

How firm a foundation

Words: Richard Keen

Music: Richard Simpkin

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How firm a foundation

No-one is sure about who the original author of this song was. It is accompanied in the original manuscript by just the letter 'K'. It appears in 'A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors', by John Rippon (1787). It could be Richard Keen, Robert Keen, John Keene, John Kirkham, John Keith. What is known for definite is that I (Richard Simpkin) didn't write the words. Unfortunately, sometimes when this song is used, the words are attributed to me, but my command of the English language could never come up to the standard set in this song.

I came to write a new tune to this song because of a deadline. I meet with Michael Lawson (Archdeacon of Hampstead, and ex-concert pianist) from time to time, who gives me very helpful guidance on the musical side of things. The next date in the diary was looming and I had nothing to offer. I'd been encouraging our group of song writers to focus on the prophets, so I looked in an old service preparation book to see if there were any old hymns from the prophets that needed new tunes. I find writing tunes a lot easier than words, so I fancied saving a lot of time!

In the section on Isaiah, 'How firm a foundation' kept on cropping up, and I realised how steeped the song is in Isaiah 43-48.

What I like especially about the words is the way the writer proclaims truth from our mouths and then from God's, a device that is commonly used in the Psalms. Modern updates have tried to iron this out, but I think that we lose the weight of the repetitions: 'I, I am your God', and, 'I'll never, no never, no never forsake.' It is a powerful thing to be able to sing the promises of God to each other.

I remembered singing the words to the tune, 'Montgomery' and felt that maybe a new colour would bring some of the words to life. It's a simple tune which seems easy to pick up, and should work with anything from a solo instrument to a full band.

How to make it go

Like 'Be thou my vision', it can be done in a 3/4 or 4/4 version. The chord sequence is very simple, so an intro playing the whole tune through on a solo instrument can be effective.

Placement in a meeting

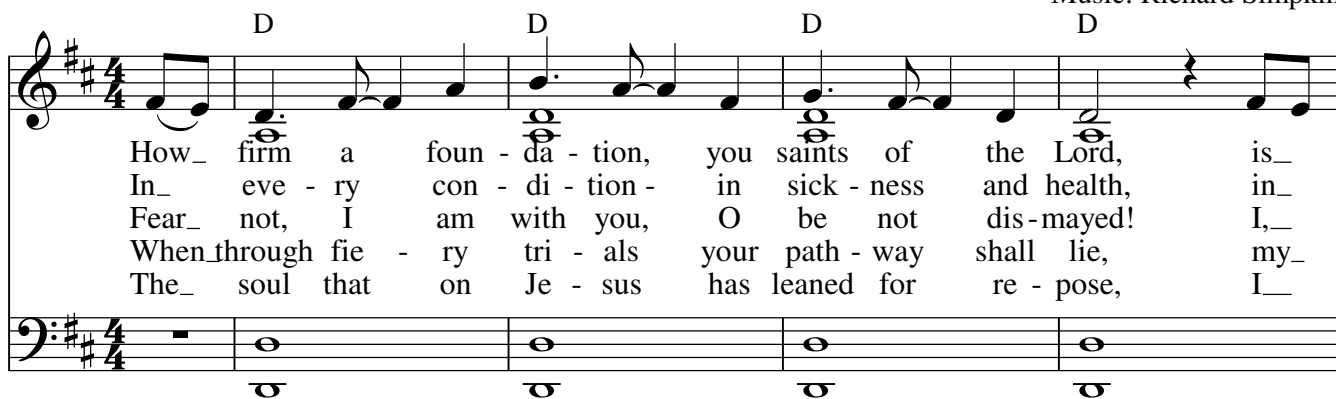
This song works well before the sermon – our firm foundation is laid in his excellent Word. It also is great for sending the congregation out, assured that God will never, no never forsake the soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose.

Richard Simpkin

How firm a foundation

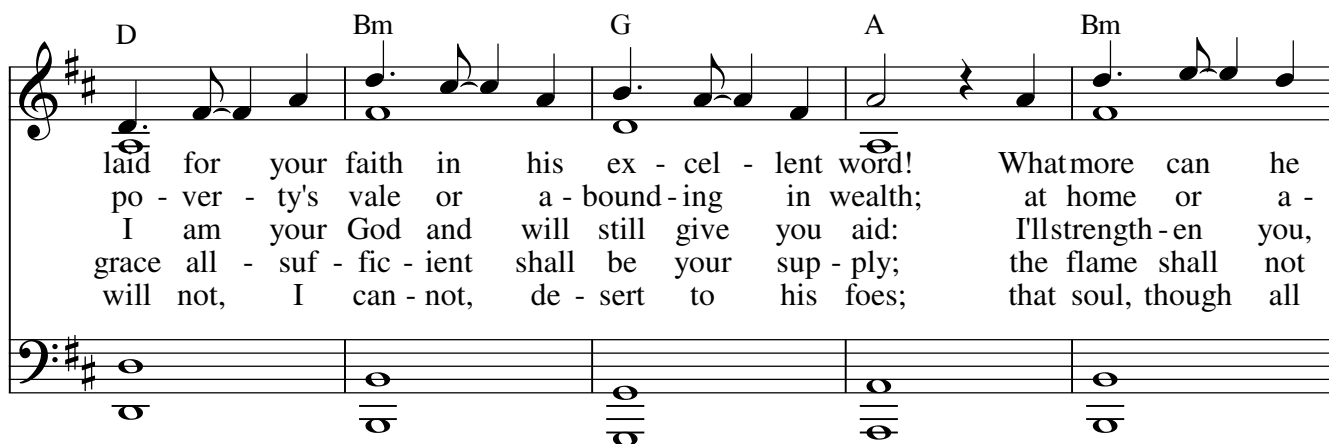
Words: Richard Keen
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D D D D



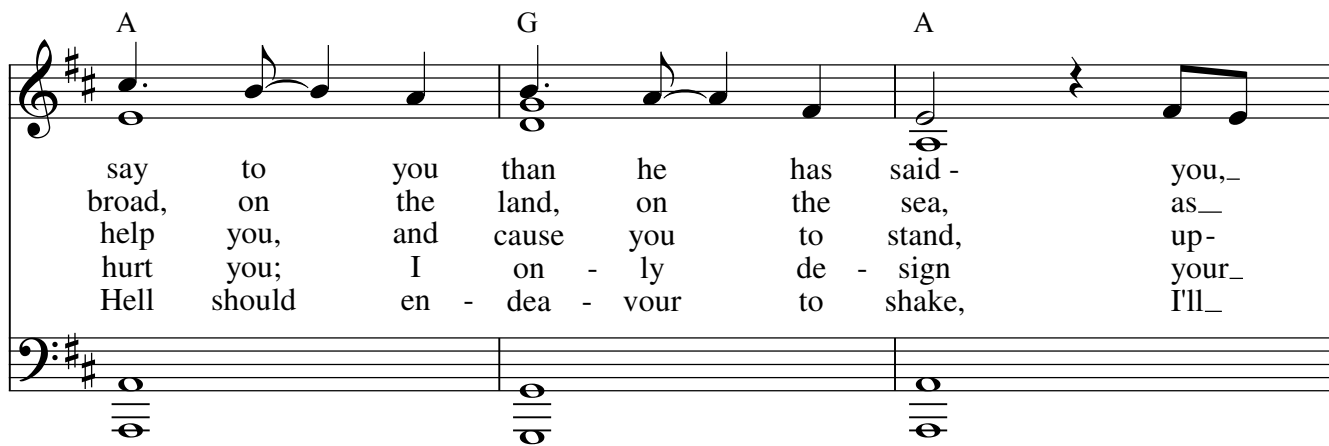
How_ firm a foun - da - tion, you saints of the Lord, is_
In_ eve - ry con - di - tion - in sick - ness and health, in_
Fear_ not, I am with you, O be not dis - mayed! I,_
When_ through fie - ry tri - als your path - way shall lie, my_
The_ soul that on Je - sus has leaned for re - pose, I_

D Bm G A Bm



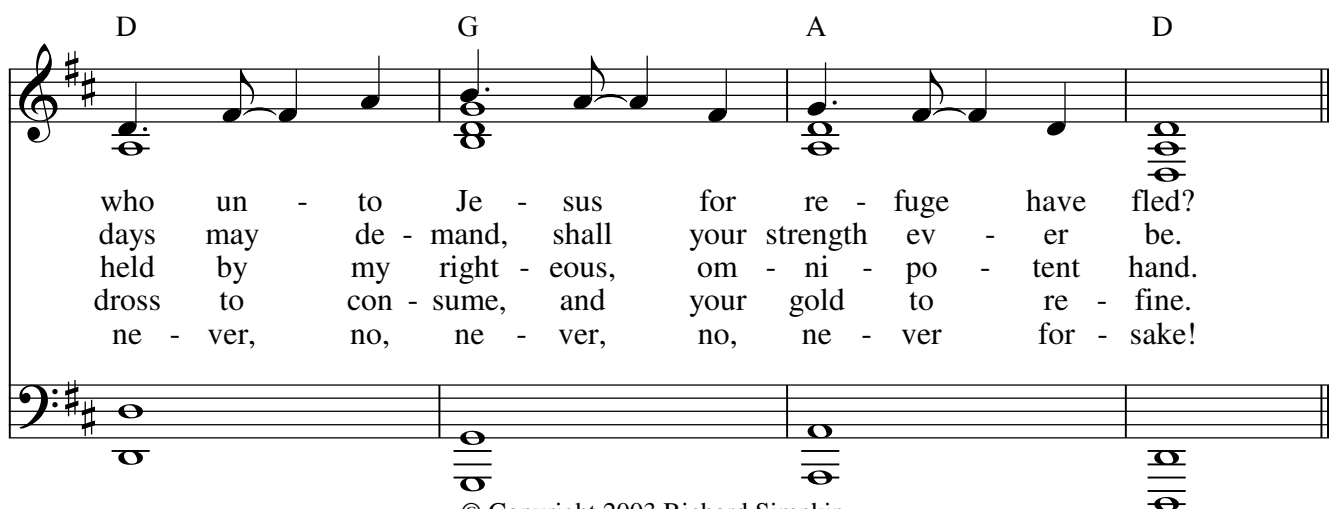
laid for your faith in his ex - cel - lent word! Whatmore can he
po - ver - ty's vale or a - bound - ing in wealth; at home or a -
I am your God and will still give you aid: I'll strength - en you,
grace all - suf - fic - ient shall be your sup - ply; the flame shall not
will not, I can - not, de - sert to his foes; that soul, though all

A G A



say to you than he has said - you,
broad, on the land, on the sea, as_
help you, and cause you to stand, up -
hurt you; I on - ly de - sign your_
Hell should en - dea - vour to shake, I'll_

D G A D



who un - to Je - sus for re - fuge have fled?
days may de - mand, shall your strength ev - er be.
held by my right - eous, om - ni - po - tent hand.
dross to con - sume, and your gold to re - fine.
ne - ver, no, ne - ver, no, ne - ver for - sake!