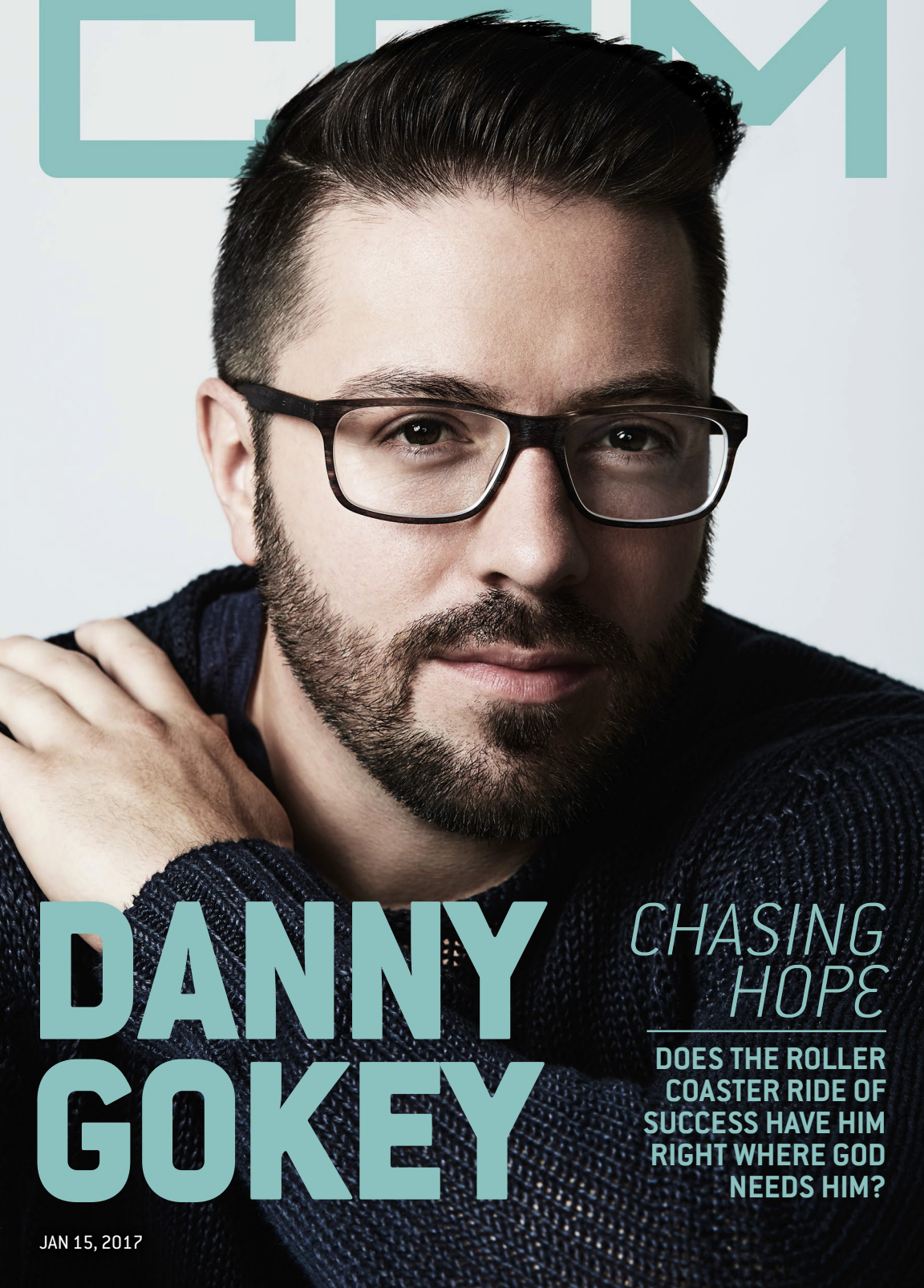


1997-2017: TWENTY YEARS OF 'PASSION' | ZACH WILLIAMS

CEM



# DANNY GOKEY

*CHASING  
HOPE*

DOES THE ROLLER  
COASTER RIDE OF  
SUCCESS HAVE HIM  
RIGHT WHERE GOD  
NEEDS HIM?

JAN 15, 2017

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## From the Editor

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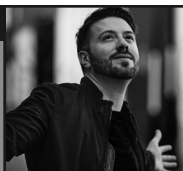
Exclusive pics of your favorite artists!

**In this issue:** David Crowder, Meredith Andrews, Trans-Siberian Orchestra + more!



### Danny Gokey

Does the roller coaster ride of success have the former *American Idol* star and No. 1 hit-maker right where God needs him?



### Passion 2017

The venues have grown bigger. The organizers have aged. But from the first *Passion* conference in 1997 to today, one thing has remained the same.



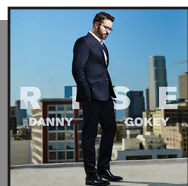
### Zach Williams

Poised to have one of the biggest 2017's—exactly who is Zach, where is he from, and how did he get here so fast?



### Reviews

New music from Danny Gokey, KJ-52, Selah, Chris Sligh + more!



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**Hope—Always Here** | Experiencing hopelessness? Finding yourself connecting with the statement, “Now we’re feeling what hope doesn’t feel like...?” \*

Hope? It’s as much as a “necessary concept” \* as it is a “feeling,” which is to say it’s neither of the two. It’s more than a feeling—and it’s certainly, way more than just a concept. Hope. Folks, Jesus is our only hope, and He’s always been here for us.

**(Ephesians 2:12-13 NIV)** says, *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

When someone harps about exclusion and hopelessness, please don’t let them convince you that you’re alone and without a prayer in this world. Reach for the only One who saves—the only One to offer real hope. *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:17-18 NIV).*

“What else do you have if you don’t have hope?” \* It’s scary to think what we would have if our true hope, Jesus, hadn’t entered the picture. We probably wouldn’t have this opportunity, among many... *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, (Eph. 2:14 NKJV).*



## From the Editor

Through Christ, you can and should “live [your] life out loud,” \* no one here on earth needs to give you the permission to, or need to remind us that we can. Truly, the very fact that our real hope in this life isn’t dependent on the government or any elected official should alone cause us to live and speak joy...at full volume.

We all have hope, every one of us, in every forgotten corner of the globe—it’s found in the name Jesus, and He is very near to you, even right now.



Hopeful,

A stylized, handwritten signature of Kevin Sparkman in black ink.

**Kevin Sparkman**

Editor, *CCM Magazine*

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\* quotes by **First Lady Michelle Obama** in her **Oprah Winfrey** special, ***Farewell To The White House***

# OUT & ABOUT

January 15, 2017



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*That's what we love.*

***Medi-Share has been a very big blessing for our family. Thank God for Medi-Share!"***

*—Ariel and Yaditza*



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A portrait of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a black t-shirt, sitting in a dark environment with his hands clasped. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some structural elements.

*DANNY GOKEY*



# Danny Gokey — Chasing Hope

Does the roller coaster ride of success have the former American Idol star and No. 1 hit-maker right where God needs him?

By Kevin Sparkman

If your nightly sleeping patterns have avoided rocks the last few years, there's a strong chance that you are already very familiar with **Danny Gokey's** story. Real talk, here. It's also likely the ad nauseam of our inundation from television media and reality shows—the very same mediums that introduced all of us to Gokey in 2009—have certainly done their part in clouding our minds from then to now.

Along with those [constant] distractions and the huge 2016 success of his now flagship single, “Tell Your Heart To Beat Again” (from ***Hope In Front Of Me***, released in 2014), you might not remember—or even realize—that Gokey, in fact, has merely just been chipping away at a “comeback,” of sorts. It's easy to think that he's “hade it made,” considering the shine that was handed him through the auspices of ***American Idol***. But after the initial album released in the glow of those moments, that light began to dim. Quickly.

Gokey was dropped from his first label. No new music had been recorded. Despite the good that came from 2009's huge rise, was this just another flash in the pan? The other part of the story you may not know, is that before hanging out in Hollywood green room's with the likes of **Ryan Seacrest**, **Adam Lambert**, and **Kris Allen**, for eight-plus years Gokey was a worship leader in his local church, bouncing back and forth between various cam-

pus locations, and leading his given community. His dreams and aspirations, at that time, were to one day possibly use that voice on a bigger stage.

Obviously, God had other plans.

“One of the things I love about my career is that, I think it should be ‘this way,’” admits Gokey. “I have what I think, but I love how God is like, ‘Yeah, that’s cool. Let Me put it right there.’ I’m a visionary—I like to talk about things. I like to see things from my perspective, but I have a great Dad who just knows how to say, ‘I’m going to put you right here.’” Through the up’s and down’s—this roller coaster ride—Gokey now seems secure in that vision, through Christ’s lenses, of course, but his message remains the same: Hope. After all, who better to offer words of hope, time and again, than Danny Gokey?

He may not be your “traditional contemporary Christian artist,” but then again, who are we to put God inside of a box? Rise, fall, and now **Rise**—his January 13, 2017 BMG release—*CCM Magazine* sits down with Danny Gokey to discuss the new album, a clearer voice, and where God now has him.

***CCM Magazine: We’ve recently heard you talk about “victories” in your life and career, what are some “wins” that can be attributed to the release of Rise?***

**Danny Gokey:** Let me tell you, [one of] the biggest that I can say right now is that we got to make this follow-up album to *Hope In Front Of Me*. From the perspective of coming off of a big [opportunity like *American Idol*], the odds were for us in that moment. Then my career took a dip for several years. I went quiet and didn’t release music. When I released *Hope In Front Of Me*, the odds had been turned against us.

To look back and see that it did way better than the expected projections—the way it connected with radio and with the listeners—and that I got to make a second record, a follow-up to *Hope In Front Of Me*, that is why it's a huge victory. Comparatively when we released the first album, *My Best Days*, there wasn't a whole lot of faith in us. We tried to get on all of these different tours, no one was biting, and we had to trudge through that. Now, we have tours lined up right out the gate, we have great media lined up—it's just a testament. But I can't take the credit. I just say, "Lord, thank you." You know? That's the victory.

Before *American Idol* I always thought it was, "Us versus them," but once I got on the show, I learned that there's a lot of people who are finding God through this experience. I heard things like, "I've never gone to church, but I feel like you make me want to go..." or, "You make me want to give God a chance." That's where this was birthed. Of course, it's been an evolving process since then, but that's why I want to say things that will reach the church, but also appeal to those outside of the church. I love the fact that my last album was being licensed and synced on television shows like *So You Think You Can Dance* and *America's Got Talent*, that was a massive victory in the sense that it allowed exposure to people who wouldn't choose to listen to Christian music.

**CCM:** *Where does your heart settle in terms of your calling?*

**DG:** When my team and I sat down to work on my first restart after I'd been dropped from the first label, I couldn't get signed by Christian labels because they felt like I didn't know my message, that I needed more time to develop. I understood. If they're going to take a financial risk, they have a right to make sure that they can invest in someone they feel confident about. So, we signed with a non-Christian label. I am the first "Christian" artist





that they've ever had. They approached it with, "We don't know why we're doing this. We're just going to do it."

I've been in the church my entire life. I spoke church, I did church—I thought I was going to be the next big praise and worship leader. To now be a solo act and mixing entertainment with the gospel message, I couldn't have envisioned that. Again, that was all birthed on the *American Idol* stage. That's where I fully realized the **Great Commission** for my life. Our message can't just be for the church, it's got to go into all the world. That's why I now write the way I do.

**CCM:** *You're increasingly being touted as a singer-songwriter, with more of an emphasis on "songwriter" now. Since the last album, how has that been more of an integral role in what you're crafting?*

**DG:** Well, with *My Best Days* (2010), I didn't do any writing on it. Going into *Hope In Front Of Me*, I did a lot more. I think with *Rise*, I knew more than ever before, now that I had more experience, exactly what I wanted to say. It's funny, because before when I would be writing with others, it was their words that came out of my idea. That's what happens in the room, you all share your ideas. Now, I knew how to [put words to even] their ideas. Does that make sense?

**CCM:** *Absolutely.*

**DG:** I actually spent a lot of time writing for the first album, but none of that ended up going on the record. [During the production of the first album], I didn't really know everything I wanted to say, this time I felt more focused on what needed to be said. This time [with other writers], I would go, "I like the thought, but this is actually how I would say that." That was a really fun

experience and I grew to love that about this process since [the last album]. I learned a lot. I'm always going to be a student—I hope I stay there. In fact, I know with *Rise* that I will continue that because I want to come back and ask, “What can I do now?” You're constantly learning, you know?

***CCM: We definitely agree. Compared to Hope In Front Of Me, Rise incorporates more of an “onward and upward” tone, yet it still deals with some pretty heavy stuff.***

**DG:** What is the gospel? Good news, and hope. That was the whole point of this album. It can be such a religious mindset to think that we're supposed to have the name “Jesus” as every other word... [I think] we're called to create music that entices the listener to want to grab on to the artist, listen to them more, and then investigate—“Why do they do what they do?”—which, hopefully, all points to Christ.

It's funny, there always seems to be a bombardment of [all kinds of] messages out there. I know that I want to be a voice. I want my message to be pointed toward hope, toward unity, and toward redemption through Christ. I want to always point to that because there's enough. There's so much hate out there, and I just feel like it's our responsibility as believers to go and take back that space that the enemy has grabbed. We're supposed to go take authority over that and bring hope to people.

***CCM: Were there any, what some may consider “hot button” issues, that helped inspire the writing on this project?***

**DG:** I grew up in a very segregated, but also very mixed [area of] Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I've just seen a lot of racism all over the board, it has shaped [me personally], but I've never wanted to feed into that. You know, people react to what they see on televi-

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sion—like the police violence and presidential election—and a lot of times there was a lot of negative reacting, a lot of pointing fingers. You saw a lot of lies out there, and the problem is so many people buy into the lies and it divides us more.

But, it's dumb to try and go back and *convince* people of the truth. You have to bring a message through love. I found that my connecting point was, "I'm not going to tell you you're wrong, I'm just going to tell you what I feel is a better way." When I introduce "Better Than I Found It" at my shows, I say, "Before we're black, before we're white, before we're Hispanic, before we're Asian...before we're anything else...we are a part of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, love, joy..." If we're not exhibiting those things, then we need to look at ourselves and figure out how.

It's time for us to love, but the thing is it's not just the world picking sides, it's the church, too. *Our* side's been chosen—you don't get to choose one. And, this is not, "Our side is better" talk... We gave up our rights. Now, it doesn't mean we're not black, white, Asian, Hispanic, male, or female, etc. It just means that there's now a higher lineage that we're from—we're a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a chosen generation. The Bible calls us "kings and priests." It also says, "Deny yourself," so if you're really a disciple, it's time to let go.

During the performance of that song at shows, we flash different quotes prominent people like **Martin Luther King Jr.**, even **Mahatma Gandhi**—messages of love and peace, you know? We're trying to get that message out there, people don't *have* to choose Christ, but hopefully we'll lead them into that. The Bible says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven." Hopefully, that is the tone that that song takes.



***CCM: We would assume that you have access to a more diverse pool of artists than those we get to talk to on a regular basis... On subjects like these, what's the chatter really like within those circles?***

**DG:** People don't talk about it a lot.

***CCM: Really?***

**DG:** I'll be honest. It's not a topic. Even politically, you'd be surprised of what you think someone would think.

***CCM: You've been known to not shy away from sharing your personal struggles. Why?***

**DG:** Earlier, we were talking about victories. A personal one that came with the song "Rise," was actually in going through the process of writing that song. Looking back at the struggles to see, "Oh, there was purpose in that." At times it seemed like there was absolutely no hope at all, but it actually was a launching pad...that dark time. I think that's the message that I'm trying to get out, is that in the dark times there's a setup happening and you're the one who gets to make the decision on how long you're going to stay there. If you can begin to grab on to God's principles, even though it feels like nothing's working, it can literally launch you forward. If you do that in faith, you'll see the goodness out of it, but sometimes we end up staying in those [dark] circumstances. I'm glad I didn't, because I feel like I was there long enough.

***CCM: We can't help but note the synergy between the story behind the song "Tell Your Heart To Beat Again" and the story of your first wife. What goes through your mind when you sing that song night after night?***

**DG:** First of all, I can't believe that God gave me that song, and how it came to be—I feel like it was destiny.

***CCM: We can't think of a better person to sing it.***

**DG:** You know, it's not every time, but a lot of times I see a picture of Jesus walking through the aisles and He's healing hearts. I know that's a very simple thought, but I like picturing stuff like that—I have the same thought when I sing "Rise." That's one of my favorite things to do—just picturing God doing something bigger than I can imagine...when you see the tears of the people who are singing along, it makes me wonder, "What are their stories?" CCM



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# PASSION

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(photo credit: Bobby Russell)



# Twenty Years of *Passion*

A movement in perpetual fast-forward  
still goes back to the heart behind it all  
—and forevermore, we'd say

By Mark Geil

Two thousand college students attended the first ***Passion*** conference in Austin, Texas in January of 1997. This year, twenty years later, 55,000 students were witnesses to a gathering with profound impact and staying power. *Passion* has seen astonishing growth. The venues have grown bigger. The organizers have aged. But from the first *Passion* conference in 1997 to *Passion* 2017, one thing has remained the same. Well, one thing—and lots of other things. First, the other things.

**“It always rains at *Passion*”** | That’s what the first door holder I encountered told me, outside of the **Georgia Dome** in Atlanta. Door holders are volunteers, 2,500 of them, who arrive for duty a full twelve hours before the first night begins.

They’re harbingers of enthusiasm, smiling faces eager to serve and say, “We’re glad you’re here.” As if to highlight by contrast their cheery faces, it was indeed raining that first night. And there, dotting the sidewalks at every entrance to the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, ponchoed door holders who had no doors to hold offered wet high fives. Meanwhile, college students, hordes of them, stood in orderly queues in the food court at **CNN Center**, waiting out a rain shower that seemingly would not pass.

**Students are still the focus** | Speaking of that crowd in the CNN Center, it reminded me that, in the same way **Calvin** (and **Hobbes**, for that matter) never aged over the ten year run of the cartoon strip, *Passion* has kept a laser-focus on the very same age group that inspired the first gathering: college students. The **268 Generation** has grown to include more than 20 million worldwide. And they're adorably similar to their forebears from almost a generation before. There was a bearded, scraggly-haired young man in front of me in that orderly queue in front of Dunkin Donuts who could have been just as ideally suited for *Passion* 1997. His eyes lit up when he found the cheapest item on the menu, a six-pack of hash browns for only 69 cents. He ordered two, one for himself and one for his companion. Dinner, 268 Generation-style.

**Students still care** | Along that rain-soaked sidewalk, near a perky door holder, stood one of those fold-up canopies covering two large boxes labeled "SOCKS" and "TOWELS." Those same college students who had to scrape together enough coins for Dunkin Donuts hash browns managed to fill those boxes with items vitally important to the homeless in the area. They've done so for years now, everywhere they gather. Moreover, they dig deeper to rally behind causes that matter, supporting the **END IT Movement** and through decades of generosity raising over 17 million dollars—real dollars, not pledges—for causes of poverty and social justice.

Here's an example of the audacity of *Passion* giving. I've seen concerts in which a plea is made to support the fine work of organizations like **Compassion International**. Sometimes, hundreds of children are sponsored. This year, **Louie Giglio** challenged the gathering to sponsor every remaining *Compassion International* child in the entire country of El Salvador. And Rwanda. And Tanzania. In the end, they

accomplished all of that and more, completing Indonesia along the way toward sponsoring over 7,000 children.

### **The Giglio's still know how to put on an incredible event**

| The rain abated as 7:00 approached Monday night. Arena speakers pumped in the voice of **Justin Timberlake** telling us all he “couldn’t stop the feeling.” Dancing ensued, spotlights circling, all pinks and yellows. Live music followed on a massive stage in the shape of a cross in the middle of the dome. I dare say the video production rivaled any concert you’ve ever seen. There were cameras on dolly tracks, Steadicam’s, jib-cameras on cranes, even the stadium’s Sky-Cam. They sent their images to massive moving screens above each arm of the stage, images adorned with VFX that looked like they came from the **Prisma** app on steroids. Then, just a few hours later, as **David Crowder** sang his closing song I thought, wait, is that **Carrie Underwood** on background vocals? And sure, enough, there she was.

Amid the bombast, though, little touches—very intentional touches—build a sense of community and intimacy. Common bonds are identified. Transparency is encouraged. Community Groups allow every person to participate, to find their place in the puzzle.

By the end of the three-day gathering, the bonds were apparent. The students (who never, ever, seem to sit down) in the massive dome somehow felt more comfortable with one another. New songs had been learned, and expressions of worship became less encumbered. After the last message, students streamed to the floor for one last musical celebration, jumping up and down like dust on a drum head.

**God is still at work** | The event transcended our planet both spiritually and physically when Giglio placed a call to the

**International Space Station** to speak with ISS Commander **Shane Kimbrough**, who offered encouraging words from a most surreal setting. Then, Francis Chan said, with appropriate incredulity, “We just talked to an astronaut!” His next reminder reset the room. “And now we get to speak to the one who made the astronaut and keeps him alive and keeps us alive.”

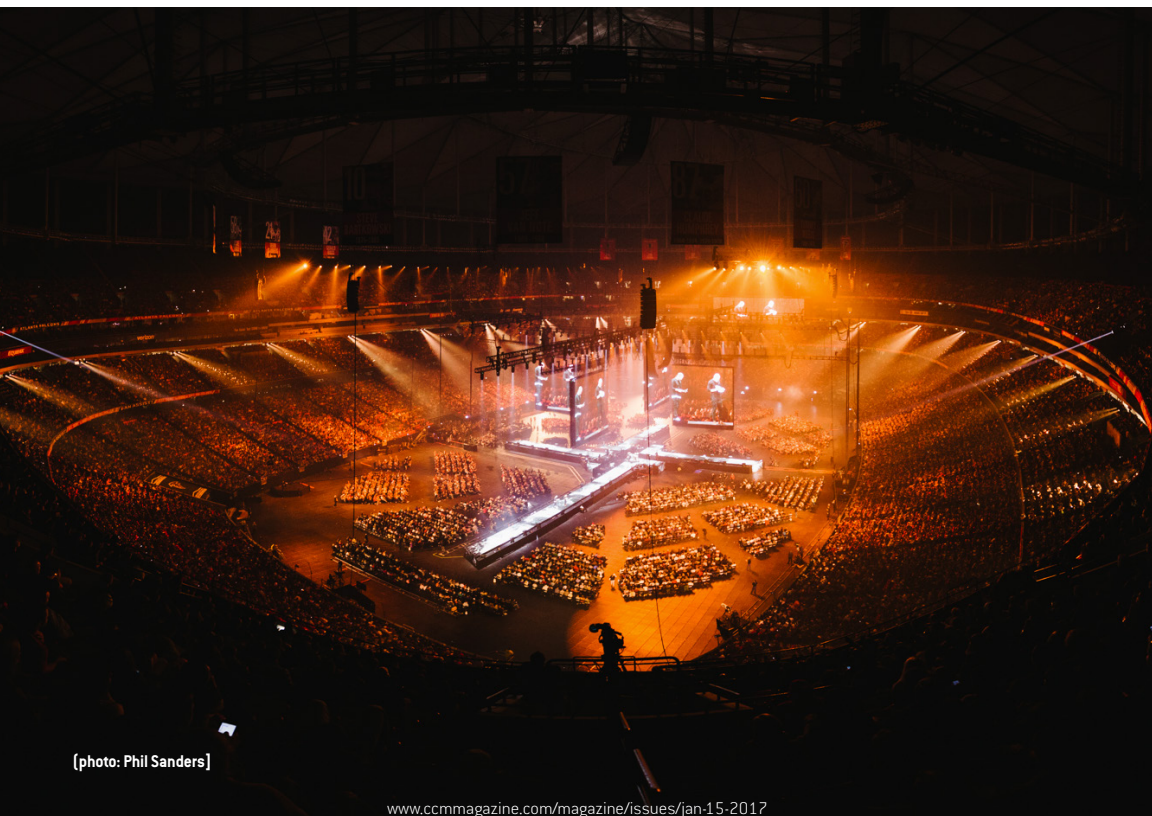
It was a remarkable gift to hear the softly spoken prayers of thousands upon thousands, all in one place, all at the same time. It was more remarkable to know that, though to my human ears they were a cacophony—a sweet cacophony—God heard and understood every word, and in so doing He united a disparate group under one great banner. To hear those same voices unite in song was a balm to a troubled world in the name of Jesus.

Which leads us to the main “one thing” that’s remained consistent. Louie Giglio proclaimed it that very first night. “The one thing that’s stayed the same over the 20 years—other than **John Piper’s** sport coat—is the heart of *Passion*. The one anchor in God’s word that is the root of all this is **Isaiah 26:8**. In time and eternity there is nothing that comes close to Him.”

Giglio and his team were clearly cognizant of the significance of the anniversary. Alumni were invited to attend. **Charles Stanley**, who was Giglio’s pastor when he was a college student, brought the opening prayer. Everyone twenty years of age or younger was invited to stand, and they were told “In 1997, when this movement started, you weren’t even born yet.” **Chris Tomlin** recalled the movement’s origins and seemed almost tentative when introducing a song, certain that the vast majority of the room wouldn’t know it. “It was at that very first *Passion* when I heard this song. I didn’t know music could sound like that.” I recognized it right away, but I’ll never hear it the same again. It was a new song back then by **Delirious?**—

“Did You Feel The Mountains Tremble?”—and the chorus became as much an anthem in the Georgia Dome in 2017 as it was in the Austin Convention Center in 1997: *Open up the doors and let the music play / Let the streets resound with singing / Songs that bring Your hope and / Songs that bring Your joy / Dancers who dance upon injustice.*

In that same closing session, Giglio got nostalgic. “We couldn’t have seen the potential in this stadium, right now, to fulfill all the dreams we had twenty years ago. Our hope is that arrows are going to be shot out of this place to land on every inch of this planet for the sake of Jesus.” I looked around the room. Music played. Heads bowed. Arms raised, holy hands lifted to heaven, straight as arrows. [CCM](#)





A full-page portrait of Zach Williams, a bearded man with dark hair, wearing a black leather motorcycle jacket over a grey t-shirt. He is sitting on an ornate, floral-patterned sofa with a distressed, peeling paint background. A semi-transparent green banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing his name in white text. He is wearing multiple rings and a watch on his left wrist. A guitar is partially visible on the left side of the sofa.

# ZACH WILLIAMS



# Zach Williams — Unpredictable Paths

Poised to have one of the biggest 2017's of any new artist, we recommend charging your GPS's to keep track of where God is leading this singer-songwriter

By Kevin Sparkman

With just a quick glance into **Zach Williams'** story, many might scan over the details of this church kid-turned bad boy and think, "We've read this kind-of saga before." But before you think you know all about Mr. Williams, think again.

His path from growing up in a good Christian home to rising star-athlete saw an interesting turning point when his college roommate brought a guitar with him to school that semester. Later, Williams would take that guitar—and a brand new song—down an all-new and unpredictable pathway.

Truth is, we're all still just getting to know Zach Williams. As soon as we were all getting acquainted with "Chain Breaker" on the radio—quite often, it seemed—we were hearing news of a GRAMMY nomination, a new album, and tour dates planned with **Big Daddy Weave**.

Funny how the pathways of Williams' life have *waved* in and out and crossed back together. A career-ending injury perpetuating the drugs and drinking—which opened up more time for learning his roommate's guitar—to leading his first local church worship service covering Big Daddy Weave's "Redeemed." We have a feeling it's going to be a very big year for Zach Williams.

***CCM Magazine: Okay, here's what we know... You've had a brand new and massive radio single, an instant GRAMMY-nod, and now surprise release of your debut LP—all toward***

*the end of 2016 and within the matter of a few months—can you sum up for us what this season has been like for you?*

**Zach Williams:** It has been a whirlwind. I think it would be for anyone, the way everything has happened. To be honest, I was totally content leading worship at my church. Then the opportunity to come to Nashville to write some music was presented to me. It was something I'd always dreamed of doing, I was just thankful for the opportunity.

We ended up writing the song "Chain Breaker." I knew immediately after it was written, that it was going to be a special song. I started praying that God would use it to reach people all over the United States, and speak to people from all different walks of life. Suddenly, the song took off and here I was, pretty much living on a prayer that I had almost just prayed. God was moving so quickly, everything was happening so fast.

Next thing I know, I was offered a record deal off of the demo of the song. We released the song and it immediately took off on the radio, I think faster than anybody at the record label or myself or any other writer involved in the song even expected...

***CCM:** And receive a GRAMMY nomination on your first single...*

**ZW:** It's been a pretty crazy year for me, but it's been super humbling. It's been awesome to just be a part of what the Lord has already done through this song. I'm excited to see what He's going to continue to do, because I feel like it's not over yet with this song, on top of all of the new songs that's coming out. It's been crazy.

At the time, the thought of touring again and being out on the road...I wasn't really looking to do that anymore. I thought I

might play a few one-off dates this fall, and now I've ended up doing about 40-50 shows already since I signed. It's funny, I told somebody at the record label the other day, "I think I'm just going to retire in January and go out on top, because I don't know if I'll ever duplicate this again."

***CCM: So, are you still leading worship at your church, or...?***

**ZW:** Before, I was full-time. I was director of a campus and I ran all of our day-to-day activities as far as scheduling volunteers, booking the band, and planning all of our songs and stuff like that. It would have been a lot to try and do that while being on the road. The way it's been this year, I've led three times since the first of October. The church has been super cool, they support me and financially and has helped us out this past year because they understood that this was a pretty big leap of faith. They've been really supportive and have been working through the growing pains of what it means to have somebody at their church also pursuing being an artist and touring musician.

***CCM: You grew up in a Christian home, but went through a bit of a rebellious period. How did the message of Christ endure for you, and how would you encourage someone who might be struggling to return to Him?***

**ZW:** For me, it was just faithfulness found in His Word that sums it up for me. God...He's faithful to us all, and He wants us to know Him. I feel like even when I wasn't pursuing God, He was pursuing me. He was constantly preparing me for something bigger than I could ever imagine—even when I was running from Him. Looking back now, obviously, I can see all the times He prepared me for the things in my life that—at the time—didn't understand why or what I was going through.



The one thing that I have tried to explain to people—whether on the stage, or through the music on the record—is God’s amazing grace. Once you can grasp how big and easily accessible it is, you begin to understand that we could know Him, have a better life, and live more abundantly. All you have to do is call out to Him and He saves you, and we didn’t do anything to deserve that. When that finally clicks, I think people just get it. I didn’t get that until I was thirty-three years old, it didn’t click with me and I grew up in the church for twenty years. I wish people wouldn’t wait until they’re my age, but I think a lot of us do have to go through life experiences to understand and appreciate what He’s done for us—to really get a hold of that picture of grace that He’s giving us.

***CCM: To back up a little further, before you were serving the local church and touring with your Christian band, you were rocking clubs and bars...and then you had a medical scare.***

**ZW:** Trust me, it was a scare. But I was in such a rut with drugs and alcohol at that time that whenever I heard the news, the only thing for me that made it better was to sneak further into the life I was already living. Instead of turning to my parents or friends I did have that were Christians, I turned to more drugs, more alcohol, and more of a reckless lifestyle. It took another good year of living that way before I reached a place in my life where I...

There were a number of things that were going on in my life—my marriage, my relationship with my kids, I had two step kids, and we had a baby on the way. There were just so many things going on that when I finally got to a point where I was just completely broken, I knew that I either I didn’t want to be there any longer and something was going to have to change.

## ***CCM: What was the catalyst?***

**ZW:** The guitar player in my rock band had been invited to play in one of the services at a church, they ended up going for a couple of more weeks, and then they invited us to visit. That was all I really needed, was somebody in my band that would sit up with me at night and talk about church—that all goes back to when I grew up in church—but at the time I didn't feel like anyone around me understood the things I was going through. When we began going to church together, we formed this bond... We already had this awesome friendship and been in a band for years, but now we had something more in common than just music and playing in dive bars.

That's where everything started to change. To have a friend say, "We should check this out. We've been doing this for way too long—we've got kids now, and we can't do this anymore." From the second I walked into the doors of that church, I knew that was exactly where God wanted me.

The craziest thing is, it's like a 7,000-member Southern Baptist church—I grew up in a non-denominational, borderline Pentecostal church—I remember thinking as a kid, "I'll never go to that church—it's just not me," and it was exactly God's plan.

The pastor and worship leader of the church loved on me, my family, and took us in. It was definitely a God thing. It was where I needed to be at the time and I feel like God had me there for a season and now He's moved me on to do something different. The thing that's been hard for me is learning to follow and listen to the Lord, because I'm such a fast-paced person that I can get ahead of Him sometimes...and I think we can all probably relate to that, too.



**CCM:** *“Fast-paced” kind-of defines your life right now... You recently said, “I did the whole rock star thing for so long. I always felt like I was always faking it, and now I just want to be real with people.” What’s it like to be on this path, in this moment?*

**ZW:** Even though I’m not proud of my past and the things that I’ve done, I’m not ashamed of it. I’m definitely not ashamed of who God’s made me to be, and what He’s doing. I definitely want to let people know that if anything, this is the real Zach. I did feel like a fake for so many years. I felt like I was trying to be somebody that I wasn’t.

It’s a huge honor to be where I am right now. To have this song... To know that God’s using it, it’s a dream come true. There’s so much more fulfillment in what I do now every night—the stories, little kids and moms and dads that are coming up and telling me stories about what the song’s doing in their life. It reminds me of the first time I led worship at church, and I could just close my eyes and sing songs. I didn’t feel like I was needing to be anyone else. Like now, I really felt like this was what I’m meant to do.

Just to know that God’s using little old me from nowhere in Arkansas, it’s a little bitty town. To know that He can take me, my past, and all the ugly things that I’ve done—to see Him do something beautiful, to call it righteous, and to use it for His glory... It’s not something I’m going to take for granted. **CCM**

# REVIEWS

January 15, 2017



*mighty roar /  
healing flood*

CHRIS  
SLIGH



*Selah*

GREATEST  
HYMNS

Vols 1 & 2

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**Danny Gokey**

**Rise**

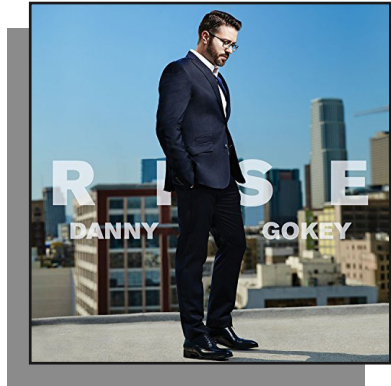
(BMG)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Chris August, Matthew West, Sam Smith*

**WE LIKE:** "If You Ain't In It"

★★★★☆



Following his time on ***American Idol***, **Danny Gokey** first made a splash in country music touring alongside **Sugarland** and **Taylor Swift**, though he soon switched gears to formally pursue Christian music. Now two standard studio albums fully immersed into that territory, *Rise* takes on a decidedly hopeful tone that addresses his transition from the pain surrounding his first wife's premature passing to the renewal that came from remarrying and joyfully embracing fatherhood.

Throughout the emotional journey, Gokey angles his rich voice even more towards the soulful side as he delivers several rhythmic romps and booming ballads meant to meet listeners wherever they're at, but destined to uplift absolutely everyone along the way.

—Andy Argyrakis

**KJ-52**

***Jonah***

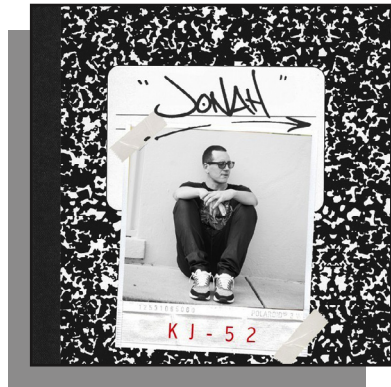
(Self-released)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Manafest, John Reuben*

**WE LIKE:** "Know About It  
(feat. Derek Minor)""

★★★★☆



From the outset of ***Jonah***, veteran hip-hop artist **KJ-52** presents a personal side not often found within a genre that can offer up swagger with little substance. From the album opener ("Hold On") where he unveils the messages that play in his mind to other tracks that expose his heart and prayers ("More Of You Less Of Me"), *Jonah* is a more subdued hip-hop/pop approach from an artist who has little interest or time in being anything but honest.

Even the LP's title is simply his real name. The addition of guests like **Curt Anderson**, **Derek Minor** and several others make this a short (at eight songs), substantive set worth checking out—whether you've been a fan for the long haul or you haven't checked in on KJ since the "Dear Slim" days.

—Matt Conner



**Selah**

***Greatest Hymns, Vol. 1 & 2***

(Curb)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Phillips, Craig & Dean, 4Him*

**WE LIKE:**

"How Deep The Father's Love For Us"

★★★★☆



**Selah's** new two-volume compilation, ***Greatest Hymns***, brings beloved Christian classics together with Selah's signature harmonies and slight Celtic influences in a beautiful vocal package. Nearly twelve years after their initial Vol. 1 release, the acclaimed trio now offer fans an incredible 33-song package, anchored by timeless favorites like "Be Thou My Vision," "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross," "I Surrender All," "Just As I Am" and many more.

It also features a radio cut of "O The Blood," from the group's 2014 album ***You Amaze Us***. While this package can feel a bit sleepy over time and lacks the groups dynamism that come from more upbeat tracks, this is still a beautiful vocal offering that should find a home with hymn appreciators and Selah's own longtime fan base.

—Matt Conner

**Chris Sligh**

***Mighty Roar/Healing Flood***

(Self-released)

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Jonny Diaz, Chris August*

**WE LIKE:** "Mystery of Love"

★★★★☆



The newest album from former ***American Idol*** alum **Chris Sligh** is steeped in familiar worship refrains and scriptural references, but rather than feeling like a typical worship leader release, ***Mighty Roar/Healing Flood*** offers up a synth-pop flavored set of vertical songs that stand out.

Tracks like "Freedom Song," "Stripes," and "Fill This Place" play with the electronic toys available to artists today without losing their worshipful heart, while others like "You Are God" and "Mystery of Love" will appeal to longtime Sligh fans with their centric, familiar approach. Sligh has been proven as a gifted songwriter and vocalist, and both remain very clear on *Mighty Roar*... even as he enjoys exploring new influences.

—Matt Conner

**Joel Vaughn**

***Surrender EP***

*(Dream Records)*

**FOR FANS OF:**

*Austin & Lindsey Adamec, Hannah Kerr*

**WE LIKE:** "If I Trust In You"

★★★★☆



**Joel Vaughn** has plied his trade as a worship leader in Texas these last twelve years, but his newest EP takes him closer to a modern-pop radio sound than anything previously released. ***Surrender***, the Texan's new five-song EP, kicks off with "As You Are," an R&B-tinged jam that should find an instant home on plenty of pop playlists.

Vaughn sings of self-acceptance and identity on the first two tracks, the other of which is "One In A Million" which features **Matthew Parker**. While the pulsing "Every Alley Of My Heart" is worth a quick mention, the highlight is found on the mid-tempo number "If I Trust In You", which is as infectious as anything this side of **Bruno Mars**. If Vaughn's going to land a mega-hit from this mix, it's likely this middle track.

–Matt Conner

**AMP**

**FUTUREGEN**

*(Good Fruit Co.)*

**FOR FANS OF:**

*TobyMac, KJ-52, Group 1 Crew*

**WE LIKE:** "Far Greater"

★★★★☆



The trio comprised of **CL, J. Han** and **Sam Ock**, better known as pop-rap-hop collective **AMP**, take their bursting beats and vertically-framed rhymes up yet another contagious notch throughout **FUTUREGEN**.

The collection marks the troupe's third and is centered around the idea of raising up the future generation with a rock solid faith, always accompanied by an eclectic mash-up of current and classic sounds. Highlights include the title track, "Far Greater" and "Keep Me," all of which strike the delicate balance of being right on point with anything going on in the mainstream while never watering down members' spiritual insights

—Andy Argyrakis



Explore the world of Aethasia™, and join the Resistance in their fight against the tyrannical emperor and his army of mechanical men!

Once a beautiful land, Aethasia is now covered by a sickly pervasive fog that corrupts everything it touches. But all is not lost. Rumors are spreading of a fledgling Resistance, who have the courage and audacity to try and restore Aethasia to its former glory, and to reinstate the The Great Engineer back to the throne of Aethasia.

And that Resistance needs you!





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