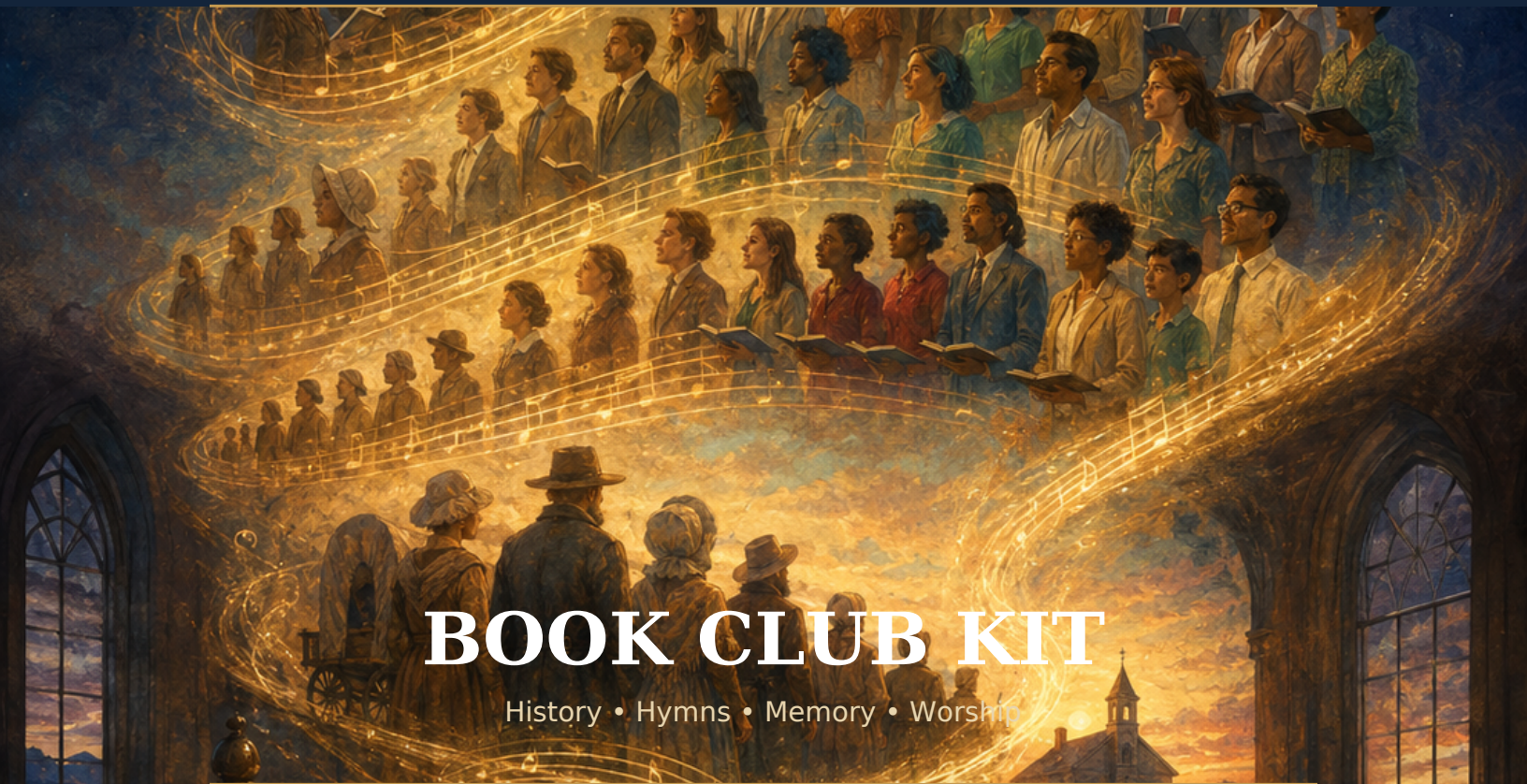


A SIX-SESSION READING & LISTENING GUIDE

THE SONG OF THE SAINTS

A History of Latter-day Saint Sacred Music



BOOK CLUB KIT

History • Hymns • Memory • Worship

Based on the book by Michael D. Young

WELCOME

A Book Club That Sings



This guide follows the manuscript's historical journey from Emma Smith's 1835 collection to the worldwide hymn and children's songbook project. It is built for book clubs, music groups, families, choirs, Church classes, and individual readers.

The central question

What do the songs a people choose to sing reveal about their doctrine, history, identity, hopes, and changing worldwide community?

How to use the guide

- Plan 60-75 minutes for each session and assign the listed chapters in advance.
- When possible, bring several hymnbook editions, photographs, or digital scans for comparison.
- Listen to or sing one hymn during each meeting. Participation may be spoken, sung, played, or simply attentive.
- Treat personal spiritual experiences with care. No one is required to share a sacred memory.
- End each session by recording one hymn, story, or question worth preserving.

A note on historical language

Several chapters examine hymn texts that were later changed because of racial terminology, militancy, geography, gender, doctrine, or shifting word meanings. Discuss the history honestly without repeating harmful language unnecessarily. Ask what the revision reveals, who was affected, and how sacred communities can preserve history while choosing better words.

Suggested materials

The book • access to hymn recordings • paper or digital hymnals • pencils • optional keyboard or piano

READING PLAN



Six Gatherings Across Two Centuries

The sequence combines history, listening, discussion, and personal memory. It can be followed weekly or condensed into a retreat.

#	THEME	READING	FOCUS
1	The song of the Restoration	Foreword; Introduction; Ch. 1	Origins, adaptation, Emma Smith, W. W. Phelps
2	Expansion and consolidation	Chs. 2-3	Mission fields, specialty books, standardization
3	Inside Hymns, 1985	Ch. 4	Committee, criteria, tune-text pairings, technology
4	A worldwide song and a personal answer	Chs. 5-6	Global unity and lived spiritual experience
5	Why hymns change	Ch. 7	Doctrine, language, compassion, inclusion, singability
6	The children sing	Chs. 8-10	Primary books, teaching, memory, future worship

A simple meeting rhythm

10 min

Opening hymn or recording and check-in

15 min

Historical discovery from the assigned reading

25 min

Three discussion questions

15 min

Listening, comparison, or memory activity

10 min

Preserve one insight and close



The Song of the Restoration

READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Foreword; Introduction; Chapter 1	Compare 'Redeemer of Israel,' 'The Spirit of God,' or 'Adam-ondi-Ahman' with another early Christian or American tune discussed in the chapter.

The first official Latter-day Saint hymnal was physically small and printed only texts, yet it established sacred singing as a form of prayer and created a distinct musical identity. Emma Smith and W. W. Phelps selected, adapted, and wrote words that emphasized hope, Zion, restoration, and the Second Coming.

Discuss

1. Why did the Restoration need its own hymn collection so early in Church history?
2. What is gained when a faith community adapts a tune or text from another tradition? What responsibilities come with adaptation?
3. How did the optimism of the first hymnal distinguish it from some religious music of the era?
4. What do the omitted verses of 'The Spirit of God' teach about changing worship practices and sacred boundaries?
5. How does the author's personal musical journey in the foreword shape the historical account that follows?

Listening activity

Text before tune

Read one early hymn text aloud without music. Name the emotion, doctrine, and imagined audience. Then listen to its familiar tune. What did the melody add, soften, or redirect?

Preserve: Record one phrase from an early Restoration hymn that still feels alive today.

SESSION 2

Expansion, Variety, and Consolidation



READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Chapters 2-3	Listen to one gospel-song hymn such as 'Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel' beside a more formal congregational hymn. Notice rhythm, call to action, and singability.

As the Church expanded through Europe, the Pacific, and North America, separate communities developed hymnbooks suited to missionary work, Sunday School, Relief Society, choirs, and congregations. Later committees tried to consolidate these traditions into a shared canon.

Discuss

1. How did distance and limited communication encourage musical variety in the nineteenth-century Church?
2. What was gained and lost when multiple specialty hymnals were consolidated into one official volume?
3. Why did gospel-song hymns flourish in Sunday School before entering broader congregational use?
4. What does the swift response to the 1948 hymnal's omissions reveal about attachment, authority, and communal memory?
5. How did changing page design and musical notation make worship more accessible?

Table activity

Create two columns: **local variety** and **shared unity**. Place the Manchester Hymnal, Songs of Zion, Deseret Sunday School Songs, the Relief Society Songbook, and the consolidated hymnals on the spectrum. Which values deserve protection at both ends?

History in one object

If someone owns an older hymnal, invite them to show the binding, typography, indexes, handwritten notes, or favorite-song wear. Treat the physical book as a witness to worship.



Inside Hymns, 1985

READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Chapter 4	Compare a familiar text in two tune settings, especially 'If You Could Hie to Kolob.' Listen for how mode, tempo, and harmonic direction change meaning.

The 1985 committee inherited both beloved traditions and an earlier failed revision. Its members evaluated thousands of submissions, balanced musical quality with doctrinal value and usefulness, simplified accompaniments, considered international editions, and described their work as a sacred trust.

Discuss

1. What can the abandoned 1970s project teach about the difference between artistic renovation and pastoral stewardship?
2. Why was anonymity important when the committee evaluated submissions?
3. How did the committee's diversity of skills improve the final book?
4. What does the 'blind date' between the text of 'If You Could Hie to Kolob' and the tune KINGSFOLD reveal about interpretation?
5. Where do you see tension between expert judgment, leader direction, congregational affection, and inspiration?

Committee simulation

Five-minute review

Choose a hymn not in your current collection. Evaluate it using the manuscript's criteria: musical quality; doctrine and poetry; appropriateness; usefulness; traditional affection; and leader direction. What criterion proved hardest to weigh?

SESSION 4

A Worldwide Song and a Personal Answer



READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Chapters 5-6	Hear the same hymn in two languages or musical traditions. Then choose one account from Chapter 6 and listen to the hymn connected with it.

The worldwide project seeks a consistent core collection across languages while drawing more fully from the global Church. Chapter 6 shifts from institutions to individuals, showing sacred music answering prayer, strengthening testimony, sustaining people through illness or depression, guiding decisions, teaching children, and connecting generations.

Discuss

1. What does a worldwide core collection make possible that separate language editions cannot?
2. How can global unity avoid becoming cultural sameness?
3. Which personal experience in Chapter 6 most clearly demonstrates music acting as prayer, answer, or testimony?
4. Why can a familiar hymn reach someone when ordinary speech does not?
5. What responsibilities do writers, translators, arrangers, conductors, and congregations share when carrying sacred meaning across cultures?

Sacred memory practice

Invite participants to name a hymn that arrived at the right moment in their lives. They may share only the title, the story, both, or neither. Listen without analyzing another person's experience.

Preserve

Write down whose voice you remember when you hear a beloved hymn: a parent, grandparent, missionary companion, child, choir, congregation, or your own younger self.



Why Hymns Change

READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Chapter 7	Compare one earlier and one revised stanza from the chapter. Speak or sing both versions and identify the shift in doctrine, tone, audience, or imagery.

The manuscript identifies many reasons for revision: clarified doctrine, changing word meanings, cultural metaphors, racial harm, a more peaceful public posture, compassion, gender inclusion, global geography, member feedback, and musical accessibility. Change can preserve a hymn's central witness by removing what prevents a new congregation from receiving it.

Discuss

1. When does changing a hymn preserve its spirit, and when might revision erase valuable history?
2. Which example best demonstrates a change toward greater compassion?
3. How should worshiping communities acknowledge harmful historical language without continuing its harm?
4. Why are singability and playable keys spiritual-access concerns, not merely technical preferences?
5. What present-day wording or assumptions might future Saints hear differently from us?

Revision lab

Preserve the center

Choose a fictional four-line hymn stanza with one dated image. Before revising, state its non-negotiable doctrine and emotional center. Change only what blocks understanding or belonging. Compare the effect.

Facilitator note: Keep the conversation specific to texts, impacts, and principles. Do not ask participants from affected groups to defend why a phrase is harmful.



The Children Sing

READ BEFORE MEETING	LISTENING / LOOKING LENS
Chapters 8-10	Listen to one early Primary text and one song from the 1989 Children's Songbook. Compare vocabulary, doctrine, view of childhood, and intended use.

From Eliza R. Snow's small text-only collection to the illustrated 1989 Children's Songbook, Primary music evolved with changing ideas about childhood, family life, reverence, doctrine, education, accessibility, and worldwide translation. These songs often become a child's earliest remembered theology.

Discuss

1. What did the earliest Primary collections assume children needed to learn?
2. How did songs about home, family, daily work, and reverence reflect broader changes in Latter-day Saint life?
3. Why might the children's songbook be even more formative than the adult hymnal?
4. What do the stories behind 'Love Is Spoken Here,' 'I Lived in Heaven,' 'I'll Walk with You,' and the Articles of Faith settings teach about filling doctrinal or pastoral gaps?
5. Which truths should every child be able to sing and remember throughout life?

Final action

Choose one children's song and ask: What picture of God, self, family, neighbor, covenant, or discipleship will a child carry from these words? Identify one way to reinforce that truth at home or in a class.

Closing line

As long as the Saints keep singing, sacred music will keep teaching doctrine, carrying memory, crossing borders, and returning prayer as blessing.



Questions for Deeper Conversation

Use these for a single-event book club, an extended course, or a group that has already read the entire manuscript.

1. Is a hymnbook best understood as a worship aid, a doctrinal anthology, a historical archive, or all three?
2. What makes a hymn become a 'dear friend' rather than merely a good composition?
3. How have printing, transportation, recording, notation software, and the Internet each reshaped sacred music?
4. What does the manuscript reveal about the often-invisible labor behind congregational singing?
5. How should committees balance excellence with accessibility for ordinary singers and accompanists?
6. Why do communities sometimes resist the removal of rarely sung hymns?
7. What is the relationship between nostalgia and revelation in selecting sacred music?
8. How can a translated hymn be both faithful to the original and natural in a new language?
9. What do Primary songs teach through repetition that a lesson might not teach as effectively?
10. Which hymnbook era most clearly reflects the social concerns of its time?
11. How do tune changes alter the theology listeners perceive in a text?
12. What is the difference between preserving a historical artifact and prescribing it for current worship?
13. Where did you notice women shaping the Church's musical canon?
14. How does congregational singing create community differently from listening to a performance?
15. What song from your own life belongs in an oral history of the Saints?

From Pocket Texts to a Worldwide Core



This compact chronology follows the main collections highlighted in the manuscript. Dates and counts reflect the draft's account.

DATE	COLLECTION	SCALE	HISTORICAL LENS
1835/36	Emma Smith collection	90 texts	First official collection; Restoration identity
1840	Manchester Hymnal	271 texts	European center; expands through many editions
1889	Latter-day Saints' Psalmody	Tunes and texts	Formal musical settings and LDS composers
1908-09	Songs of Zion / Sunday School Songs	Specialty books	Missionary and gospel-song traditions
1927	Latter-day Saint Hymns	421 hymns	General Music Committee and consolidation
1948/50	Hymns	387 hymns	Congregational focus; major cuts and restoration
1985	Hymns	341 hymns	Worldwide editions, careful revision, digital engraving
2018 project	Worldwide collection announced	Global submissions	Common core across languages

Timeline prompt

Circle the edition where you believe the greatest change occurred. Was that change driven mainly by doctrine, geography, organization, technology, musical taste, or the needs of worshipers?



How a Hymn Earns a Place

The manuscript shows that hymn selection is not a contest with a single score. Committees balance competing goods and work under spiritual, pastoral, musical, practical, and institutional constraints.

Musical quality

Does the tune reward repeated singing and support the text?

Doctrine and poetry

Are the ideas sound, clear, memorable, and artfully expressed?

Worship setting

Is it suitable for congregational or other intended use?

Usefulness

Does it fill a needed topic, ordinance, season, or community role?

Accessibility

Can ordinary singers and accompanists use it successfully?

Tradition

Does it carry meaningful communal memory?

Worldwide reach

Can its imagery and message travel across languages and cultures?

Spiritual discernment

Does the work help people worship and draw closer to Christ?

Which two criteria are most likely to conflict? Which one should never be used alone?



Hear What the Page Cannot Show

Choose a hymn available in more than one tune, arrangement, language, or historical version. Complete the observations before deciding which version you prefer.

Version A: first impression

Version B: first impression

What changed in mood, pace, emphasis, or doctrine?

Which words became newly audible?

Which setting better serves congregational worship, and why?

Try this pairing

Use the manuscript's account of 'If You Could Hie to Kolob' and KINGSFOLD, or compare an early text-only hymn with the tune later associated with it.



Personal and Family Oral History

Sacred music history is not only a sequence of books and committees. It also lives in voices, rooms, illnesses, missions, funerals, family evenings, Primary classes, and moments when a line became an answer.

The hymn or children's song I remember

Whose voice or instrument I hear

Where and when the memory lives

What the song taught or gave me

How I want to preserve or pass it on

Interview invitation

Ask an older friend or relative: Which hymnbook did you first use? Which song did your family sing? Which omission or addition mattered to you? With permission, preserve the answer in writing or audio.



A Global Hymnal Conversation

A consistent core can let congregations across languages recognize and sing the same sacred repertoire. The manuscript also argues for receiving musical gifts from cultures that were previously underrepresented.

Discuss or journal

1. What should be truly universal in a worldwide hymn collection?
2. Which metaphors travel well across cultures, and which depend heavily on place?
3. Should some songs remain in their original language? What would worshipers need in order to participate?
4. How can local musical traditions flourish alongside a common core?
5. What digital resources belong outside the printed book: alternate accompaniments, historical notes, recordings, translations, or teaching guides?

Design principles

- ☐ A common doctrinal center
- ☐ Cultural gifts moving in more than one direction
- ☐ Natural, singable translations
- ☐ Keys and arrangements accessible to local musicians
- ☐ Digital space for resources that cannot fit between covers
- ☐ Room for local supplements and living musical traditions

Unity without sameness

A worldwide songbook succeeds when members can recognize one another's faith and also hear one another's gifts.

A Primary Music Study Page



The children's songbooks reveal changing views of childhood. Early collections emphasized Zion, duty, and preparation; later books added home life, reverence, doctrine, inclusion, illustration, and child-directed design.

ERA	FORM	WHAT THE BOOK EMPHASIZED
1880s	Small text collections	Zion, duty, meetings, Second Coming
1905-39	Music and daily life	Family work, behavior, patriotism, progressive education
1951	The Children Sing	Organized gospel topics; growing reverence emphasis
1969	Sing With Me	Child surveys, doctrinal commissions, beloved new songs
1989	Children's Songbook	Illustration, home use, access, translation, doctrinal gaps

Evaluate one song

Song title: _____

The child is invited to believe, feel, remember, or do:

A word, image, or musical feature that makes the teaching memorable:



Lead History, Music, and Testimony with Care

Before

Select three questions and one legal, accessible recording. If singing, choose a comfortable key and offer lyrics or hymnbooks. Never assume every participant reads music.

During historical discussion

Distinguish description from endorsement. Place words in context, name harm plainly, and focus on what a change teaches about the community's growth.

During music making

Participation is invitational. Some may sing harmony, melody, play, hum, read the text, or listen. Musical confidence is not a measure of spiritual depth.

During testimony sharing

Do not evaluate, explain away, or compare sacred experiences. Thank the speaker and let the account stand on its own.

When tastes differ

Ask what function a hymn serves rather than declaring it good or bad. Historical value, artistic merit, singability, doctrine, and personal affection can point in different directions.

After

Record titles, memories, and unanswered questions worth preserving. Invite participants to keep listening beyond the final session.



The Song Continues

Use this fifteen-minute conclusion after the final session or as an individual reflection.

1 • Read

Read Doctrine and Covenants 25:12 and Colossians 3:16. Notice how each passage connects singing, prayer, teaching, grace, and blessing.

2 • Remember

Call to mind one song that taught you doctrine and one voice that helped you believe it.

3 • Sing or listen

Choose a hymn from any era in the book. Attend to the words as historical inheritance and present-tense prayer.

4 • Respond

Complete the sentence: I will help the song of the Saints continue by...

Closing prayer

Thank Heavenly Father for writers, composers, translators, editors, accompanists, choristers, teachers, children, and ordinary congregations. Ask that sacred music continue to teach truth, unite the worldwide Church, comfort the weary, and turn song into prayer.

A final invitation

Open the hymnbook. Learn the story. Hear the people behind the page. Add your voice.