

You were the Word (What a Beautiful Name)

Ben Fielding and Brooke Ligertwood

Ben Fielding and Brooke Ligertwood wrote the Grammy award winning* 'What a beautiful name' for Hillsong over a period of four months from December 2015. Taking inspiration from the conclusion of Colossians 1, Fielding brought the first two lines of the song's first verse to the table as a starting point.

Though the name of Jesus is described differently each time the chorus is repeated ('beautiful', 'wonderful', 'powerful'), Ligertwood refutes suggestions that this was to make the appeal of the song more inclusive, saying simply, 'We really loved the idea of singing about the name of Jesus in a way that [...] unfolded some of the facets of the beauty, wonder and power of his name.'

Hear it here

Interview with authors and a mostly acoustic version:

Hillsong Worship, New Song Café <https://youtu.be/q5GbDeQvYKU>

Scores // Lyrics // Chords

Online:


- Worship Together website (key D)
https://mediacontent.worshipstogether.com/free/pdf/what_a_beautiful_name_hillsong_114887.pdf
lyrics, chord symbols, lead sheet (free)
- www.musicnotes.com, www.praisecharts.com
full scores (various keys available) (paid)

Books:

- Spring Harvest Praise, *One for All Songbook*, #57 (key D)
full piano and chord symbols. Incorporates melody in right hand. Verse rhythm given in a slightly more complex form than Hillsong site.

Range

✓✓ (congregational, somewhat low)

Voice 

Published in D as standard, the range and frequencies of pitches over one verse and chorus are congregational, if a little on the low side. It may be worth experimenting with Eb or E.

Regularity

✓ Syncopation

✓✓

As recorded by their author there are variations of rhythm and melody both between the verses, and the nearly-but-not-quite repeated phrases within a verse. This freedom is transcribed into printed scores, with the Spring Harvest songbook giving a completely independent melody line for verse 2.

Variations in verses make for an enjoyable listening experience; it's the chorus, with its all-important 'hook', that needs to be identical and memorable. But to subtly adjust this into something a congregation can truly sing together, we must simplify. Note, too, the need to make clear the single word changes in successive choruses, and especially on a chorus repeat *which* chorus it is that is being repeated.

Fortunately, the lyrics of both verses will, in fact, fit the rhythm of the first. You may also wish to consider singing the near-repeated second phrase, 'your hidden glory in creation,' identically to 'You were the word at the beginning'. Using the slightly simpler rhythm of the Worship Together version, verse 2 could be:

*Grammy for Best Contemporary Christian Music Performance/Song, 2018

2. You did-n't want hea-ven with out us, so, Je-sus, you brought hea-ven down.

My sin was great, your love was grea - ter, what could se - pa-rate us now?

Example 1: Possible rhythm to adopt for both verses

Instrumentation and accompaniment

'Don't overplay', say the Hillsong band in the interview (above). The keyboard player mimes the reason: there are many repeated notes in this song, most especially the six short notes at the same pitch beginning the chorus ('What a beau-ti-ful name'). Sequences like this certainly have a place in congregational song: 'Make me a channel of your peace' (StF 707) is built from groups mostly numbering six; no fewer than ten in a row begin the chorus of 'Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice' (StF 274). But in these examples the tempo is moderate enough for them to be played by a keyboard player as written. At a faster tempo these repeated notes easily sound somewhat frantic and clumsy played in a piano accompaniment.

The keyboard player suggests playing one chord per change, but they have an exceptionally able lead singer, and an arrangement essentially complete in itself doesn't especially encourage full congregational involvement, which is our aim here.

Once the melody has been learned, and to begin with you're really going to need a lead singer, group, or recording, it will be advisable and more in keeping with the mood of the song to play sustained alternate notes ("What a beau-ti-ful name"). This should be a sufficient framework to guide and unite, leaving voices to do what they do best.

Voices: Christ. What a beau-ti-ful name it is, — what a beau-ti-ful name it is, —

Piano: A D A

Example 2: Sparser accompaniment that still leads

Song set medley options

Songs that could flow well from this song or lead into it. In the Worship Café video, the composers suggest that from their experience it sits well as the last song in a set of four.

- Similar themes
 - *Jesus, the name high over all*, Charles Wesley (StF 357)
 - *Wonderful, so wonderful*, Tim Hughes (SoF 1632, MP 1130, Source 1634)
- Similar themes and tempo
 - *How sweet the name of Jesus sounds*, John Newton ST PETER (StF 322)
 - *None other Lamb, none other name*, Christina Rossetti ALL HALLOWS (H&P 271)