

CEM

LAUREN DAIGLE

HOW IT ALMOST
WASN'T MEANT
TO BE



STRYPER

MICHAEL SWEET:

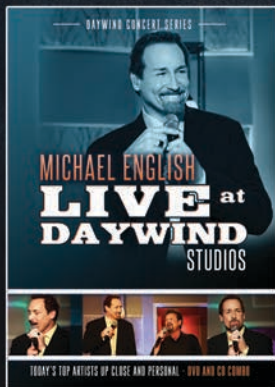
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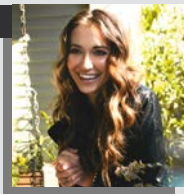


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FEATURES

Lauren Daigle

So far, it's been quite a journey for the now three-time Dove Award-winning songstress. How did surrender play a part in such a successful and whirlwind rookie season?

**Stryper**

As the tussle of deadline and disorder fuels the fire, front man Michael Sweet explains why Stryper is far from delivering their final blows.

**Cody Carnes of Gateway Worship**

Will we ever be good enough to be welcome in God's presence? How did the Israelites conquer Jericho? Why are believers continually divided? Carnes on tearing down our walls.



DEPARTMENTS

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

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

**REVIEWS**

**JONATHAN McREYNOLDS,
CHRISTMAS MUSIC 2015—
PART 1, JONNY DIAZ
+ MORE!**



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#OptForEternity | In a recent news story, recreational retailer **REI (Recreational Equipment, Inc.)**, announced that they will officially close their doors during the upcoming annual “Black Friday” shopping frenzy. Most of their 12,000 employees will receive a paid day off, as president and CEO **Jerry Stritzke** said, “We’re closing our doors, paying our employees to get out there.”

Of course, other than some of the more obvious promotional sidebars surrounding their October 27 statement, (including the simultaneous launch of an updated logo, and a new dedicated companion website), I can only speculate as to the motivation behind Stritzke’s strategy for his company’s Thanksgiving weekend (furthermore, I don’t have the room here to go into why REI, a co-op, is uniquely set up to execute this type of business decision, etc.—*talk amongst yourselves*).

But what struck me is the implied motivation lurking, at least, on the surface of this story—the guts to be counter-culture, and to take a stand. To Stritzke’s credit, he did say, “We think that Black Friday has gotten out of hand, and so we are choosing to invest in helping people get outside with loved ones this holiday season, over spending it in the aisles.”

I love the notion of consciously making a decision to go outside the boundaries, beyond our walls—REI is taking it, well, literally—and as Christians, I think we should, too. As **Cody Carnes** of **Gateway Worship** puts it in our November 1 Song Devotional feature, “It was never God’s plan for us to live with walls. His original design was for us to live in Eden—a place of freedom and intimate communion with Him...”

The world constantly tugs at us to get up at 2:00 a.m. the morning after Thanksgiving, and to stand in a freezing line for some kind-of “deal of the century.” The King of Kings is simply knocking at our door, inviting us to go on a daily journey with Him—outside any conceivable walls—for a welcoming covenant on eternity.



Blessings,

Kevin Sparkman

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1



COMPILED BY
ANDY ARGYRAKIS

1 Jason Eaton, front man for newcomers **6th Day Made**, flashes a peace sign while meeting **Newsboys** singer **Michael Tait** backstage at the **Big Ticket Festival** before both bands took the stage.

2 The 30th anniversary of **Farm Aid** attracted artists from all walks of life with legendary gospel singer **Mavis Staples** (of **The Staple Singers**/"I'll Take You There" fame) sharing some good news alongside sets from **Neil Young**, **John Mellencamp**, **Dave Matthews**, **Imagine Dragons** and **Jack Johnson** (amongst many others).

2



3



3 The grand finale of **Farm Aid** also featured plenty of praise as event co-founder **Willie Nelson** (now 82, but still going strong) and southern gospel group the Blackwood Quartet led fans and fellow artists alike through spirited renditions of “Family Bible” and “I Saw The Light.”

4 **MercyMe** gifts **Fox News Headquarters** with an early present, performing songs from its brand new album, ***MercyMe, It's Christmas!***, which marks the group's second ever holiday offering.

4



5



5 & 6 Eclectic worship troupe **Rend Collective** showcases material off the recent release ***As Family We Go*** live on **FOX & Friends** (prior to joining **Chris Tomlin** on tour this fall).

6



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SONG OF THE YEAR - 2012
"HOLD ON TO ME"
LAUREN DANGLE

NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR - 2012
LAUREN DANGLE

PERFORMER OF THE YEAR - 2012
LAUREN DANGLE



Every Season



Would You Believe That
LAUREN DAIGLE's
Journey Toward 2015
GMA Dove Awards *New
Artist Of The Year* Began
As A Prayer For Pop
Success?

BY LENA ZIEGLER

At fifteen years old **Lauren Daigle** was sure of one thing: she would *never* make Christian music.

"At the time I just thought I can't do that, my friends are going to judge me if I sing Christian music. So then I thought, 'I definitely can't do anything in worship. If I do worship [music], that just makes me *old*, all of a sudden!'" she says with a laugh. "*These* were my thoughts at fifteen!"



Now nearly ten years later (a realization that makes the twenty-four year old Daigle gasp in disbelief), she has become a household name in Christian music. With her first album **How Can It Be** debuting at #1 on the *Billboard* Christian charts earlier this year—and still standing strong at #4 even twenty-eight weeks later—and her first trip to the **Dove Awards** a staggering success, with a take-home of the coveted **New Artist of the Year** award and **Song of the Year** for “How Can it Be,” Daigle has cemented her place and indelible role in an industry she once doubted she could ever belong.

“I really believe so many people just long for one person to believe in them,” she says. “I feel like [New Artist of the Year award] was not just one person, but an entire industry saying, ‘Hey we believe in you, we believe in what God is doing through you!’ and giving me that warm embrace.”

But that embrace didn’t come easily for Daigle, who spent several years of her early career with sights set on mainstream success, and early signs from God telling her she was destined for greatness.

“When I was fifteen years old I was diagnosed with an illness called cytomegalovirus and I was placed on homebound rest for about two years,” she explains. “And I kept having all of these dreams about tours, awards, charts and all of these different stages I’d be on. And I was like, ‘God what is this about? Am I just having cabin fever, or is this real—what’s going on?’ Then He affirmed me. No, *this* is what I have in store.”

From fear and uncertainty sprang resistance as Daigle made the personal decision to not pursue Christian music, despite messages from God telling her otherwise.

“I told the Lord—yes I told *Him*, ‘I’m not going to do Christian music! I’ll sing whatever You want me to sing, I’ll do whatever you want me to do in the mainstream world, but I’m not doing Christian music.’”

Fast forward several years later, after struggling to make it in the mainstream market, including venturing to Hollywood for **American Idol** only to be sent back home

“I really believe so many people just long for one person to believe in them. I feel like [New Artist of the Year award] was not just one person, but an entire industry saying, ‘Hey we believe in you, we believe in what God is doing through you!’”

—Lauren Daigle

to Louisiana, Daigle still hadn't found a home for her talent and passion for music. Though she led worship at her church, she still doubted whether the Christian music industry was the right place for her. "It got to the point when I said, 'Lord, I don't know what I'm doing, and I need You to help me figure this out.' So I got on my knees one day and prayed to surrender all of it, because in my heart I just care about singing—I care about glorifying Him," she says. "What I realized was that the more I fell in love with Him, the more He revealed things about how He really does give us the desires of our hearts, even if they look different than what we thought." And for Daigle, different came with an unexpected direction from God—a return to *American Idol*.

It was late in the rounds of the reality show competition's famed "Hollywood Week," and Daigle was doing well. But as she grew closer toward the final rounds, she had a life-altering revelation on stage, unbeknownst to the world as they watched her sing.

"I breathed into the microphone and I thought, 'God if you don't come and inhabit this, it's not fulfilling. Nothing about this gives me the same feeling of being at home and leading worship,'" she says. "Even though there were millions of viewers, it didn't compare to the 1,500 people I was leading worship for at church. And right there and then, I knew that God was teaching me, regardless of what kind of music I do or what kind of life I live—if I don't do everything from a place of worship, nothing is going to be fulfilling. That was the game changer for me."

As Daigle's personal mission transformed, doors began opening for her. She was unexpectedly offered an opportunity to attend a music workshop with an indie Christian band she sang backup vocals for during her time at Louisiana State University. "**Centricity**, the label that I'm with now,

contacted them and said, 'Hey, would you come out to this indie artist retreat, we want to see you guys work, and, oh by the way, we have one extra spot if you want to bring that female background vocalist.' It was totally random! So I went there, without a clue as to what this was. I just thought, 'Oh, a free trip to the mountains? That sounds great, sure, I'll go. And it's about music? Why wouldn't I go? That's fun!'"

But in Christian music, ***Musical In The Rockies*** is much more than a trip to the mountains, but rather a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for independent artists to showcase their talents and potentially get signed to a record label. In a "twist of fate" so exceptional, it could only be God's work, the lead singer of the band had an emergency appendectomy on the morning of their showcase, and Daigle was asked to assume on lead vocals.

Shortly after, Daigle dropped her scholarships at LSU and moved to Nashville to pursue music full-time, an act of faith so impressive to executives at Centricity, that they signed her on the spot.

"It's amazing how God puts all the pieces together," she says. "There's no reason to worry or strive whenever we just consider Him our provider in all things. God's not a God of risks. He just says, 'Trust me,' because He has it all under control. To us, in our human life, it looks like a risk, but He's like, 'No, I'm God. I got this.'"

Along with powerhouse vocals and unforgettable songwriting, it is Daigle's unwavering faith that moves so poignantly through her music and into the hearts of her fans that has made her a sensation. But even with that, Daigle says she struggles at times to fight the anxiety that comes with recording, performing, and trusting in God first before all things.

"That's exactly why 'First' was written. There was that pressure, like, 'Hey, with these next



“Even though there were millions of [*American Idol*] viewers, it didn’t compare to the 1,500 people I was leading worship for at church. And right there and then, I knew that God was teaching me, regardless of what kind of music I do or what kind of life I live, if I don’t do everything from a place of worship, nothing is going to be fulfilling.”

—Lauren Daigle

four songs you write, can you please give us another hit? Thanks,” she says, divulging the fears and doubts that plagued her when writing the songs that would transform the *How Can it Be* EP into a full-length album. “I woke up super-anxious one day, and the Lord showed me this passage; *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you* (**Matthew 6:28**). So I knew, right there in that moment, God was doing something incredible. I just needed to sit, and rest in His presence.

“The next day, I walked into a scheduled co-write, and the girl looked at me and said, ‘They’ve come up with a song title, but they want to know what God was putting on your heart.’ So I gave her that passage, and she said, ‘Well, that’s amazing, because the title we just came up with is called *First*. I knew, right then, that God was about to do something massive in this song.”

“First,” currently #1 on *Billboard* Christian Radio charts is massive in its sound, its scope, and its reach to fans, reminding them to have trust in God always, and to always put Him first.

“He’s just going to do more, He’s just going to do greater things, and remind us not to get anxious and fearful of the pressures, but to stay focused on His Kingdom. I have to battle that one, and still he’ll say, ‘Don’t worry about those kinds of things, just focus on being a clean vessel for Me to pour through.’”

And it is God pouring through Daigle’s voice and the words she sings, that she says forms the spiritual connection between herself and her fans, who through social media and meet-and-greets after her concerts, never forget to remind her of how deeply her music has affected them.

“Night after night, sometimes with tears streaming down their faces, people say, ‘I can’t tell you what God has done through your music’—it’s the total pay off,” she says.



“Because then, it’s less about me and all about the power of God, as He works through the song. He’s the one that’s going in and transforming people’s lives, and the fact that He would choose my songs completely blows me away.

“Just the other day a woman told me that she had been dating a married man for thirteen years, and then she heard ‘How Can It Be,’ and instantly knew she had to end the relationship. She said, ‘I knew in that moment God had the capacity to continue to love me through this. Through my sin, through my shame, and to fix all the pieces afterwards, as well.’ That, right there, is what it’s all about!”

And when it comes down to it, that’s what Daigle is now all about—sharing her faith through music, reaching people, and serving God as a medium for His message. Through an initial struggle to find her way, Daigle has found more than her musical path, but also a profound sense of peace and love, coupled with a worldview that could only be credited to her ever-evolving relationship with God.

“He’s really crafted my eyes to see beyond what I would normally see,” she says. “Like the capacity we have to love—it’s just

unbelievable. The ability to love beyond human, beyond flesh, and do crazy things, like loving the people that hurt you. That’s the exact opposite way in which the world functions, but through Christ, we gain those abilities.”

And in the case of Lauren Daigle, He’s given her even more.

“When I look back over the last two years, I’m like, ‘Wow, this has been so exciting!’ The joys of it all are always there, always consistent. I feel like I’m completely in that surreal headspace, all the time. Just wondering... ‘Is this going to end?’ I hope it doesn’t. I hope this never ends!”

And as fans of Daigle, watching her career blossom through hit songs and unshakable faith, we pray it never does. With overwhelming vocals, a purity of heart, and an ability to seamlessly transform faith into music, it is ever the more evident that she is exactly where she is meant to be; creating music for believers in a mainstream world. **CCM**



FOR MORE ON THE LAUREN DAIGLE, STAY TUNED TO CCMAGAZINE.COM IN THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER FOR BONUS MATERIAL!



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A full-page photograph of two men standing in front of a weathered brick wall. The man on the left has short brown hair, wears glasses, and has a goatee. He is dressed in a black leather jacket over a black shirt, with a small American flag patch on his left thigh. The man on the right has long, dark, wavy hair and a goatee. He wears a black leather jacket with silver-colored metal cuffs and black pants with the number '777' on the right leg. The title 'ROUND TWO KNOCKOUT' is overlaid in large, yellow, outlined, block letters across the center of the image.

ROUND TWO KNOCKOUT

BY ANDY ARGYRAKIS



AS THE TUSSLE OF DEADLINE AND DISORDER FUELS
THE FIRE, FRONT MAN **MICHAEL SWEET** SHARES WHY
STRYPER IS FAR FROM DELIVERING THEIR FINAL BLOWS

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urviving thirty years in the music biz is a tremendous feat in

and of itself, but being able to thrive with an unstoppable streak of three original studio albums, a covers collection and a live CD/DVD (supported with just as much time on tour) in the last half-decade alone is absolutely astounding. Then again, the spiritually sound heavy metal men of **Stryper** have always marched to the beat of their own drums, slaying MTV throughout the '80s (in spite of their overtly evangelistic message), becoming one of the top reunion attractions of the new millennium, selling over ten million albums across each era, while racking up an armload of Dove Awards and a GRAMMY nomination along the way.

"It really does boggle my mind, because I was looking at the numbers recently and saw we have officially done more now since '03 than we did from when we formed in '83 until we disbanded in '91," considers co-founding front man/guitarist **Michael Sweet**, who continues the group's prolific quest with the brand new album **Fallen** (Frontiers Music SRL) alongside fellow originals **Oz Fox** (guitar), **Tim Gaines** (bass) and **Robert Sweet** (drums). "I always try to remain humble, because that day could come where there's writer's block or that well could dry. Thank God above it hasn't yet, and for whatever reason, those songs are still flowing and coming. I really do give thanks to God every day for it—there's no real explanation to it other than that. I think God wired me where I have this constant song in my head, to the point where it's a blessing and a curse. It can be distracting at times, and can actually get in the way of my regular life. Songs have been birthed from a deep sleep, which



is pretty odd. I don't know if other people around me do, but I love the way I'm built, and I think that's why there's a constant song. I pray that never goes away."

Though that muse continued to flow straight into the *Fallen* sessions, the singer/songwriter will be the first to admit that having so much on his plate as of late (such as a solo album, an autobiography, plus his super duo **Sweet & Lynch** with mainstream metal man **George Lynch**), did add a few unusual ripples to the equation, which were further complicated by some other conditions he just recently started discussing. "I was diagnosed with ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], I'm definitely OCD



[obsessive-compulsive disorder] and I'm also a procrastinator," he lets out with a laugh. "If a label calls me up six months prior to starting on an album and I say, 'Great let's do it,' I wait sometimes—not all of the time—but I did for *Fallen*. It wasn't like I was just sitting around the house, I was touring and doing other things, but I put it off until just a few weeks before the guys were supposed to come out to the house."

Continues Sweet, "Oddly enough, within a nine or ten day period, I wound up putting the whole album together—I wasn't necessarily saying to myself 'This is perfect,' or 'I'm very confident that this is done and the way it should be.' It was more or less

'Oh gosh, I hope it's good!' It's not a highly recommended method to make an album, but here's what's funny about the way I work. I tend to work better under that kind of pressure. It helps me to focus more because of the ADHD and some of the issues I have. I was able to go down every day and truly focus on that album until I emerged from my studio with the whole project, and thank the Lord, everybody who's hearing it so far is saying it's really good."

In addition to bountiful feedback on the group's social sites, both Christian and mainstream industry reviews have been unanimously positive, basically suggesting Stryper once again knocked the project out

of the park with some of its hardest driving material to date, while still managing to maintain its melodic sensibility. Sweet even recounts talking to a few critics who admitted never liking the band before, but became spellbound with the undeniably electric sound of this album, along with his signature faith-laced lyrics, updated to reflect the current times.

"To be sitting here thirty-two years later writing, putting together and producing some of the best music of our careers, of our lives and ministry—however you want to term that—it feels really good," asserts Sweet. "I think it would be pretty darn cool if we can continue down this path where the next album is better, and then the next album is even better than the last. We set out to make the heaviest record we've done, and when I say 'heavy,' sometimes that word scares people, it's not just necessarily referring to the music, but it's referring to a lyric and an attitude in all of us making this album, and



"TO BE SITTING HERE THIRTY-TWO YEARS LATER WRITING, PUTTING TOGETHER AND PRODUCING SOME OF THE BEST MUSIC OF OUR CAREERS, OF OUR LIVES AND MINISTRY—IT FEELS REALLY GOOD. I THINK IT WOULD BE PRETTY DARN COOL IF WE CAN CONTINUE DOWN THIS PATH WHERE THE NEXT ALBUM IS BETTER, AND THEN THE NEXT ALBUM IS EVEN BETTER THAN THE LAST."

—MICHAEL SWEET



that comes through. There's a determination and a passion that translates to 'heavy' on this album. Yes the music's heavy, yes the lyrics are bold, but at the same time, there's this certain vibe you get when you listen to it that just kind-of smacks you in the face. I refer to [2013's] *No More Hell To Pay* as getting in a heavyweight fight and going twelve rounds, but this album might be like getting in a heavyweight fight, and going fifteen rounds. It's kind-of sucker punching you in a great way, while saying 'Hey, we're still alive,' and 'wake up.' It's really cool, man, and we feel revived. We feel like we're at our peak right now."

In addition to the continued "Yellow And Black Attack" from the musical front, perhaps the first hint of that boldness comes from the *Fallen* album's pummeling title track, which reads like a literal history lesson on the life of Lucifer. He was the angel of music. Then, obviously



pride entered in a terrible, evil and ugly way, and he tried to take over heaven. He was kicked out, and became Satan,” explains Sweet of the narrative meant to rally against evil influence. “‘Yahweh’ is about the crucifixion of Christ and [lyrically plays out] like the movie ***The Passion Of The Christ***. ‘Let There Be Light’ is about the beginning when God created the heavens, earth, man and the creatures. When you listen to the whole album, it almost feels like you just took part in a Bible study, but it’s not done in a pushy or cheesy way. Did we plan that? No, but it just kind of fell into place and happened that way.”

One element that’s especially admirable from Stryper’s beginnings to this very day is the fellas’ commitment to sharing their faith, even if it hasn’t always been understood in less heavy metal-minded church circles, nor has it been exactly fashionable in the secular scene. Nonetheless, the band regularly performs at venues of all associations and continues to land on multiple *Billboard* charts (a pattern that unquestionably

blazed the trail for crossover acts like **P.O.D.**, **Switchfoot**, **Skillet** and the countless others that followed in similar footsteps).

“The world that we live in inspires us to do so, and what I mean by that is there’s a lot of darkness in this world,” observes Sweet. “In some ways, people say, ‘It’s getting better,’ but I think in other ways it’s getting much, much worse. I believe we’re in the end times. When is God going to come? Nobody knows, but we’re certainly seeing the end times right before our eyes, and there’s so much going on in this world that’s right out of the Bible. It’s there and that inspires us to be even more driven to perform in front of people [all over the world]. The underlying point of it all is so we can have the opportunity to share the Gospel, and we do so in our own way. We don’t come out mid-set, pull out stools, and sit and preach to people. We’ve never done that. To me, the music is what’s doing the preaching. The lyrics to ‘More Than A Man,’ ‘Soldiers Under Command,’ ‘To Hell With The Devil,’ ‘The Rock That Makes Me Roll’—that’s the sermon, and we give them that.”

“We encourage and inspire through the banter between songs, and we always end with a prayer and throw out Bibles so people can take that home with them. Man, that’s it right there... We get beat up from both sides, and we have since the very beginning, because we don’t really fit in anywhere, but we keep getting up because there’s still a calling on our lives. As long as that’s there,

we’re going to keep going. If that’s until we’re 80 or 90-years-old, then break out the yellow and black canes because we’re gonna be using them. It’s just who we are.” CCM



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‘WALLS’—THE HEART BEHIND THE SONG

BY CODY CARNES OF GATEWAY WORSHIP

Then the people shouted, and the trumpets blasted. The noise of the voices and trumpets rose higher and higher, and the thick walls of Jericho collapsed, just as God had promised. When the wall fell before them, they rushed straight ahead and took the city...

Joshua 6:20 (The Voice)

Walls are all around us.

Walls of race. Walls of hate. Walls of religion, fear, and insecurity separating us from each other. Walls of sin and shame separating us from God.

It was never God's plan for us to live with walls. His original design was for us to live in Eden—a place of freedom and intimate communion with Him. But then sin entered the world, and walls started going up everywhere.

Thankfully, Jesus entered the world to make things right, restoring our relationship with God back to how it was in Eden. Back to intimate communion with God. Back to a world without walls.

Yet all too often, the enemy tricks us into believing those walls of sin and shame still



Cody Carnes

exist. He convinces us we're still not good enough or not worthy enough to be in God's presence.

THE GOOD NEWS

But here's the good news ... we'll never be good enough. We don't have to be good

enough, though. Our salvation is a free gift, one with no strings attached. The enemy has already lost. So when Satan tells me I'm not good enough, the best thing I can do is agree, and *boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me (2 Corinthians 12:9)*. I simply get to rest in the truth that Jesus has saved me by grace, defeated the grave, and now calls me righteous.

When I started writing "Walls," my heart was to put words of declarative praise in the mouth of the Church to remind our enemy that Jesus has already defeated him and to continually remind us that Jesus has set us free.

As my wife, Kari, and I have traveled around the country this past year, we've seen God uniting the Church in a unique way. So many different streams of the Church are reaching across invisible lines to honor and connect with each other. We're awakening to the realization that we are better and we are stronger when we work together.

STANDING TOGETHER

If you think about it, the Israelites who conquered Jericho didn't really do much. They marched around a wall seven times and shouted really loud. Anyone could do that. But the key was they did it *together*, and they invited God into their midst by raising their voices in praise. God's presence and power comes to life when we lock arms with each other, and lift up praise. And *anytime* you welcome God into an atmosphere, things change, and He tears the walls down.

PRAYER

In the months and years to come, my heart's prayer will be for God to do whatever He

wants with this song. And wherever He decides to use it, I also pray that every heart would gain a revelation of His love and freedom.

As we sing and lift up our voices in praise to Jesus, let us pray that walls and enemy strongholds over our cities and families would come crashing down. ...that we would go outside the four walls of our churches and walk across the street to love people who may be different from us. ...that local churches would reach across town to other churches, and discover God's way to work together. ...that the blessing God commands

as a result of unity in **Psalms 133** would be tangible, because we're living in a place of oneness with God and with the people around us. ...that God's presence would fill our hearts, homes, streets, and churches—for that is the greatest blessing of all.

Jesus says in **John 13**, *Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*

May the Church in the days to come be a unified church that loves like Jesus.

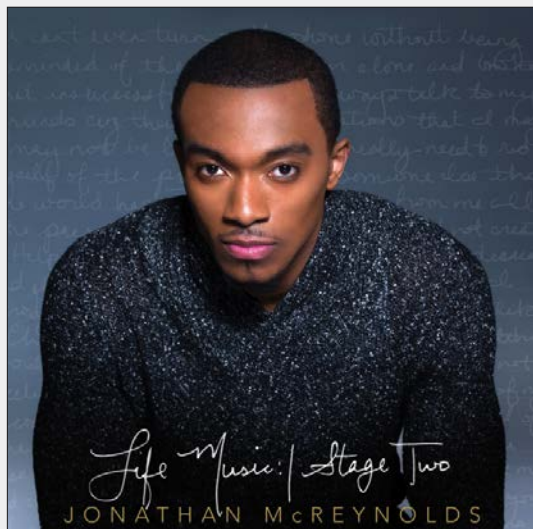
For far too long, God's people have believed we have to live behind walls and be separate from each other. But that lie doesn't hold weight, whatsoever. It is being exposed as a lie by this truth—that there is nothing better than standing together.

Walls are coming down! CCM

Complete with invitations to enter into God's love, grace and freedom, Walls is loaded for an album that focuses on tearing down those walls that we encounter, both personal and from within the church. Featuring: Rita Springer, Mark Harris, Cody Carnes and Kari Jobe among others.



CLICK HERE TO READ THE "WALLS" REVIEW



JONATHAN McREYNOLDS

Life Music: Stage Two

(Entertainment One Music)

FOR FANS OF:

Anthony Brown & group therAPy,
Jonathan Nelson, Aloe Blacc



In the three year period since Jonathan McReynolds dropped his debut *Life Music*, the gifted newcomer scored both Dove and Stellar Award nominations, plus lit up stages as diverse as the BET Celebration of Gospel, Austin's South By Southwest Festival and New Orleans' Essence Festival. On this sequel of sorts, the singer/songwriter continues his appeal to both the church and world at large, gathering an all-star pool of guests (Israel Houghton, Derek Minor, India.Arie, Warrryn Campbell and many more) who further enhance a rhythmic gumbo spanning contemporary gospel, radio-ready R&B, soulful ballads and straight up pop. But perhaps even more enticing than the contagious sonic spread is the concept behind this ambitious collection, which is "written from the perspective of a guy looking for God in a social media-distracting generation." Not only do songs such as "Gotta Have You," "Whole," "Pressure" and "Full Attention" engage amidst millions of other musical choices right now, but they bring a much needed dose of unswerving spiritual substance to anyone searching for something deeper.

—Andy Argyrakis

IN THIS ISSUE



WE LIKE: "Gotta Have You"



MERCYME

MercyMe, It's Christmas! (Fair Trade Services)

★★★★☆

The creative renaissance continues for MercyMe on this second ever Christmas collection that finds the fellas expanding their musical palettes even further than the first time. With super producer Brown Bannister behind the boards, the band lays out a sumptuous spread of covers and originals bathed in up-tempo beats and soaring ballad arrangements. "Christmastime Again" bursts with a swinging snap to recall retro sounds of the season transported to today, while the beautiful "Joy" gives Bart Millard the chance to flex his bountiful pipes. Add in a split between good old-fashioned fun ones ("Sleigh Ride," "Have A Holly Jolly Christmas") with classic carols ("Go Tell It On The Mountain," "Do You Hear What I Hear?"), and there's basically something for everyone on one of this season's most inviting Yuletide treats.

—Andy Argyrakos

WE LIKE: "Christmastime Again"



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Country Faith Christmas (Word)

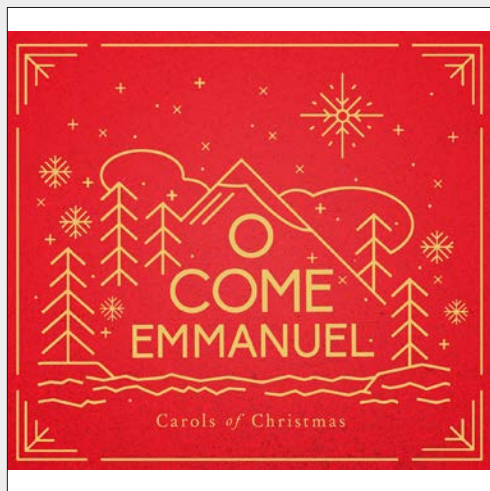
★★★★☆

This collection features thirteen Christmas classics, plus one very special and unique album finale with Johnny Cash's spoken-word reading of **Luke 2:1-18**. A perfect, and appropriate ending to a CD full of country music powerhouses like Carrie Underwood, Hunter Hayes, Brad Paisley, Dolly Parton, Rascal Flatts, Martina McBride, Gloria, Trace Adkins, Sara Evans, Lonestar, Alan Jackson, Clay Walker, and Travis Tritt. Highlights include Rascal Flatts front man Gary LeVox's performance on "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," Hunter Hayes' signature twang and modern rendition of "Go, Tell It On The Mountain," and the rich guitar tones and arrangements from Brad Paisley on "Born On Christmas Day." A perfect fit for country fans, a necessary addition for all Christmas music lovers and collectors.

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Silent Night" (Martina McBride)

CHRISTMAS



VARIOUS ARTISTS

O Come Emmanuel: Carols Of Christmas

(Lucid Artists)

★★★★★

If you didn't know, most, if not all, Christmas albums are recorded either in the summer, or usually not when the "weather outside is frightful." Consider this, when listening to *O Come Emmanuel: Carols Of Christmas*, and you will be all the more impressed with this collection, produced by Andrew Greer. Each song on the album will instantly transport the listener in a cozy wintry scene, whether curling up beside a December fire or sitting in the sand, along the toe-lapping surf. In addition to the stunning instrumental orchestrations (of particular note, an arrangement of "What Child Of This," featuring Ron Block of Allison Krauss' Union Station), highlights include a touching duet with Greer and Lindsay McCaul on "Different Kind Of Christmas," and "Silent Night" with Dr. Gregg Bunn on organ.

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Mary Of Nazareth"



THE GETTYS

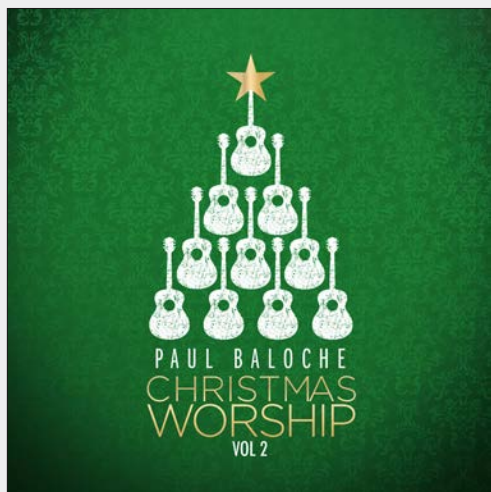
Joy: An Irish Christmas Live (Getty Music)

★★★★☆

Keith and Kristyn Getty have developed an exciting new Christmas tradition in recent years with the release and subsequent tours of *Joy: An Irish Christmas*. Recorded at the historic Tennessee Theatre in Knoxville, the Gettys have weaved together a live recording of their 2011 album of the same name—a stunning set of 18 Christmas songs (including eight new compositions). It features a dynamic, spirited array of holiday classics and new songs alike. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Carol of the Bells" become festive favorites on the Gettys' watch, while the duo also include their biggest hit "In Christ Alone" on this yuletide ride. Equal parts exuberant and contemplative, The Gettys' *Joy: An Irish Christmas Live* will be Christmas treasure for many.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "In Christ Alone"



PAUL BALOCHE

Christmas Worship, Vol. 2 (Integrity)

★★★★☆

For 30 years, popular songwriter and worship leader Paul Baloche has nurtured the church with some of the most oft-sung congregational songs ever written. For his latest project, Baloche is giving his attention to the Christmas season for a set of songs that maintain a Christ-centered focus during the holiday season. This second volume comes two years after the first, and contains both familiar and original compositions. "Joy To the World/Our God Saves" beautifully features All Sons & Daughters with a sparse yet effective blend of the songs. The same can be said of "O Holy Night/Love Shines Bright" and "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear/Glorious," both of which infuse beloved songs with new meaning. *Christmas Worship, Vol. 2* is an ideal package that puts a fresh spin on well-known holiday tunes.

—Matt Conner

WE LIKE: "O Holy Night/Love Shines Bright"



MORGAN + JAMGOCHIAN

Christmastime (Self-Released)

★★★★☆

This inspiring EP offers four Christmas classics ("Angels We Have Heard On High," a smart mash-up of "Little Drummer Boy" and "O Come Emanuel," "Away In A Manger," and "12 Days Of Christmas") and two stellar originals penned by Tyrus Morgan (hit writer for Unspoken, Newsong among others) and vocal mainstay Jamie Jamgochian. The lead single, "Christmastime," is a fun toe tapping, fire-crackling new Christmas favorite exclaiming, *Christmastime, a time for joy / Gather 'round, lift up your voice!* Production and vocal performances are near flawless, encouraging sing-alongs or dance parties, opposed to serving as just another holiday music sampler. A new lyrical rendition of "12 Days Of Christmas" is anchored in the line, *O how I want to sing / Of the Savior who set us free.*

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "We Call It Christmas"

ROCK



VARIOUS ARTISTS

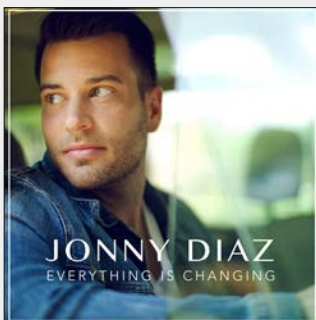
WOW Hits 2016 Deluxe Edition
(Capitol Christian Music Group/
Provident Music Group/Word
Entertainment)
FOR FANS OF: Casting Crowns,
Kari Jobe, Third Day
★★★★★

Christian music's annual compilation continues its streak of sharing the scene's hottest sounds from today, alongside a sneak preview of what's to come in the immediate future. That means a genre-stretching, 36-track list stocked with the instantly familiar likes of TobyMac, Chris Tomlin, Francesca Battistelli, crossed with the burgeoning talents of Love & The Outcome, Lauren Daigle and Stars Go Dim, all sure to be an ideal stocking stuffer for anyone seeking a sampler of modern sounds.

—Andy Argyrakis

WE LIKE: TobyMac's
"Beyond Me"

URBAN



JONNY DIAZ

Everything Is Changing
(Centricity)
FOR FANS OF:
Aaron Shust, Mark Schultz,
Shaun Groves
★★★★☆

Written surrounding the birth of his first child and in the midst of his wife, Libby, opening a fitness studio in Nashville, one of Christian music's "good guys," Jonny Diaz, releases his second project with Centricity. Beyond his own personal realizations while working on the project, we think Diaz has truly found his voice, and it's evident on *Everything Is Changing*. Solidifying Diaz's forthcoming longevity, there's a cohesiveness heard throughout this album found only in the most seasoned artists.

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Joy"

AC



TYLER WARD

Yellow Boxes, Part One
(Self-Released)
FOR FANS OF:
Jason Mraz, Gavin DeGraw,
Danny Gokey
★★★★☆

For someone who basically pioneered the art of selling and streaming cover tunes via embedded code, and with the release of his independent project *Yellow Boxes, Part One*, Tyler Ward is finally carving out a space all his own. After landmark collaborations with Jason Derulo, Hunter Hayes and many more, in addition to his millions of online subscribers, spins, and world tours, Ward proves his talent isn't fleeting like an internet meme, rather, a shoe-in for artist-of-the-year status.

—Kevin Sparkman

WE LIKE: "Life Is Calling"

A FEW OF OUR

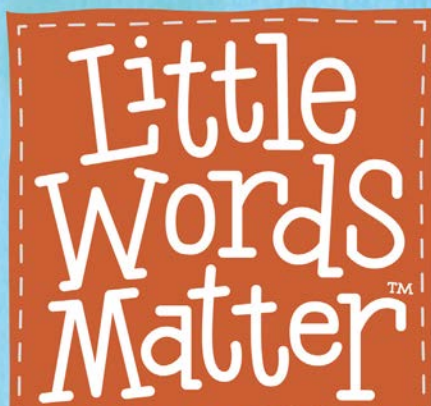
Favorite
THINGS

2015 GIFT GUIDE



Christmas GIFT GUIDE

2015



Designed specifically for toddlers, *Little Words Matter* line launches with five books and focuses on teaching Biblical truths, and stories to little ones. Each book is simply illustrated—appealing to an age group who learns visually. The books contain a limited word count—perfect for short attention spans and growing vocabulary, and they are the perfect way to begin teaching simple biblical truths. *Little Words Matter* books are also durable and can handle a lot of toddler wear and tear.

In *Jesus*, children will be introduced to His story from birth to resurrection. In *Noah's Ark*, children will learn about the story of Noah and God's plan for him and his family. These stories were written and designed to help a child memorize and repeat back the key elements in the story.

The next two books are the sound books, *Jesus Loves Me* and *The Whole World In His Hands*. With six sound buttons and an on/off switch, these sound books will remind little ones of just how much they are loved by the Lord. Each book contains a familiar poem or song, with buttons that read the book to the children, page by page.

Little Words Matter Bible Storybook, the fifth book, contains 19 total stories from creation to the resurrection. This storybook has 38 pages of full color Bible stories, created and written with both integrity to the Biblical truth and simplicity for pre-school understanding.

B&H Kids will be conducting a major blog outreach to 500+ of our top B&H bloggers. B&H Kids will sponsor an online contest for moms of toddlers to show what words their toddlers are learning using the #littlewordsmatter.

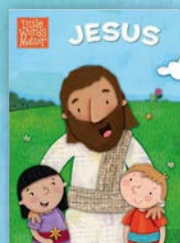
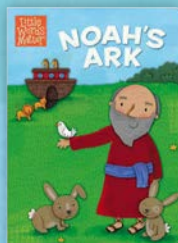
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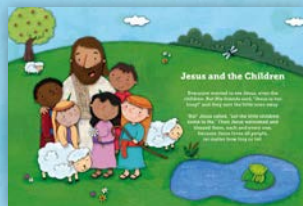
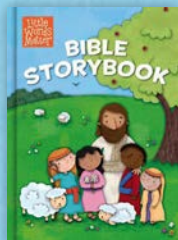
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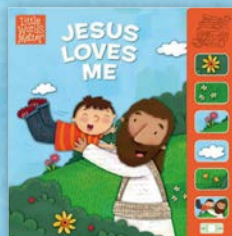
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Interior Sample

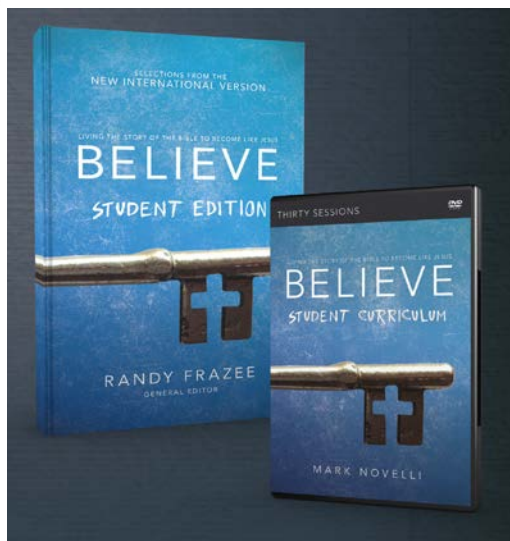


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Your kids know the story of the Bible, but do they know what it means? Join bestselling author and pastor Randy Frazee as he teaches children and teens how to think, act and be more like Jesus, through 30 Old Testament and 30 New Testament stories that highlight biblical truths, and answer big questions about God. The *Believe Coloring Book* gives even the youngest child a way to interact with the stories and lessons the rest of their family is following in the church-wide Believe campaign. With bold black line images for 60 Old and New Testament stories, this coloring book lets children have fun coloring the pages that encourage them to THINK, ACT, and BE like Jesus.

The Believe Storybook shows children the 60 Believe principles in a vibrant storybook Bible. Each story from the Bible showcases the themes, combined with captivating and dramatic illustrations by Steve Adams, children and adults alike will be inspired to become more like their savior and the person they were meant to be.

The Believe Kids' Edition (for children 8-12) and *Believe: Student Edition* (for teens) takes youth on the journey through Believe, written just for them. They'll learn what the Bible has to say about everything from the nature of God and the identity of Jesus, to prayer, worship, and the fruit of the Spirit. Each big category is divided into ten topics to give an up-close look at the important things God wants them to know.



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Your Kids Know the Story of the Bible.



But do they know what it means?

Join bestselling author and pastor Randy Frazee as he shows children how to think, act, and be more like Jesus. Through 30 Old Testament and 30 New Testament stories that highlight biblical truths and answer big questions about God, kids of all ages will learn what it means to become more like their Lord in every way.

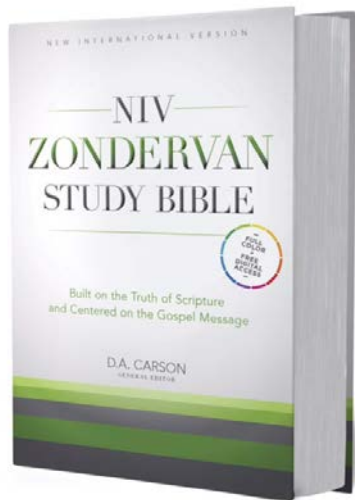


The *Believe Student and Children's Curriculum* helps you teach 30 big ideas found in Scripture, and contains 30 complete lessons each for twos, preschool, early elementary, and later elementary.



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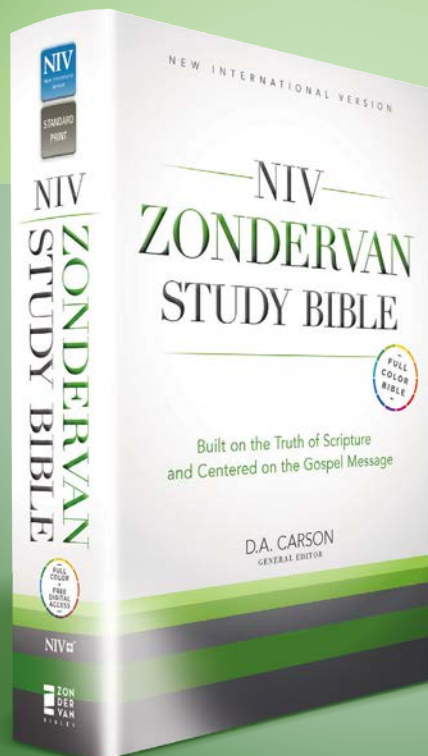
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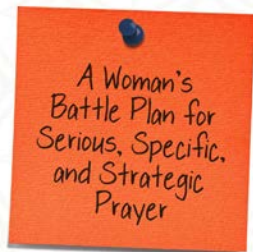
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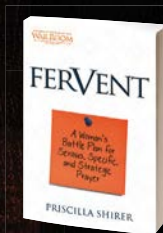
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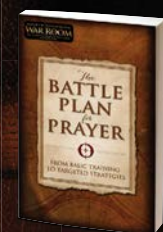
FERVENT

A Woman's Battle Plan for Serious, Specific, and Strategic Prayer

by Priscilla Shirer

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BATTLES
the right way—
THROUGH PRAYER



THE BATTLE PLAN FOR PRAYER

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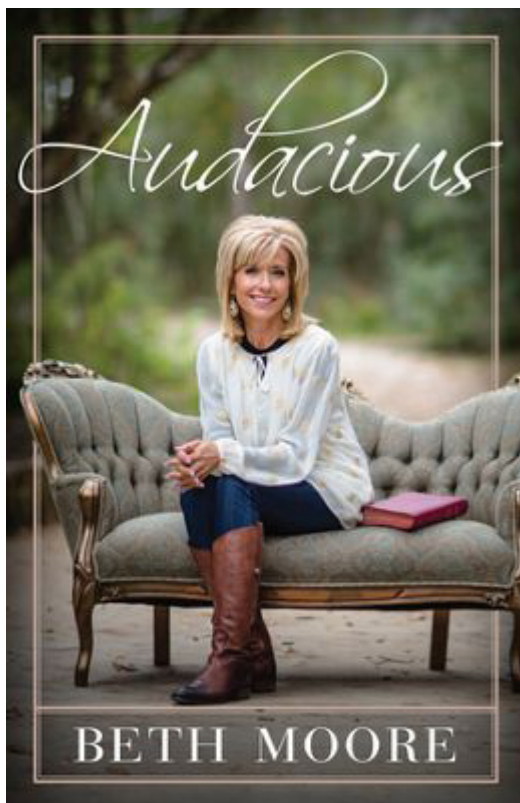
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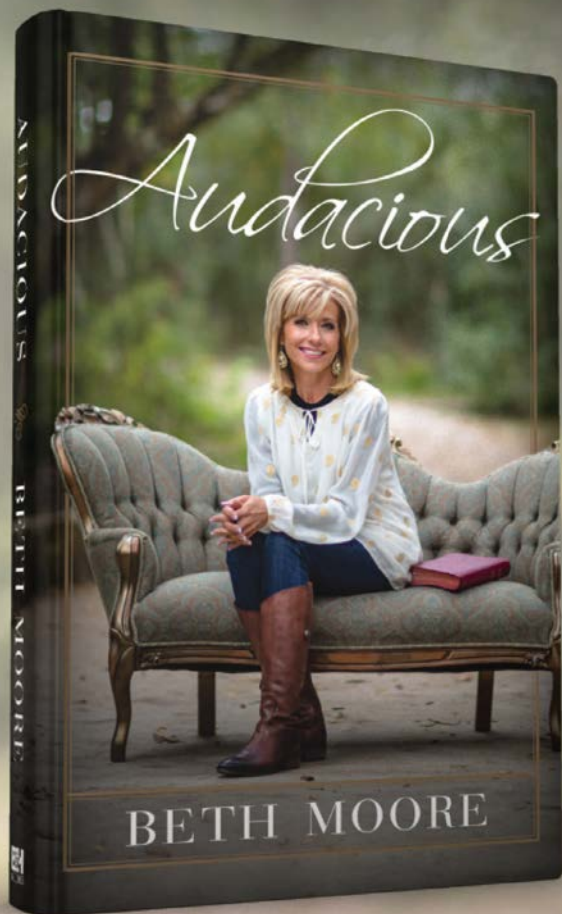


"Confidence in prayer changes everything: the tone of our voice, our words of choice, our posture, our passion, our presence of joy. We turn our faces heavenward as true believers in what we're asking, not just apologetic beggars panhandling a cautious God with tight pockets. We approach Him full of unshakable faith that we are going to get the audacious love we request because it is God's supreme desire for man. And woman. We take this request to His throne with no back up plan if He doesn't come through. No bracing ourselves for disappointment. We get to ask for it with flamboyant expectation because our receiving it is as sure as our requesting it. This gift of confidence means that, with the first breath, we get to ask Him—and, with the second breath, we get to thank Him. Start it from the very beginning. Be outrageous in your thanksgiving. You can even break out in a little tap dance over it if that's your kind of thing. Or, if you're a runner, go run wildly in the wind with incarnate gratitude. For the love of God, do something. Show Him some enthusiasm. He'll love it."

— Beth Moore, *Audacious*



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"If I got to sit across from a woman of any age and say just one thing, I'd want to say this."

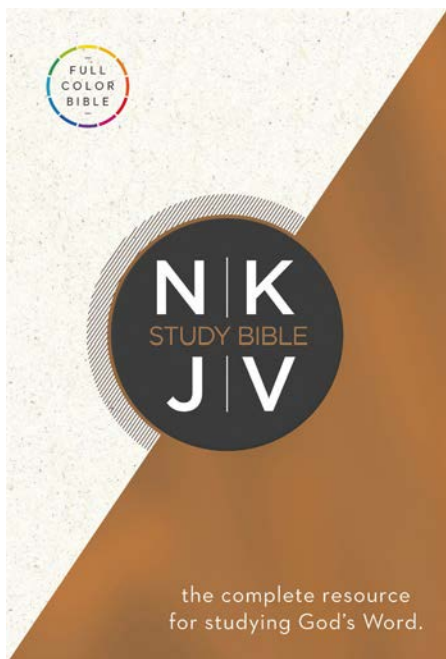
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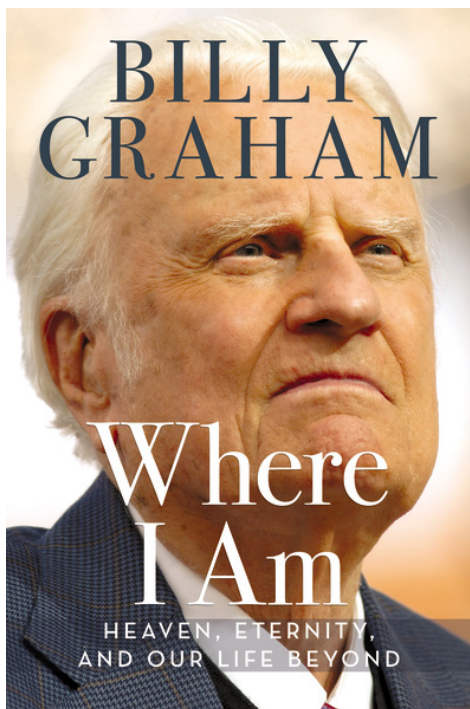
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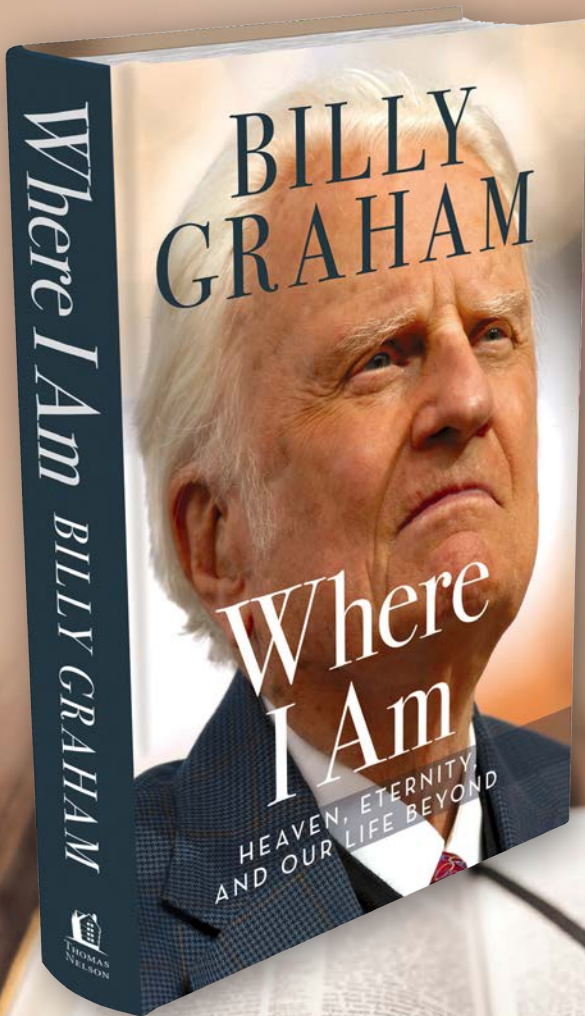
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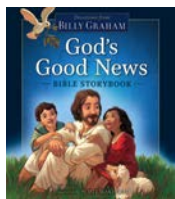


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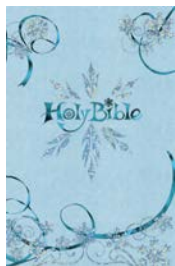
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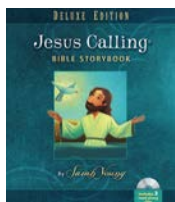
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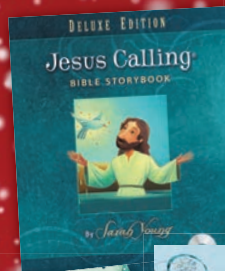
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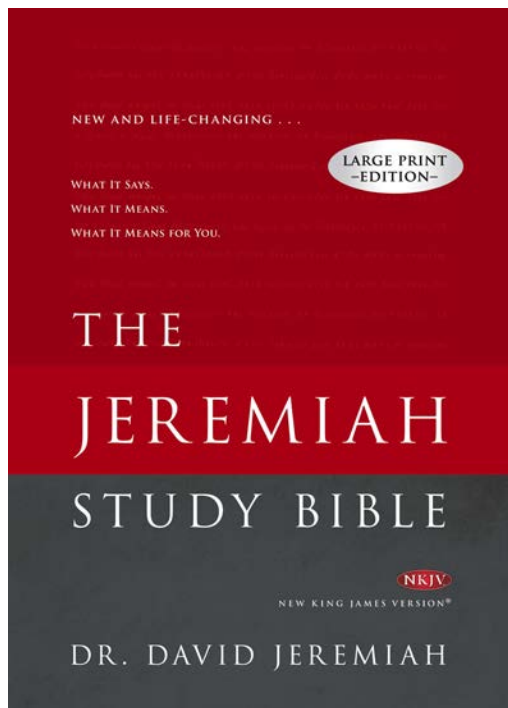
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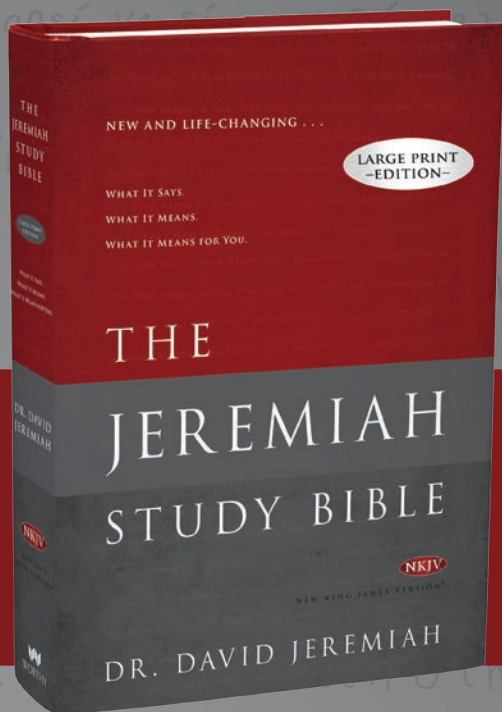
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