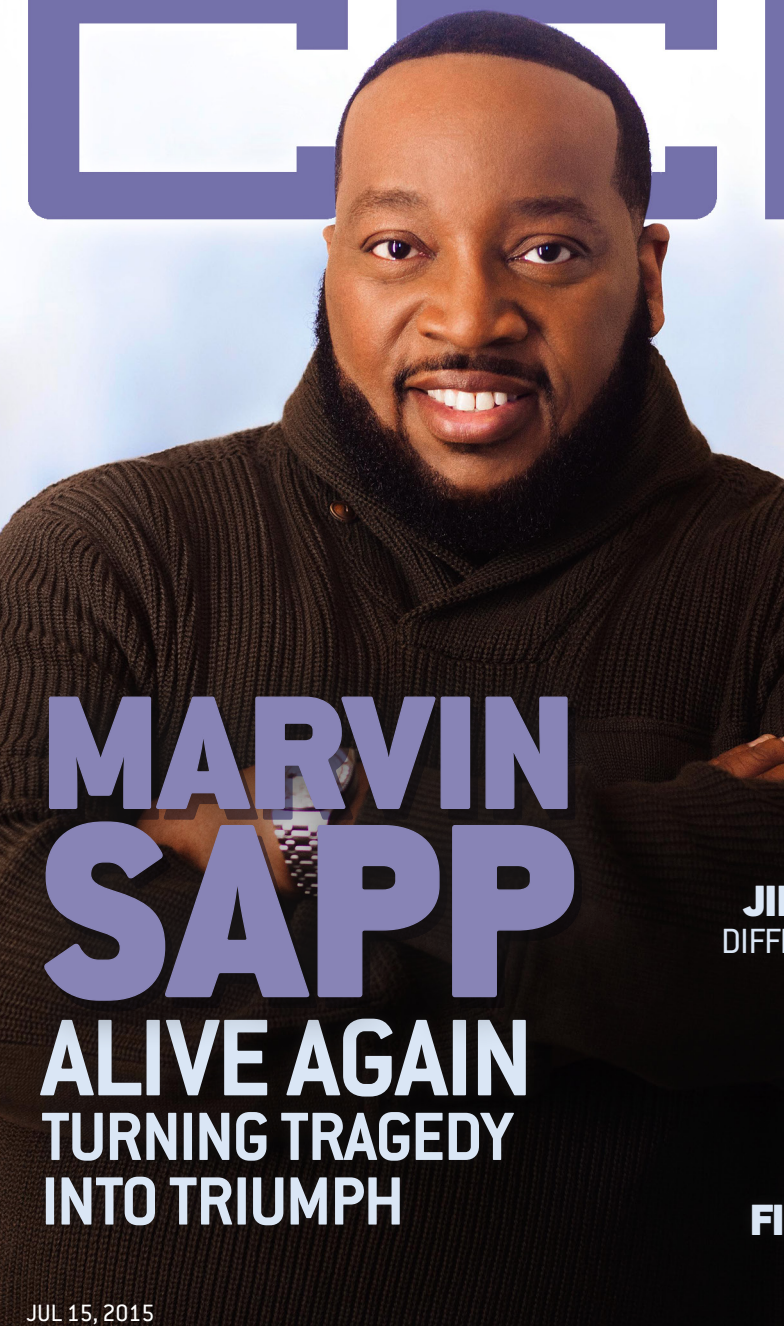


CEEM



MARVIN SAPP

**ALIVE AGAIN
TURNING TRAGEDY
INTO TRIUMPH**



MIKE FARRIS
SHINING BRIGHTER
THAN THE SCARS



JIMMY NEEDHAM
DIFFERENT INGREDIENTS,
DIFFERENT RESULTS



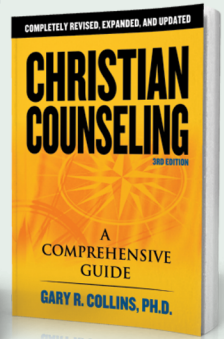
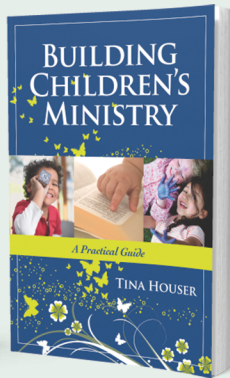
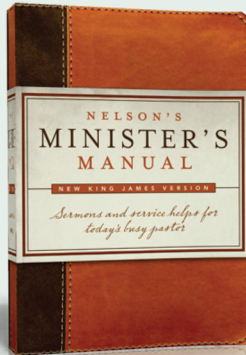
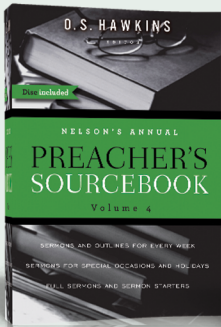
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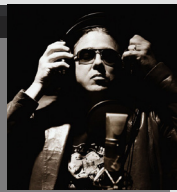
FEATURES

MARVIN SAPP

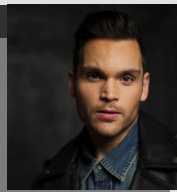
Faced with a life after losing his wife and ministry partner, MaLinda, Marvin Sapp picks up the pieces to deliver an even stronger message.

**MIKE FARRIS**

Returning to the land of the living, legend in the making Mike Farris is just thankful to be playing music. Period.

**JIMMY NEEDHAM**

Writers block and a vocal power outage force Jimmy Needham to shake things up on his latest album, *Vice & Virtue*.

**FINDING FAVOUR**

Perservering is the hardest part. The members of Finding Favour now realize that good things come to those who wait.



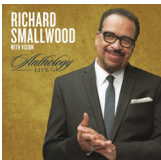
DEPTS

FROM THE EDITOR**PHOTOS****OUT AND ABOUT**

Pics of your favorite Christian artists on the road, off the road and everywhere in between

REVIEWS

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RICHARD SMALLWOOD,
SHINEBRIGHT + MORE!**

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Assistant Production Manager
Paula Rozelle Hanback

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Service Manager**
Jennifer Evenson

Customer Service Reps
Jessica Hirsch
Heather Smith

**Executive Directors of
Advertising**
DeDe Donatelli-Tarrant
805.987.5072
dede@salempublishing.com

Joel Stombres, 630.584.0213
jstombres@salempublishing.com

Web Ad Traffic Director
Tamara Phillips

We are especially excited to release this edition of *CCM Magazine*! Any time that we can cover artists that typically do not receive a large amount of press in the, what some might call, “traditional CCM” market is an all-around win.

Our first two featured artists in the July 15, 2015 issue, **Marvin Sapp** and **Mike Farris**, have as many (if not more) GRAMMY and Dove nominations and awards as those you regularly see on Christian music publications and websites over and again. What is especially great about highlighting these two in particular, are their gripping stories of hope found in Christ. I am assured both of them would eagerly trade their collections of accolades for the chance that their gifts would draw you close to God.

Richard Smallwood’s career spans a who’s who list of collaborations and musical partnerships ranging from **Destiny’s Child** to **Bill and Gloria Gaither** to **Quincy Jones**, and **Aretha Franklin**—naming just a few. As we witnessed from the examples of **Andrae Crouch** (another Smallwood colleague), what an extraordinary opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus Christ on some mighty incredible platforms.

I agree with Mike Farris. There would be no Contemporary Christian Music (or blues, jazz, R&B, rock, gospel, etc.) if it were not for our own unique musical heritage—in his words, “Black spirituals and old Appalachian music.” We hope you enjoy this glimpse into celebrating the fruits of our musical roots, for what the Lord has done, and what He is continually doing!



Blessings,

Kevin Sparkman
Editor, *CCM Magazine*
KSpark@CCMMagazine.com



Andy Argyrakis

is a Chicago-based entertainment writer/photographer who appears in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Illinois Entertainer*, *Hear/Say Magazine*, *Concert Livewire* and more.



Rebekah Bell lives in

Southern California, works as a writer, and speaks on the side.

Find her online at www.rebekahbellwrites.com



Matt Conner is a

music writer for the *Indianapolis Star*, *Relevant* and *Metromix* and the founding editor of www.StereoSubversion.com.

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1



COMPILED BY
ANDY ARGYRAKIS

1 A convoy of current Christian music favorites gather at the K-LOVE Ultimate Fan Experience. Pictured from left to right: **Blanca**, **Kari Jobe**, for King & Country's **Luke Smallbone**, **Plumb** and for King & Country's **Joel Smallbone**.

2



2 Worship singer/songwriter **Kari Jobe** (left) poses with fellow vertically-themed troubadour **Lauren Daigle** backstage at the Grand Ole Opry during the K-LOVE Awards.

3



3 Daigle also received a visit from veteran singer **Natalie Grant** at the same ceremony, where the relative newcomer took home the “Worship Song of the Year” trophy for “How Can It Be.”

4



4 & 5 R&B-flavored gospel artist/pastor/former Commissioned member **Marvin Sapp** packed Chicago's Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park for the Gospel Music Festival, during which he performed contemporary classics like "Never Would Have Made It," alongside brand-new cuts from his tenth solo album, ***You Shall Live*** (RCA Inspiration).

5






6 Legendary label-mate **Richard Smallwood** with **Vision** also appeared at the Windy City's annual spiritually-themed celebration, presenting a plethora of tracks from the recently compiled collection **Anthology Live**. Since the 1970s, Smallwood's not only racked up a mountain of his own hits, but has been covered by the lauded likes of **Albertina Walker**, **Whitney Houston**, **Destiny's Child** and **Yolanda Adams**.

COUNTING ON GOD

From The Depths Of Isolation To
Reconstructing A Winning Formula,
MARVIN SAPP Is Finally Living Again

By Matt Conner





Christian artists often sing about inspirational themes—of hope in the face of trials and peace in troubled times. But few of them have run headlong into the particular type of tragedy CCM Magazine’s July 15 cover artist and gospel superstar **Marvin Sapp** faced.

Nearly five years have gone by since Sapp’s wife and ministry partner, **MaLinda Sapp**, passed away due to complications from colon cancer. In an instant, he had become a widower and single father, and now bore alone the responsibilities of pastoring **Lighthouse Full Life Center Church** in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For Sapp, life as he knew it had shattered, and the musical legend-in-the-making was forced to pick up the pieces.

Like many artists, Sapp naturally leaned into his creativity for processing and help in making sense of the experiences he and his family were suffering. The outcome of that painful process can be heard on his powerful and personal new album, ***You Shall Live***.

“When you are an artist, experiences will cause you to examine your life and will push you to express what you have learned from them,” says Sapp. “I haven’t released an album in four years, and these last four years have been very difficult. I’ve learned some valuable lessons, so part of putting this whole thing together was to attempt sharing what I’ve been through and how I’ve been able to approach a place of resolve in life. Now for my fans, my message is focused on the importance of overcoming and just getting through...enduring life’s crises.

“It has been a challenge, because you never expect to be in this type of position in life,” he continues. “It has taught me how to have direction and focus. The main thing was an understanding of how to live through my issues, count on God, and know that love always wins. In the end, I decided to put pen to paper, and prayerfully, I hope people find hope in these songs.”

Sapp says the process was “therapeutic” for him, as he began to piece together the lyrics that would become hope-filled anthems on *You Shall Live* like “Your Love Wins” and “I Can Count On You.”

“I think for any writer who is experiencing challenges, there has to be some level of peace and tranquility that comes through their lyrics. It’s therapeutic for me, and it gives me the opportunity to pour out my heart.”

Sapp also says the healing process has come in the sharing of his experiences with others. As he hears from fans that respond to the new songs, Sapp finds inspiration for his own faith walk and ability to move on from such life-altering events.

“I say the writing is therapeutic, but the therapy also comes from hearing how God has used my message to touch others,” an emotional Sapp states. “It makes it that much better for me to know why I was chosen to go through this. It’s the power of assignment, like Jesus told Peter when He said, ‘You are supposed to strengthen your brother.’ That’s what I have been trying to do and I see it happening. It’s so fulfilling.”

“I often hear about how the songs are helping people—from my followers on social media to people who have walked past me in the store,” says Sapp. “Earlier today, a young man in the mall stopped me for a few minutes to tell me how much one of the songs on my new CD meant to him. When you hear those things, it definitely encourages you.”





It's a common story for an artist as celebrated as Sapp, who has ten GRAMMY nominations, 22 Stellar Awards and two Dove Awards to go along with chart-topping albums like **Thirsty**.

Getting the message across is one of Sapp's highest aims when he's writing. More than melodic hook or lyrical prowess, it is the song's overall effectiveness in sharing a story in a way that draws in the listener that is Sapp's focus. It's an art that he knows well,

both from his early days as a singer alongside **Fred Hammond** in **Commissioned** to his own best-selling singles like "Never Would Have Made It" and "Best In Me."

"I tell people all of the time that I think the key to a successful song is its ability to relate to others," says Sapp. "When you write songs from personal experience, people can easily identify with them. It opens the door for what you're trying to share, and will oftentimes allow for people



to find themselves in a song. When that happens, I think it makes them feel better about what they have to come through, and more importantly it can encourage them that they can come out of it.”

Obviously, the songs for *You Shall Live* took some time to develop. In the aftermath of MaLinda’s passing, Sapp admitted that he began to push everyone away, including God. It was a natural defense for someone going through such traumatic loss, and Sapp said

it was his children who encouraged him to begin to live again.

“Right after my wife passed, I decided that I was going to be all about my kids,” explains Sapp. “I found myself so engulfed with making sure they were healthy that sometimes I wasn’t even paying attention to the fact that I also needed to heal. I found myself going into isolation more and more, and I was using them as an excuse to do that.

“They realized that too, and finally said, ‘Dad you have to have a life. You have to get out and do something. When you come home, you just go to the bedroom or you spend time with us.’ They’re getting older. They’re living. They said I couldn’t keep pushing people away, and that I had to establish a new normal.”

“Your Love Wins” was the first track that Sapp wrote from his place of pain and loss.

“Honestly, what I’m sharing in this song is my deep isolation,” he says. “I was so hurt and scared, and I even began to push God away. But His love came crashing in like a wave against the shore, and it completely won me over. So many people can relate to this place of hurt and distrust. It’s so easy to take everyone out of the picture, even yourself—I got to a place at which I forgot who I was in Christ. Thankfully, God can love us back again—and love us back to Him.”

Another powerful song on the album pays tribute to Sapp’s earliest days in music, when Fred Hammond handpicked Sapp to fill an empty spot in one of gospel’s most acclaimed vocal groups, Commissioned.

“Praise Your Way Through” fits right alongside the other hopeful songs on *You Shall Live*, but gives the album a bit of an “old school” feel, as Sapp explains.

“That song was an ode to Fred Hammond,” he says. “Fred actually discovered me in 1990, and I was listening to some of his music like I always do. I said, ‘We should write a song that reminds me of that old school, Fred Hammond vibe.’ What we came up with ended up being a song about encouragement

"I think the key to a successful song is its ability to relate to others. When you write songs from personal experience, people can easily identify with them—it opens the door for what you're trying to share. When that happens I think it makes them feel better about what they have to come through, and more importantly it can encourage them that they can come out of it."

– Marvin Sapp



when things in life can be challenging, when it looks like you're down for the count. The reality is, however, that God will fight the war for you. Don't get down. He can handle it all."

Sapp says Hammond remains an important person in his life, even after 25 years. "We absolutely keep in touch," says Sapp. "He sang on my Christmas record a few years ago. I almost did a tour with him this coming fall, but my schedule conflicts with the tour dates. But he is a friend, and he is the mentor that I still go to when I need direction."

Musically speaking, he wasn't keen to change too much on *You Shall Live*, his tenth solo release all together. Sapp has millions of fans for a reason, so while he might add an influence here and there, à la Hammond, a dependable sound is the key for an artist like Sapp.

"I am all about consistency. That is my vision," he says. "I just want to get the music and messages God has laid upon my heart to people. After ten records, I've kind-of found my niche. I think we have a good idea who enjoys my music, but that's developed over 25 years of establishment and growing a fan base. I want to give them what they enjoy, and ultimately that's really what I enjoy doing. Many artists try to reinvent themselves, and I applaud them, but I am winning with this formula. It works."

You Shall Live is a studio album, which presented some challenges for Sapp, who does prefer the live worship setting over a more controlled environment. "The stage is where I come alive," he says. "I come alive

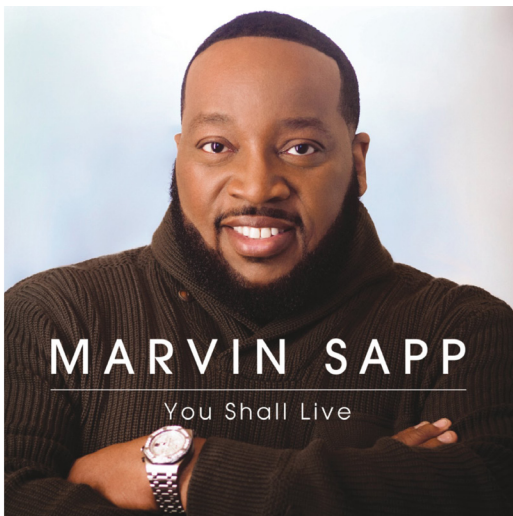
because I draw on the energy from the crowd. When I'm in the studio I first create a mental picture, then deliver the song. When I make a live record, I can focus in on someone in the audience and immediately see how the message is affecting them."

Sapp says he has tour plans in the works for the upcoming fall and winter seasons, however he's mostly focused on his priorities at home. In addition to his musical and ministerial services, Sapp is also President/Founder of Grand Rapids Ellington Academy of Arts and Technology, a charter school with five hundred students. Between family

and multiple career responsibilities, Sapp has a lot on his plate. Fortunately, he has a very clear vision of how to keep things in order.

"I try not to control ministry—I like to let it flow organically," he says. "I intentionally don't juggle those things because that allows for an opportunity to drop them, so I prioritize. My foremost responsibility is

my children, and then it is my church. Next is my music ministry, and after that are my other endeavors. As long as I keep things prioritized, they work well for me. When they get shifted out of alignment, that's where it gets challenging. I am able to successfully navigate through it, as long as I keep the main thing the main thing." CCM



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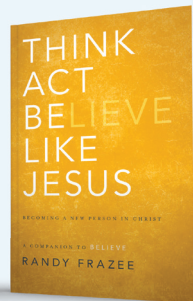
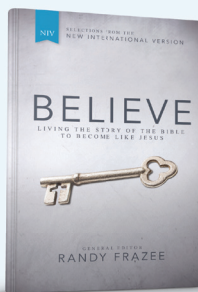
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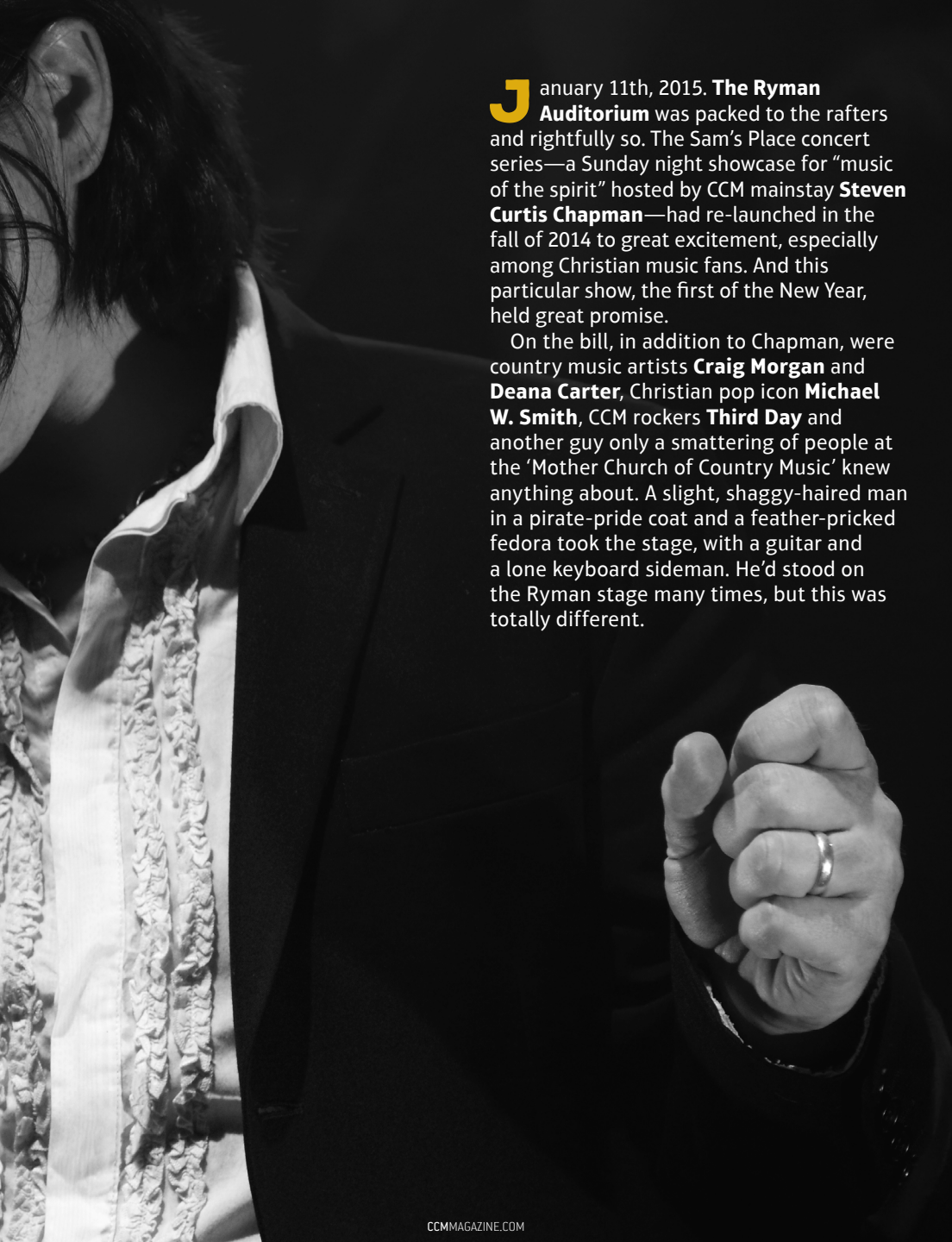


MIKE FARRIS:

*For All
The People*



BY MELISSA RIDDLE CHALOS



January 11th, 2015. **The Ryman Auditorium** was packed to the rafters and rightfully so. The Sam's Place concert series—a Sunday night showcase for “music of the spirit” hosted by CCM mainstay **Steven Curtis Chapman**—had re-launched in the fall of 2014 to great excitement, especially among Christian music fans. And this particular show, the first of the New Year, held great promise.

On the bill, in addition to Chapman, were country music artists **Craig Morgan** and **Deana Carter**, Christian pop icon **Michael W. Smith**, CCM rockers **Third Day** and another guy only a smattering of people at the ‘Mother Church of Country Music’ knew anything about. A slight, shaggy-haired man in a pirate-pride coat and a feather-pricked fedora took the stage, with a guitar and a lone keyboard sideman. He'd stood on the Ryman stage many times, but this was totally different.

He knew he was standing in a room full of the faithful, but he wasn't standing before his own.

Flashback to April 2007, when **Mike Farris** debuted his critically acclaimed ***Salvation In Lights*** before music business insiders and music buyers at Gospel Music Week. There, at B.B. King's Blues Bar in Nashville, people who thought they'd heard and seen it all stood with mouths agape, eyes like saucers, aghast at how that sound, that soul, could come from such an unlikely source. Artists, set to perform after the "new kid" Farris, stood off stage, in the wings, shaking their heads in disbelief. "You want me to go on after *that*?"


That Mike Farris had recorded a gospel album was a wonder. The fact that he was alive to record anything was a miracle.

Dependent on drugs and alcohol since the age of fifteen, Farris' addictions had long held him hostage. At age nineteen, answering a newspaper ad for a soul singer, he became the front man for **Screamin' Cheetah Wheelies**, signed a deal with **Atlantic Records**, recorded three albums and toured around the world. Primed for A-list success, the southern rock outfit gained a rabid, faithful following, but Farris' demons denied him the focus success required. His gift was undeniably rare and new opportunities continued to knock—including a stint in **Stevie Ray Vaughn's Double Trouble**—but a fog wrapped him like a gauzy winter coat, taking a seemingly irreversible toll. Homeless, living in his car in Knoxville, TN, his reality had all the trimmings of a made-for-television movie.

But God had a better plan for his broken boy.

In 2005, Farris got his first taste of sobriety. He stood at the gravesite of his nephew, as his own estranged father drove away, and he knew it was past time to get his life in order. Not the best approach by any means, he went "cold turkey," seeking solace and renewal in the music that had moved him most: black spirituals. Encouraged by his longtime





"I wasn't trying to make a living [at music] by that point. I was just focused on trying to do something with the music that God had used to bring me back to the land of the living. I was really scared I'd never play music again, so it was just beautiful to see God show up and use it somehow."

— **MIKE FARRIS**

AFTER THE RELEASE OF HIS 2007
ALBUM *SALVATION IN LIGHTS*



manager Rose McGathy, Farris began—in pursuit of his own healing—to record his own versions of the spirituals he loved. Then **INO** president **Jeff Moseley** heard the demos and signed him, knowing full well it'd be a hard sell in the homogenized Christian music market. He was too old, his look too rough around the edges, his sound too 'out there' for CCM.

But for Farris, none of that mattered. He was just following his heart. "I wasn't trying to make a living at that point," he says of *Salvation In Lights*, "I was just focused on trying to do something with the music that God had used to bring me back to the land of the living. I was really scared I'd never play music again, so it was just beautiful to see God show up and use it somehow."

Once the album was complete, his initial hope was that he could take it to churches, to church folks. "So many avenues of music flow through me, hundreds of years of music, the music that I grew up with—from blues, rock, R&B and gospel—there had always been this pressure to try to force it into a box that would sell somehow. It's crazy and overwhelming at times, the weight of trying to meet expectations and make a living, but this time, that all fell away. I know now that this gift only exists to encourage people in their struggles, and if there's any power in it, it's not from me."

In the eight years since *Salvation In Lights*, Farris' music has been embraced all over the world, but rarely within the confines of a church. He's played dive bars, small clubs and private parties, at the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**, **TED-x Nashville** and at the **Hollywood Bowl**. His live performances at festivals such as **Bonnaroo**, **South By Southwest**, **Austin City Limits Festival**, **Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival**, just to name a few, have left music novices, fans and seasoned artists alike with the same awe-struck response.

His live shows around Nashville have been

the talk of the town, contributing in no small part to Farris' Americana Music Award win in 2008—"New & Emerging Artist of the Year"—and the Dove Award in 2010 for "Traditional Gospel Album of the Year."

And as if that weren't enough for this small-town, farm-life country boy, in 2015, Mike Farris' ***Shine For All The People***—a Kickstarter.com-funded project he co-produced—won the GRAMMY Award for "Best Roots Gospel Album."

Shine For All The People pushed beyond *Salvation In Lights*, revealing a hope not only in the glory to come, but in the failures and suffering of the present...something Farris knows all too well, having relapsed with pain medications prescribed for an ongoing back issue. Confessing to his wife Julie, he finally sought the life-changing rehabilitation/counseling he needed to unearth the root causes of his addiction.

The album took a back seat, as Farris began the hard work of ongoing, daily sobriety, with the help of support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. After rehab, he got back to work, finished *Shine* and went out playing every weekend to support it. "Through it all," he says, "I've discovered that falling is a divine thing. It's part and parcel of being human. The important thing is to keep the faith and keep moving on and on. Daring to be courageous enough to share our deepest burdens with each other is the greatest gift we can give."

And back we go to that January night at the Ryman. Farris recalls being quite anxious about the actual stage time. The set list had been changed at the last minute to accommodate a shift in the line-up. Not really knowing any of the artists on the bill, he and his wife Julie stood in the green room, feeling the way most visitors feel at a new church on Sunday mornings: like a fish out of water.

"Play nice with the Christian folk. They're just like you," texted a friend who knew of his anxiety, a couple of hours before the



Ryman show. “Just sinners in need of grace. Go out there and do what you do, and let God do the rest.”

The artists gathered around to pray before the show—a rare occurrence in the venues Farris plays—which had a calming affect on the soul singer. When it was his time to take the stage, out he went, sunglasses on, scarf around his neck. He tried a bit of humorous banter with the audience, which was warmly received, but not his strong suit, so he decided to just get down to business.

“My music has always been first and foremost for the downtrodden, the wayward—people who’ve had to go up the rough side of the mountain,” Farris says. “Even when it’s upbeat and inspiring, there’s always an element of pain because truth be

told, we’re all flawed. Not everybody knows it, but we all are.”

Farris and sideman **Paul Brown** laid it down in the hallowed hall as they lay it down everywhere else they play: all in. Every note. As if their lives depend on it.

The next day, as is typical of many artists, Farris analyzed his performance. “It wasn’t my best. I don’t think they really ‘got’ me. But it’s okay, I knew it was a stretch. And it’s always good to stretch,” he said.

There were two standing ovations at the Sam’s Place show that night. Only two. Both for the shaggy soul singer in the pirate coat. **CCM**



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INPUT / OUTPUT

A FRESH BATCH OF INGREDIENTS POURED INTO **JIMMY NEEDHAM'S** NEW PROJECT ***VICE & VIRTUE*** PROVES TO BE THE DIFFERENCE

BY MATT CONNER

Jimmy Needham knew a change was needed. The popular singer-songwriter has built a solid platform and fan base with an infectious bluesy delivery, but as his seventh album approached, Needham threw away the familiar. After all, same input equals same output.

"I knew after a decade of making records I couldn't use the same creative methods and expect different and fresh results," says Needham. "My ethic became, 'Try everything except what I've done before.'"

"So instead of writing songs with my acoustic, I lost the guitar and wrote without an instrument," he continues. "Instead of coming up with the music of a song on my own, I had my producer send me instrumental tracks to write lyrics and melodies over. Instead of creating by myself, I got my favorite players from around the country in a room for a week and wrote as a quartet. It lit a fire under me creatively that I wasn't sure was still there, to be honest."

The beautiful result is ***Vice & Virtue***, an important, challenging album for listeners who might feel like they've been following a formula of their own for too long. The complexity and mystery of scripture and the journey of faith are subjects to celebrate and dive into rather than ignore, according to Needham.

"I realize that when people hear that title they will bring their pre-conceived notions of what those words mean to the table," he says. "Vices are bad. Virtues are good. It's that simple. The Bible just doesn't see it as clear-cut as that. For Jesus, the most dastardly people were almost always the religious elite, not the prostitutes and adulterers."



“I’VE NEVER FELT HESITANT TO SAY HARD THINGS ON MY RECORDS, MAINLY BECAUSE I KNOW I’M SAYING IT TO MYSELF FIRST. I SUSPECTED I WOULDN’T BE WINNING ANY FRIENDS BY WRITING SONGS LIKE THESE. I WAS DELIBERATELY PROVOCATIVE, BUT ONLY SO FOLKS WOULD TAKE SERIOUSLY THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT.”

—JIMMY NEEDHAM

Needham’s killer vocal and melodic sensibilities are perfect vehicles for some of the bigger questions that aren’t so easily asked. *Vice & Virtue* is a substantive album that asks without always answering.

“It is precisely the most moral, nice and virtuous folks that have the hardest time seeing their desperate need for a Savior. What if we’re wrong about morality? What if there’s a way to do good from a bad, self-centered, Cross-avoiding, faithless motive? Can that action really be counted as a ‘virtue?’ These are the questions I’m hoping to raise in people’s minds as they listen, in hopes that the best of us might begin to feel a more desperate need for our Redeemer.”

The subject matter for *Vice & Virtue* came at a perfect time for Needham, who said he had

felt uninspired in recent writing seasons.

“I was asking questions about what I had left to say and create as an artist,” he says. “I was 10 years in and feeling a writing slump. I was also between labels at the time. It seemed appropriate to be asking if this was a good time to bow out.”

Needham has dealt with writer’s block before, as have most artists, but this time felt different than before. After six previous albums, he’d already said plenty as an artist, and his ability to keep things “fresh” had faded.

“Every record cycle there is a tinge of that for me, but around the time I was writing **Clear The Stage**, I felt that it was harder than ever to write fresh stuff,” he says. “I remember trying for eighteen months to write a spoken word for that record, only to come up empty-handed.



“Something happened as I was gearing up for *Vice & Virtue*, however. I was asked to write a spoken word for a friend’s wedding. I was nervous because I’d tried so long to come up with one for my last album without luck, but as I sat down to write this one for my friend, it was different. I don’t know what changed but a day and a half later, I had a six-minute piece that ended up being the final track on the new album. It was an incredible shot in the arm.”

Even after finding inspiration, it wasn’t as easy as writing and recording a new batch of songs. With a title track like “*Vice & Virtue*,” Needham faced a new hurdle as he worried about how the lyrics would be taken.

“I suspected I wouldn’t be winning any friends by writing a song like this,” he admits.

“I was deliberately provocative, but only so folks would take seriously the importance of what I am talking about. I’ve never felt hesitant to say hard things on my records, mainly because I know I’m saying it to myself first. I remember sending the demo of “*Vice & Virtue*” to my label president, **Dale Bray**, nervous that he was going to make me change some lyrics, if not scrap the entire song! I was so encouraged when he wrote back saying it was his favorite thing I’d turned in so far and that he loved what I had to say on it.”

Yet the lyrical side was only a slight concern compared to the physical challenges Needham faced when he entered into the studio. Needham says he began to lose his voice while recording, and by over-singing, he actually “ravaged” his vocal cords, requiring numerous

postponements in the studio. The entire ordeal lasted six full months.

“What ended up producing the most anxiety for me during this process was losing my voice during recording sessions,” he says. “I started to experience acute pain every time I spoke. We kept delaying the production, even cancelled live shows. The doctors couldn’t tell what the problem was, which was frustrating.

“It was an incredibly trying time for me, doubting whether I would ever sing again because I was showing no signs of recovery. But I can seldom remember a sweeter time I have had with the Lord. I felt the presence of my

Father so near during that season. By his grace he healed me just in time to sing the rest of the songs.”

Perhaps that is a fitting way for this album to have finally been born—completely on God’s terms. Through Needham’s desire to shake up the norm, and things coming together in His perfect timing, the Lord is truly doing a new thing (**Isaiah 43:19**), and we are blessed and lucky to be beneficiaries. [CCM](#)



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WORTH THE

**FINDING FAVOUR TRUSTS THE PROCESS AND
FINDS ENCOURAGEMENT THAT FANS THE
FLAME IN FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT**

BY MATT CONNER



WATT



Blake NeeSmith didn't think that he would have to wait so long. Looking back however, he wouldn't have it any other way.

The front man for **Finding Favour** expected the results to come much sooner than they have. To his credit, very few bands would expect to release a debut album four years after signing a record deal. But Finding Favour had to also find their voice, and the experience of earning their right to record has been a journey worth taking, according to NeeSmith.

On the verge of releasing their first ever full-length album, NeeSmith says the time behind the scenes has produced significant fruit for Finding Favour. You can hear the splendid results on **Reborn**, the band's new album produced by **Casey Brown (Love & The Outcome, All Things New)**. Now NeeSmith hopes that fans will enjoy it as well.

"This is our first full-length record, which has been a long time coming," says NeeSmith. "We have found that it's a bit nerve wracking to wonder if people will love project the way we do. Among those mixed emotions, it gets us excited to already see people reacting positively at live shows and from airplay. We hope that it will continue to blossom from here."

Nearly ten years have passed since NeeSmith and company first decided to form a band. From the outset, they played anywhere and everywhere they could, mostly taking opportunities to lead worship—hoping that a big break would come their way. Then a few years ago, the long-awaited opportunity finally presented itself unexpectedly.

"A few years back, while we were writing our first single called 'Slip On By,' a familiar looking guy walked into the room. He got closer and said, 'Hey guys, what's up? I'm **Toby Mac.**' I said, 'I know who you are!' He began talking to us, listened the song, and ended up loving it. He said he wanted to be a part of what we were doing and that he wanted to sign us to **Gotee Records.**"

After the deal was official, NeeSmith admits he thought they would jump right into the studio and hit the road. Unfortunately the industry has changed, which means that labels are treating new acts a bit differently than in year's past. Talent is now developed, and artists have to wait. As a band, Finding Favour had to adjust their expectations.

"[We signed] about four years ago," says NeeSmith. "Right after, we said, 'Alright, this is it!' Come to find out, it doesn't work that fast. They released the single and then they

"WE'RE MORE THANKFUL THAT OUR FIRST SINGLE OR ALBUM DIDN'T PROVE TO BE AN EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS—WE WERE ABLE TO GROW RATHER THAN HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMPLACENT. WHEN YOU'RE IN THE BACK OF THE PACK, YOU LEARN SO MUCH ABOUT PATIENCE AND GOD'S PERFECT TIMING. WHEN YOU HAVE TO FIGHT AND CLIMB—WORKING TO MAKE A RIPPLE—IT'S SOMETHING YOU LEARN TO REALLY APPRECIATE."

—Blake NeeSmith of Finding Favour

FINDING FAVOUR



wanted to release a five-song EP. For a lot of these record labels, it's not like it used to be, with new artists seemingly growing on trees or falling out of the sky like they used to. They just can't afford for everyone to make a full record initially.

"In comparison, it's a lot like getting to the minor leagues. You have to earn your spot in having an opportunity to make a big project. [Signing the deal] was a stepping stone and we just had to trust the process."

Fortunately, good things were developing under the surface for both Finding Favour and their fans. The band's first single, the aforementioned "Slip On By," turned into a solid AC hit for them and additionally as a Top 40 country radio hit for **Austin Webb**. The band's self-titled EP also earned them tour slots with **Hawk Nelson** and **Building 429**. And all the while, NeeSmith says, these opportunities were giving them the time to fully develop their craft.

"There's absolutely nothing that I would change," NeeSmith reflects. "Going back to where we were and considering our development now, we are a totally different band. We realize that you have to earn it. Disappointments come and go along the way, but those should foster an attitude of hard work and transformation."

"I actually think that we're more thankful that our first single or album didn't prove to be an extraordinary success—we were able to grow rather than have an opportunity to rest on our laurels and become complacent. When you're in the back of the pack, you learn so much about patience and God's perfect timing. When you have to fight and climb—working even harder to make just a ripple—it's something you learn to really appreciate."

Now that greater opportunities are presenting themselves, Finding Favour, also comprised of **Allen Dukes** (guitar), **Dustin**

Daniels (bass guitar) and **Josh Duckworth** (drums), is taking full advantage. They recently completed a 42-city tour with **Newsboys**, and will soon join **Crowder**, **Lauren Daigle**, and rapper **NF** on an **Air-1** tour. They'll also hit the road with **Sanctus Real** later this year.

A recent conversation with a fan after a show reminded NeeSmith of exactly why it's been worth the wait. One of the band's new songs, "Be Like You," is a powerful single that's already resonating with fans. NeeSmith says it's those connections that confirm why they're making music in the first place.

"We have a song about being a father," he says. "I have a little girl, so I wrote it like a prayer. Once after sharing the song, and a man came up to me and said, 'A few years back, I lost both of my daughters in a car accident. That song truly gave me great memories of them, and gave me a hope.'"

"It was an example of showing great love, and it definitely put things into perspective. When people share intimate details about their lives, and there are so many people I know that are being blessed, it builds up a fire that helps you continue to fight." CCM



CLICK HERE TO CHECK OUT *CCM MAGAZINE'S* REVIEW OF FINDING FAVOUR'S DEBUT

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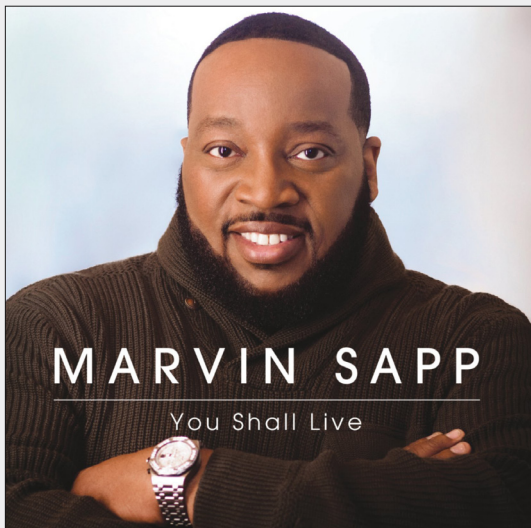
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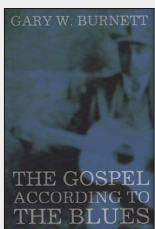
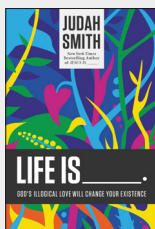
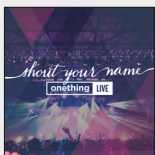
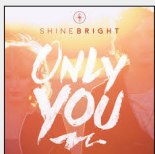
You Shall Live (RCA Inspiration)
 FOR FANS OF: Fred Hammond,
 Smokie Norful, Hezekiah Walker



Now ten albums into his solo career, Marvin Sapp sure has come a long way since being invited into the Commissioned fold by Fred Hammond. And even if *You Shall Live* took three years, it was well worth the wait thanks to the singer/songwriter/pastor's superb craftsmanship that seems to have jumped up a notch ever since 2007's gold selling *Thirsty* and its massive crossover hit "Never Would Have Made It" put Sapp on the international map. With its contagious bounce, instantly memorable chorus and lyrics of unceasing encouragement, lead single "Yes You Can" may very well follow in its footsteps while also setting the tone for today's contemporary-gospel playing field as a whole. Outside of a pretty straightforward but pleasant rendition of "Old Rugged Cross," everything else is original throughout *You Shall Live*, as Sapp illustrates that commanding proclamation time and time again across multiple tones. "Greater" grooves with a bountiful choir, "Praise Your Way Through" seems tailor-made for the church, while the ballad "Holy Spirit Overflow" frames the singer's smooth voice with an eloquence that regularly encapsulates this spirited effort.

—Andy Argyrakis

IN THIS ISSUE



WE LIKE: "Yes You Can"

**JOSH WILSON*****That Was Then, This Is Now*** (Capitol CMG)

FOR FANS OF: Brandon Heath, Matt Wertz, Dave Barnes

★★★★☆

The latest offering from singer/songwriter/guitar-wizard Josh Wilson masterfully blurs the line between worship and just a great all-around album to listen to front to back. With lyrics that pack a punch and a fresh, updated sound, *That Was Then, This Is Now*, is aptly titled and will serve to define this moment in Wilson's now nine-year career. The once singularly folksy artist breaks new musical ground, coupled with deeply personal songs about struggle, his faith, and fear. Anchored in the idea that Christ makes all things new, the album heavily draws inspiration from scripture to create a spiritually deep and thought-provoking collection.

—Rebekah Bell

WE LIKE: "Grace Upon Grace"

**SHINEBRIGHT*****Only You EP*** (BEC Recordings)

FOR FANS OF: BarlowGirl, Superchick

★★★★☆

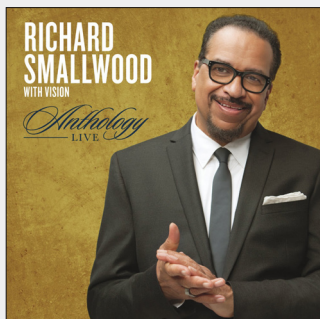
In an effort to sharpen the focus of their message, Shine Bright Baby has officially changed their name to SHINEBRIGHT. Fortunately, there wasn't a need to tinker with the band's infectious pop sound. *Only You* is the BEC band's new 9-track EP that offers five new songs and four remixes, including turns by Unikron and Dream Records' Jonathan Thulin.

EP opener "Closer to the Sun" is the additive center of this sonic solar system, despite the impressive appearances turned in by guests like Thulin and Rapture Ruckus on lead single "Reckless for Love" and "Limitless," respectively. The track is a stellar mid-tempo start to the EP and conjures comparisons to Leigh Nash's work with Delerium in the short-lived side project, Fauxliage.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "Closer to the Sun"

URBAN


**RICHARD SMALLWOOD
WITH VISION**
Anthology Live

(RCA Inspiration)

FOR FANS OF: Israel & New Breed, Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, 3 Winans Brothers

★★★★☆

Legendary gospel singer/songwriter Richard Smallwood and his longtime backing troupe Vision, turn in a riveting rundown of several faith-enriching, praise-centered staples. In addition to new cuts and beloved medleys chronicling their own celebrated urban gospel career, the collection also includes all-star guests like Edwin Hawkins and Angela Winbush, before culminating with a poignant tribute to Andraé Crouch, whose influence is readily apparent in all of the immense talents involved.

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: “Same God”

POP


SAINT ESPRIT
Saint Esprit (Dream Records)

FOR FANS OF:

Press Play, Plumb

★★★★☆

With a brand-new, self-titled, seven-song EP, Saint Esprit (French for “Holy Spirit”) is the latest electronic flower to bloom from the diverse soil of Dream Records. The husband-wife team of Michael and Kelly Bibeau are part of the Nightlife Worship collective, but with their own synth-heavy release, they’re able to further their positive messages with modern flavors. “I Can Be The Light” and “Wildlife” will be crowd favorites, but “Shelter,” near the end of the EP, is a hidden gem.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: “Shelter”

WORSHIP


ONETHING LIVE
Shout Your Name

(Forerunner Music)

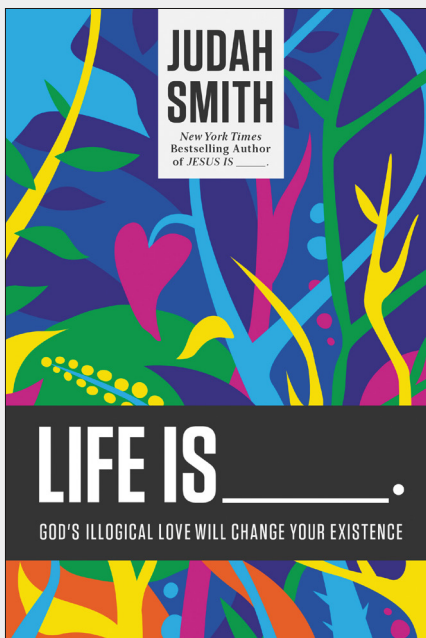
FOR FANS OF: Jesus Culture, New Life Worship, Hillsong United

★★★★☆

Courtesy of the International House of Prayer Kansas City (IHOPKC), *Shout Your Name* is the musical manifestation of the Onething Young Adult Conference held last December. The album features a host of IHOPKC worship leaders, notably led by Misty Edwards. The cheerful “Famous” (Jaye Thomas) lifts high the name of Christ, while “So Come” (Misty Edwards) petitions God to “give us beauty for ashes, love for hate.” With tracks ranging from joyous proclamations of God’s goodness to heartfelt prayers, the album encourages worshippers to draw near to the heart of a God who is always faithful.

—Rebekah Bell

WE LIKE: “Famous”



LIFE IS _____. GOD'S ILLOGICAL LOVE WILL CHANGE YOUR EXISTENCE

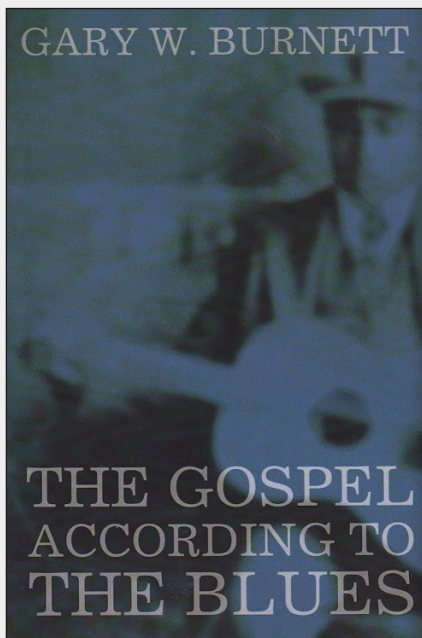
Judah Smith (Nelson Books, 2015)

★★★★☆

In *Life Is _____*, the follow-up to his *New York Times* bestseller, *Jesus Is _____*, Judah Smith once again attempts to fill in the blank in a crucial statement. He succeeds by defining four main points that take the reader on glorious rabbit trails that, if written by another author, might end up going nowhere. However, what begins as a hilarious sidetrack always ends up leading to a solid Biblical point and a powerful “a-ha moment.”

With a foreword by NFL quarterback Russell Wilson and praise from other celebrities, this book is entertaining from page one. However, it is more than pop-culture fluff. Judah Smith is in his element here, taking weighty theological topics and making them easy to understand for even new believers.

–Jamie Walker



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE BLUES

Gary Burnett (Cascade Books, 2014)

★★★★☆

For the brand new fan to the true aficionado, *The Gospel According to The Blues* will give all readers a new appreciation, respect and love for the blues. Author Gary Burnett takes the reader on a journey through an exhaustive history of the lauded genre, providing insight into the authors, musicians and music, along with deeper revelations into its connection to the Christian gospel. You will certainly want to play through the integrated and helpful listening guide at the end of each chapter. Simple Google searching will gain you access to most of the recommended selections. However, we expect this book will inspire many readers to visit their local used record stores for a more in-depth experience and to further immerse themselves in the spirituality and authenticity of the blues.

–Tamara Phillips



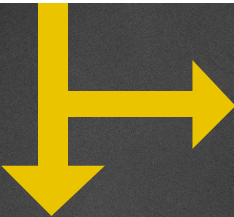
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