

WAR ROOM'S PRISCILLA SHIRER | AND INTRODUCING: STEVEN MALCOLM

CCM

THE SHACK'S OPEN INVITATION

HOW THE BOOK - AND NEW FEATURE FILM -
CONTINUES TO BRING US ALL INTO HEALTHY
CONVERSATIONS OF LOVE AND LOSS

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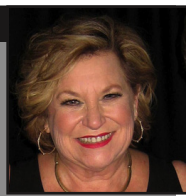
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From the Editor

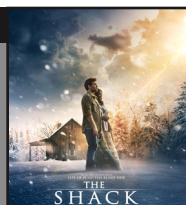
Out & About

Exclusive pics of your favorite artists!
In this issue: Thousand Foot Crutch,
 Sandi Patty, Andrew Marcus + more!



The Shack

Nine years into the novel's release,
 author William P. Young's message
 is still the same—our walk with the
 Almighty is relational, and God is
 very fond of us.



Steven Malcom

All fired up, we introduce Christian
 hip hop's new "Hot Boy"



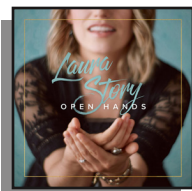
Priscilla Shirer

When fear and doubt creep toward
 this mom-of-all-trades, the highly
 skilled author-actor gives her first...
 or perhaps second breath to prayer



Reviews

New music from Laura Story, Steven Malcom,
 David Dunn, Kat & Jared + more!



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‘The invisible moving the visible’ | In just a few weeks (March 3, 2017 to be exact) **The Shack** will finally hit theaters worldwide. Take it from someone who has experienced it now two times, you will want to go see this movie (don’t just wait for the DVD—go and experience it in its big-screen glory...later, bring it home and watch it again). And if you have read the book (it also won’t matter how long it’s been since you’ve actually turned its pages), especially don’t miss this movie!

It’s a given that the reach this story will have over the coming months will expand exponentially—naturally, films have a way of doing that. Unfortunately, it will probably also be a given that more “critics” will come crawling out of the woodwork. As author **William Paul Young** hilariously stated in our recent chat for this issue’s cover story, “They’re the ones who won’t read the book [or in this case, see the movie] and will hate it.” But rather than defending the movie here, specifically, I’ll attempt to stress an interesting point: As you watch this film, this visible thing, pay close attention to what’s happening with the invisible.

Of course, the story of *The Shack* brings the unseen (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit) into visual clarity, you will be able to see their beautiful and colorful interpretations right in front of your eyes—but it’s really all still about, *Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. (John 3:5-6 MSG)*. We can be so much like **Nicodemus**, easily distracted by anything and everything (like books, movies, interpretations, gender, skin color, etc.), and could potentially miss the big picture. Jesus is talking, will you be moved?



Blessings,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Sparkman'.

Kevin Sparkman

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OUT & ABOUT

February 15, 2017



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- 2/4 NO REGRETS CONFERENCE 2017
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- 2/24 KINGDOM YOUTH CONFERENCE
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- 2/24 LOVE & THE OUTCOME
LITTLETON, CO

- 2/25 LOVE & THE OUTCOME
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- 2/25 SANDRA MCCracken
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
- 2/26 LOVE & THE OUTCOME
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- 3/1 SECRET KEEPER GIRL, PURPLE PARTY TOUR
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- 3/2 SECRET KEEPER GIRL, PURPLE PARTY TOUR
NORTH PORT, FL
- 3/3 SECRET KEEPER GIRL, PURPLE PARTY TOUR
LAKELAND, FL
- 3/3 KINGDOM YOUTH CONFERENCE
MONT BELVIEU, TX
- 3/4 SECRET KEEPER GIRL, PURPLE PARTY TOUR
LARGO, FL
- 3/10 KINGDOM YOUTH CONFERENCE
CLAREMORE, OK
- 3/17 KINGDOM YOUTH CONFERENCE
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THE SHACK

our conversation with author William Paul Young

The Shack — Open Invitations

Almost 9 years after the release of the pivotal novel, author William Paul Young's message is still the same—our walk with the Almighty is relational, and God is very fond of each and every one of us

By Kevin Sparkman

Ever seen a movie and thought, “I liked the book much better!” Some books are meant to just be books. Some books weren't even intended to become books in the first place, which is, perhaps why we think **William Paul Young's** novel, ***The Shack*** (**Windblown Media**, 2007), has adapted perfectly into big screen theatrics.

So, on March 3, 2017, movie giant **Lionsgate** will debut ***The Shack*** in theaters, of which producers **Gil** and **Lani Netter** (***Life Of Pi***, ***The Blind Side***) and English director **Stuart Hazeldine** (***Exam***, ***Christian***) have worked meticulously to paint this transcendent story with beautiful pictures. In anticipation of this event, we sit down with the heart and mind behind it all, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Young.

CCM Magazine: At the onset of getting the book written and published, which, understandably wasn't even in the picture from the very beginning, could you have foreseen this blossoming into a full-on feature film?

William Paul Young: That's like asking a single monk if he ever imagined having grandchildren [*laughs*]. It wasn't even on the radar, you know? So, no, it was not an imagination, it was not an expectation, there was nothing that prepared any of us for

this happening. For example, to be on the [filming] set was an incredibly surreal experience. You know, you write a little story for your kids for Christmas and you make fifteen copies at Office Depot that do everything you ever wanted that book to do, and then this happens. It's like, "Are you serious? How cool is this?"

CCM: *We thought the movie did a masterful job of painting such beautiful, lasting pictures with your words. Seeing the movie years after reading the book, it seemed like the imagery that we didn't know was still in our minds instantly connected with what we were seeing on-screen...*

WPY: That's cool...

CCM: *...as you were on-set at the filming and watching all of it unfold, did you have a similar experience?*

WPY: Yes. I think the best way I can put it is this; those who loved *The Shack* will not be disappointed by the movie. It is a very faithful adaptation. From the very beginning, Gil and Lani Netter, Stuart Hazeldine, and Lionsgate worked really hard on keeping the sense of the movie—the faithfulness to the impact of it—and the heart of it. I think they did a remarkable job.

To watch it, it's what was inside my head and heart. There's lots of detail-stuff that's different, but that's not the point. I mean, little details, not anything that would matter. But, to understand that the movement from a book to a film is a huge step in terms of the collaborative nature of movies and for them to succeed to the degree they have is, to me, an amazing accomplishment. I loved the movie. I've seen it now three times, and I think I've cried every time. It just gets me. And that's the impact of the book, so I'm thrilled to have participated.

You go on to a [film] set, it's like when you go into a theater, you're kind of opening yourself up to step into a different world. It was never a problem for me. I never imagined being involved to the degree that Lionsgate, Gil and Lani, and Stuart invited me into because I had no creative control so, it was a really great gift for me to be allowed to be a part of the process. I've enjoyed the whole thing.

CCM: *So, you had no say in the creative process of the film?*

WPY: I had no creative rights, no creative control at all. Anything they asked me about, they could take to heart or not.

I think that's Gil's heart about any movie that he's done that's based on a book (and he's done lots). He said, "If the author is alive, it would be ludicrous to not have them engaged in the creative process." It was done in spite of the fact that I had let go of all the creative control and the rights. They invited me to look at the script and to be involved in the conversations about selection of actors. I got to be on the set. I was very involved in terms of dialogue between Netter, Hazeldine, and myself with regard to the editing process and what they were working on. I saw the first cuts, gave them pages of feedback in which they always took into consideration—again, they didn't have to do any of that. It was a great gift to me and I'm so grateful for that.

CCM: *What, in particular, did you receive from Gil in terms of his response to his story? Did he just come out to you and say something to the effect of, "I just loved this book personally—it touched us...?"*

WPY: That's exactly right. And he would say this too, that Lani, his wife who co-produced it with him, is "a *Shack* evangelist." She has always loved the book and she has been the engine



behind the whole production because it touched her so deeply. Gil, **Stuart** and on through to the set designer, for example, **Joseph Nemec**... From the time he read the book, he wanted to be the set designer. It didn't look like it was going to come his direction until the person that they initially approached had a conflict and had to turn it down. Then they turned to Nemec. It was a prayer and a dream on his part to be involved, and it shows up. You have this collaboration of different skills—from lighting down to the people that are putting together the floral arrangements and are part of the scenery...all the detail work.

For Lionsgate and the Netter's to call me up and say, "We would really love you to be on the first day's shoot and to pray a blessing over the entire cast and crew." Now, that's pretty incredible. It was a beautiful moment and a part of the experience. Again, nothing I could have anticipated.

CCM: Did that carry over into any off-set conversations with those involved in the production?

WPY: Lots of them. One "Are you kidding?" moment... I'd made a connection with a theologian named Brad who lives up in British Columbia, that's where my family is, also, and where the film was being shot. He was out with friends of his, his best friend Dwight, along with Dwight's wife Laurie who have a cabin up at Cultus Lake. Brad and his wife Eden were spending a couple of days there, out in the woods. [During that same time], Lionsgate had [surprised me] with an invitation to spend another day on-set.

I just endorsed Brad's book, ***A More Christlike God***. I loved his work. He'd read and loved Eve, and so we had this dialogue going but I'd never met him. So, I emailed him because he's a seminary professor in London, so I didn't even know if he was

going to be in the country. He immediately responds and says, "Can I come pick you up at the airport?" Lucky check.

We got it all set up and then ten minutes later I get another email from him that says, "So I'm up at Cultus Lake, we're on a walk right now about two-and-a-half blocks from Dwight's cabin, and here..." And there's a photo of Brad and Dwight—who I don't know yet, but who is a business guy, Brad's best friend, and the one who introduced Brad to *The Shack* back in 2008—and they're in the middle of the woods by a big yellow sign that reads, "The Shack." They didn't even know, but one of the set locations that they were filming was two-and-a-half blocks away from where they were, at that moment, at Cultus Lake.

Then he said, "You know, Dwight and Laurie have been profoundly impacted [by the book]. Laurie is a spiritual formations director, and Dwight's a business guy...but three years ago the youngest of their children took her own life in the middle of the woods. They're absolutely stuck. Dwight's stuck. He thinks that if he could just read *The Shack* again, it would help him get unstuck, but he can't get past Chapter One. Laurie is just angry. She's just angry."

He continues to write, "Would there be any possibility that you could spend a few minutes with them while you're up here?" I responded, "I don't know what site location I'm going to. I won't know that until the night before. I don't know how this is all going to work out, but we'll find a way to make it happen." [After arriving and spending all day with Brad], that night I get the call sheet and it reads, "We'll pick you up at 9:30 and take you to Cultus Lake." So I'm going to be going right up to the site that is two-and-a-half blocks away from where the four of them are.

I texted Brad, "I'm two-and-a-half blocks away." He says, "We'll have food ready for you. You can just walk down the waterfront and we'll meet you, just to be with you, to have ten minutes." [What Brad didn't know] was that I had previously shared all of this email correspondence with Stuart, Gil and Lani and had asked them, "Would there be any possibility that the four of them could come to the set?" Not only did they say, "Yes!," they enthusiastically said, "Absolutely!"

One of the reasons they had me come back to the set this time was because they built the whole shack right there in that location. When we arrived, they had five chairs waiting for us, complete with headphones so that we could watch [and clearly hear] the shooting. I didn't even know what scenes they were going to be shooting that day. Turns out, it was the scene in the movie where **Mackenzie**, with **Papa** awaiting with a prepared breakfast for him, comes out of his room in a fury because he had nightmares all night long about **Kate**. At one point in the conversation, Papa turns to him and she says, "Mackenzie, the fundamental flaw in your thinking is that you don't believe that I am good, and until you believe that I am good, you're never going to be able to trust Me." And he looks at her and he says, "Why would I ever trust you? My daughter is dead."

I look over, and everybody is stunned. We watch it again, and then by the third time, tears are flowing...and then we watch them film it fifteen times. The whole day was like that. Octavia [Spencer], Sam Worthington, and **Aviv Alush**, the Jewish actor from Tel Aviv who plays Jesus, and **Sumire** were there. They wrapped up my friends with an embrace on the set. That day broke loose a healing in them that has absolutely stayed. They have now become very good friends, but it was the event that got them unstuck, and it happened on the set.

I look at this and think, “How is this even possible? Except that there is a God who is good and involved in the details of our lives— all of the time.” The timing of this, that I would have the nudge to contact Brad, that he would even be in the country, that he’s at Cultus Lake and going for a walk with Dwight and run into the film set. Then, they get invited, and this is what they happen to be shooting. Timing is the sandbox of the Holy Spirit. That’s *one* of the events that happened on the set.

The first day on set, the kids that played Kate and **Josh** brought their own copies of The Shack because they had read the book and loved it. I got into some really good conversation with **Tim McGraw**, because he and I both have “daddy issues,” so we connected on that. He was so kind, so gracious, and so present. [At the time of filming] Sam Worthington had a 10 week-old, his first baby, **Rocket Worthington!** It changed him and since then, I don’t know if you’ve heard any of his interviews, but he so identified with Mackenzie’s journey spiritually, and it’s had a huge impact on him.

Octavia, she and I just hugged a lot. She was thrilled. Since she read the book, she had wanted to play this role, so that was something that had been on her heart. All this that happened on set was incredible. Talking with Joseph Nemec and sharing his heart and love for the book and what this meant for him...yeah, lots of cool stuff.

CCM: Why do you think this metaphor really resonates with people? Being able to have a “place” to put the things that get us stuck, as you’ve mentioned, hurtful things. What is it about getting a place for those?

WPY: I think the book and the movie accomplishes a couple of things amid a whole bunch, because different people hear and

see different things depending on where they're at. One thing, is it gave people a language to have a conversation about God that wasn't religious. It was relational. That is very powerful, because faith means a lot to a lot of people—but a lot of times, our religious traditions have not given us good language for anything other than performance. This is not about performance. This is about limitless affection.

The second thing is, that it honored our humanity. That is, the two things that human beings have in common—regardless of our political, ideological, religious, economic, ethnic, or cultural differences—we share love and loss. Those two things. The movie and the book focus on love and loss, and there is such an honoring to our “great sadnesses” that a lot of times our culture doesn't let us. That is to say, your tears actually matter. Who you are as a human being and what you've experienced matters—and the questions that have arisen out of that, those matter too—and it honors that. You get to be inside Mackenzie's world, and you can feel it. To me, the greatest loss that a human being can experience is the loss between a parent and a child, because that's the deepest loss—one that God identifies with completely. But, because it's the deepest loss, it picks up all the others along the way.

I've thought about that, because I remember when I was working on the first manuscript for the kids, thinking, “Why would I write this for my kids?” Like [my wife] Kim once said, “Write something that puts in one place how you think, because you think outside the box.” I'm thinking, “All right, sadly, we live in a world where this kind of tragedy happens. This kind of tragedy asks the best questions about us as human beings and about the nature and the character of God.” I think that has resonated deeply with people.

Surprised, I didn't know anyone outside my friends and family would care, but they have, and around the whole world. You can feel it. When you're watching the film, you get caught. Just like when you're reading the book, you get caught by surprise and by emotion that the beauty of creative art, or fiction, if it's done even half-well it has a real powerful way of "sneaking past our watchful dragons," as **C.S. Lewis** would call them, and finding a place. Music does that, too.

CCM: *In Matthew, Jesus says, "Unless you become like little children..."*

WPY: Exactly.

CCM: And yet, *The Shack*, was, as we know, originally written for children—for childlike faiths. With the release of the film, the second wave of this story coming back to our attention, there will be more reaction from staunch religious-type folk...

WPY: My people! ...they are. Modern evangelical fundamentalists, those are my people. That's what I grew up in, so be careful how you talk about them [laughs]. They're the ones who won't read the book and will hate it.

If you come from any religious fundamentalism, you know that we're sort-of addicted to being right, but we're really scared. Afraid. When somebody's upset with what I've written or what they've heard that I've written, or about the movie or whatever, and they already have their preconceived ideas... They're not coming to tell me about who I am, they're coming to tell me—in the only language they know—about who they are, and what matters to them. I don't want what is precious to them to be less precious by the time we're done with our conversation. That's not my place.

But at the same time, how many of us have actually changed when everything is going smoothly and really well? We tend to create our prisons out of our comfort, our certainty, and our prejudices. We need to be challenged. I love that [*The Shack*] has stirred up conversation. It has stirred it up in family systems—not only families of faith, but biological families—where suddenly there's a way to talk about stuff or ask questions that are authentic and real. All of us change. None of us believe everything today that we believed fifteen years ago, and the same is going to be true fifteen years from now. We've got to give some space for that kind of transition.

In the final analysis, God is way bigger than a book, a movie, or a song, and there's a point where we trust the Holy Spirit and stop trying to *play* the Holy Spirit. You know?

I get it. I understand. You bring your pair of glasses that you've been raised with to read something and you can actually read the opposite of what it says, because you're looking for what you think it says. And that's happened. People read page 184, which in most editions [of *The Shack*] has this conversation between Mack and Jesus and Mack says, "Do all roads lead to Papa?" I put that in there specifically so that nobody would think that I think that all roads lead to God. Jesus laughs and says, "No, most roads don't lead anywhere, but I'll go down any road to find you." Which is exactly the Good Shepherd, right? The one who leaves the 99 to go find the one. [CCM](#)



STEVEN MALCOLM
Christian hip hop's new "Hot Boy"

Steven Malcolm — Fired Up

Introducing Steven Malcolm,
Christian hip hop's new "Hot Boy"

By Andy Argyrakis

The name **Steven Malcolm** may be brand new to many catching the Christian hip hop trendsetter on the current edition of *Winter Jam*, but to those in the know, he's been steadily climbing the ladder to success since 2014's well-received *Monsters Ink*. The following year, he was nominated for "Best New Artist" on *Rapzilla.com*, can be heard on the "Sideways Remix" with **KB** and **Hollyn**, while also scoring tour time alongside **Lecrae**, **Andy Mineo**, **Da T.R.U.T.H.**, **Canton Jones** and many others. And when he's not on the road as an opener, headliner or appearing at major events such as the *Big Ticket Festival*, *Lifest*, *Unity Fest* and the *Urban Youth Workers Conference*, Malcolm leads worship at a hip hop church called **The Edge Urban Fellowship** in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Add it all up, and the singer-songwriter-rapper recently caught the attention of **Word Records**, and more specifically, the folks at its hip hop branch **4 AGAINST 5**, who quickly swooped up the burgeoning star for a self-titled release coming at the top of 2017. Every song on the project was either penned or co-written by Malcolm, while also featuring a slew of GRAMMY and Dove Award-winning producers, including **Derek Minor**; **Beam (Tyshane Thompson)** of **Track Or Die**; **Dirty Rice**, **Joseph Prielozny** and **Juice Bangers** of **COBRA (Lecrae, Andy Mineo, Blanca)**; and **Scottie (Ariana Grande, Chris Brown)**. *CCM Magazine* caught up with the "Hot Boy" (to borrow from the project's lead single) about the unconventional ride from

building a spiritual foundation to embracing artistry and striving to impact the world at large.

CCM Magazine: It sounds like you didn't grow up in a church going home per se. How did you come in contact with faith for the first time?

Steven Malcolm: A good friend of mine, who I played high school basketball with, got saved a year prior. We ran into each other and he asked me if I was interested in coming to church and told me it was a hip hop church. At the time I had nothing to do and was at a rocky place in life, so I gave it a shot and that's all God needed.

CCM: What inspired you to pursue a career in music?

SM: A year after getting rooted spiritually, I wanted to serve my church. I decided to join the worship team at my church, The Edge Urban Fellowship, and found my passion for using music to glorify Jesus. I fell in love instantly and knew that's what I wanted to do the rest of my life.

CCM: Give us the brief backstory of getting connected with Word Records and its hip hop arm 4 AGAINST 5.

SM: [Eight-time Dove-winner] Joseph Prielozny, who was A&R for **Reach Records** at the time, connected with me on Twitter and we began to build a relationship. He told me he loved what I do, so we continued to build [our relationship]. When he made the move from Reach to Word Records, where he started the new hip hop imprint 4 AGAINST 5, Word felt I would be a great fit for the team.

CCM: So, what exactly is a "Hot Boy?"

SM: Anyone who is made alive in the Son, Jesus, and has a burn-

ing passion to glorify God is a “Hot Boy.” God has given us all a gift and we should be on fire, giving 100% to steward that gift.

CCM: Why did you decide to self-title this project?

SM: It gives the fans what Steven Malcolm is about musically. I want the name to stick and the brand to pop because I plan on making my mark in Christian hip hop. Plus, people always spell Malcolm wrong, so hopefully this will help.

CCM: What do you hope to bring to Christian hip-hop that either hasn't been done before or is your own creative stamp?

SM: Bringing someone who loves the genre. Christian hip hop changed my life, so it's an honor to be on the front line. I feel I bring a hunger to grow the genre, to show the world God can use any and everything for His glory and change lives with it.

CCM: How do you feel like your material will fit with those who listen to mainstream artists?

SM: There really is no difference to me sound or quality wise when it comes to my music and mainstream. The only difference is my message, and my message is my faith and my life experiences. The fit is all up to the listeners and what they are willing to relate and connect with. I just make music for the world to know Steven Malcolm and let it do what God wants it to do.

CCM: What did you take away from your time on tour with Lecrae?

SM: Opening for Lecrae on his tour was awesome. Just watching how he carries himself and puts together a great show really impacted me. He has been a super success, so to be able to learn

and observe was amazing. Hopefully I'll be able to get to know him more soon.

CCM: And last but not least, what can concertgoers expect from your set at Winter Jam?

SM: High energy, fun, worship, and a party, party, party! I'm so excited and I've been practicing so hard to perfect this ten minutes that I have on stage, so expect nothing less than a great experience. CCM



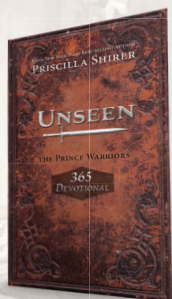
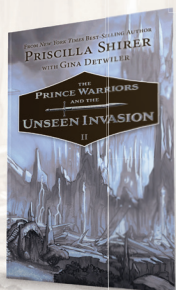
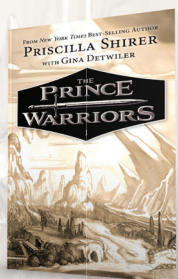
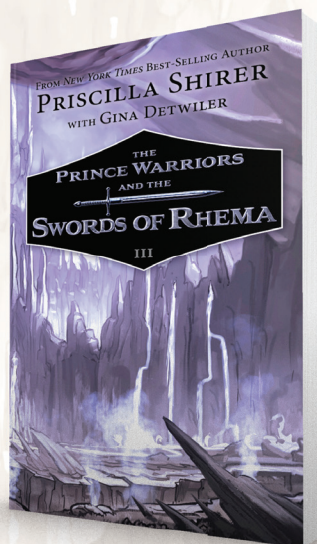
THE PRINCE WARRIORS

New from Best-Selling Author Priscilla Shirer

I can't wait for kids everywhere to
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Reward Over Reluctance

When fear and doubt creep toward this mom-of-all-trades, the highly skilled author-actor gives her first... or perhaps second breath to prayer

By Matt Conner

Priscilla Shirer originally told the producers of *War Room* she wasn't interested in an acting role in the to-be hit feature film. The truth was that she felt ill-equipped for her first acting turn, a familiar feeling she admits before taking on any of the varied ministry roles that keep her so busy these days.

That very humility is exactly why Shirer believes she's even been presented with the opportunity to publish numerous books, including her latest series of children's titles under the heading *The Prince Warriors*. What began as a burgeoning women's ministry career with books and a **LifeWay** video Bible study series has blossomed into a full creative array that includes children's fiction and another role in the upcoming film *I Can Only Imagine*.

We recently asked Priscilla about these varied roles and the lessons she's learned as God presents her with some pretty incredible opportunities.

CCM Magazine: You've written different kinds of books, ventured into acting, spoken at conferences and much more. How much do you enjoy having such a bouquet of creative outlets for ministry?

Priscilla Shirer: At this season in my life, that's exactly how I feel—that it's a bouquet of opportunity, and I'm very thankful for it. I'm still a bit shocked by it. It certainly wasn't the plan. Every sort of direction the Lord has allowed us to go toward has appeared in our lives; these aren't things that we've pursued. Even with the movie *War Room*, the producers called me to be in it and at first I said, "No, are you kidding?" I even recommended some great actresses for that part who are actually skilled in the art of acting! So, I've even tried to back out of some of these opportunities, but I am so grateful to the Lord for the chances to push past that fear and insecurity and intimidation and walk down those roads anyway.

It's the same thing with the kids' series [*The Prince Warriors*]. My intention was to answer a simple question that my six-year-old, at the time, had asked me over breakfast about whether or not he would ever be in a war or battle with the enemy. When your six-year-old comes up with a question like that, it's one of those mornings where you need to stop scrambling the eggs, turn around and talk to him about the armor of God. I said, "Son, you actually are in a battle." I remember his eyes getting as wide as saucers because they were so excited, as a boy who runs around with a sword and cape anytime we run errands, and is intrigued by this ongoing battle.

The Prince Warriors was really a response to my kids. I would write chapters and read to them before bed. I hadn't thought about publishing it. Instead, it was for my boys to have adventure-filled stories that would help to keep them clued into the armor of God and realize they have weapons and protection to suit them up for victory. So again, it was just by chance that these stories were written, so to have the opportunity to share them with other young people who need to be suited up for victory, or for parents who want to equip their children well, is

a real privilege. It feels really good and surprising to have the privilege to be participating in ministry from so many perspectives and so many genres. I'm very grateful for it.

CCM: That's such a good story, but I feel like most parents would just stop at answering the question. Very few would ever sit down and compose a brand new story. Was there an impetus to actually take that step, or is that the way you are wired?

PS: No, writing is a discipline for me. Some people will write, and that's me, and some people are writers and they're made for writing. For me it's a discipline that I've had to hone throughout the years. The impetus to put pen to paper in this regard is that I'm a homeschool mom. I really was looking for materials that my boys would want to read. Just getting them to read was my goal, especially for one of my sons who's had a challenge with reading comprehension and desired to even attempt to dive into reading.

One night I was sitting with him, painstakingly trying to get through a book for school, and it was an adventure story. I will never forget this particular day, because it was the first time in a long time that I'd seen my boys even remotely interested in their reading lesson. As we read this mystery-adventure story, the mom part of me said, "I wish this was a book that also happened to have spiritual principles—that had adventure, that was epic, that had a narrative that would engage boys in particular, and girls as well—but also gave me an opportunity to have an organic conversation about spiritual things with my kids."

That's why I started writing any of this. I wanted to write chapters that my boy—and my other son, as well, who could take or leave reading altogether—would want to engage with.

I wanted it to be filled with all these theological secrets that pique their interest so that they want to talk about spiritual things.

CCM: As you hear from people who've read the books, do you speak with parents who found themselves in the same scenarios with their own children?

PS: Absolutely. One of the most encouraging notes, emails, and comments that we receive are from the moms or dads who say, "I've got a ten year-old who doesn't like to read, but they can't put this book down. Thank you." Then they tell me the conversations they've had to have with their kids after, because the kids have some questions or because of our website. We have a button there that says "secrets" that parents or kids can click on and see in each chapter the theological secrets tucked into each story. That will hopefully help stimulate conversations based on what's really behind those chapters.

CCM: What a great resource! You said earlier that you wanted to actually back out of the movie role. Does it feel like that's happened in other ways too, where this has all come together outside of you?

PS: Absolutely, and let me tell you something: I've had to have a constant standing guard against intimidation, insecurity and fear. We all do when we find ourselves facing an opportunity for which we feel ill equipped or ill trained or we think of ten others who are so much more suited for the task. I would be so quick to talk myself out of stuff. But yes, most everything we've done in ministry—and I only say "most," because I hate to put one-hundred percent on anything—are things that have just come to us. We've just been responsible with what's in front of us to do and from that, another opportunity will blindside

us and we'll prayerfully consider whether this might be God's direction for us.

Even with the video Bible studies I've done with LifeWay now for ten or eleven years, they called us to consider putting some of our messages into some Bible studies to go deeper in conversation with God's word. My first response was, "Isn't this what **Beth Moore** does? If so, then no, I can't do that!" It was my husband who encouraged me toward that end. He said, "Priscilla, I think because you think you can't that it's exactly why God wants to use you, because his strength is made perfect in our weakness."

So, from the first book I wrote when I was 24 or 25 years-old to the video Bible studies to the movie, all of those were opportunities that came to us as we prayerfully considered, "Is this something that God would want us to pursue, despite our feelings of inadequacy?"

CCM: I couldn't help but notice that you're also slated for another feature film, which means this initial impulse to back-out is now something you're leaning into. Is that right?

PS: [Laughs] Yes, that creative bouquet you mentioned earlier has been very fulfilling to me in this season of my life. When you do one thing over and over, you love that one thing, but it's great to flex other muscles that have had to lie dormant. Just the opportunity to flex outside of the box for me—to be around people who do things completely different from what I do—has been so enjoyable. I've loved watching actors in their craft, in their element, and seeing that creative energy operating in their lives.

I told the Lord, “Hey, God, I liked that. That was fun.” I didn’t want to leave our life and ministry to move to Hollywood, but I prayed that if there are other projects that will lift up God’s name and would be a good fit for the purpose and passion that He’s put in our hearts to serve Him, then we’re open to that. Within weeks, the **Erwin Brothers** contacted me about *I Can Only Imagine*, a new movie about that incredible song that has changed the lives of millions of people. I’d met **Bart Millard** from **MercyMe**, who wrote that song, and he’s just a tenderhearted, wonderful man. To get a call to be a part of a project about that song and about the life of a guy like that, again, I count it a privilege to be a part of it. ccm

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Various Artists

The Shack: Music From And Inspired By The Original Motion Picture

(Atlantic)

FOR FANS OF:

Skillet, Needtobreathe,

Tim McGraw & Faith Hill

WE LIKE: "Stars (The Shack Version)"

★★★★☆



Like the best-selling novel and the new movie of the same name, this soundtrack to ***The Shack*** covers a lot of spiritually-enlightening ground, while helping further illustrate a story steeped in tragedy, depression, and ultimately, redemption. Even as a stand-alone listening experience, the collection of entirely exclusive material features many of the most significant names in pop, rock, country and contemporary Christian music, including **Lady Antebellum, Dan + Shay, Francesca Battistelli** and **for KING & COUNTRY**, plus several multiple collaborations (**Tim McGraw** and **Faith Hill**, **Kelly Clarkson** and **Aloe Blacc**, **NEEDTOBREATHE** and **Lauren Daigle**).

Inspirational highlights abound with a stripped-down, string-soaked update of Skillet's "Stars" taking the top spot, though there's literally a little something for anyone even remotely keyed into today's musical trends that are simultaneously seeking to pump up their faith.

–Andy Argyrakis

Laura Story

Open Hands

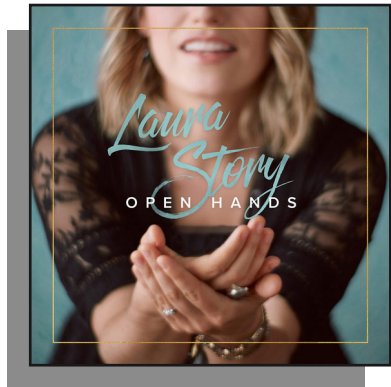
(FairTrade Services)

FOR FANS OF:

Natalie Grant, Nichole Nordeman

WE LIKE: "Death Was Arrested"

★★★★☆



The first-fruits of **Laura Story's** newest album, **Open Hands**, has already made significant waves with the early release of the title track that features Third Day front man **Mac Powell**. The rest of Story's latest matches that single's impactful message and vision with songs that remind us of God's grace and glory in all facets of life, both up and down.

"Awake My Soul (1,000 Tongues)" feels like a **Matt Redman** fave. "For The Love Of My King" beautifully blends the popular hymn "My Jesus, I Love Thee" into a newer melody. However the real spotlight belongs to "Death Was Arrested," a modern hymn that deserves attention in churches around the globe.

—Matt Conner

William McDowell

Sounds of Revival II: Deeper

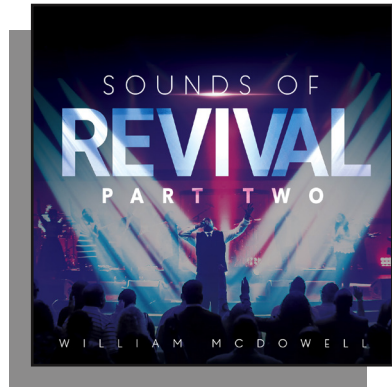
(entertainment One)

FOR FANS OF:

VaShawn Mitchell

WE LIKE: "You Are The One"

★★★★☆



A moving spirit can be felt from the moment **William McDowell**'s latest album begins, the follow-up to the first ***Sounds Of Revival*** recording. ***Deeper*** features an incredible supporting cast such as **Israel Houghton** and **Tina Campbell** (among several others) on contemplative, prayerful songs intended for personal and corporate worship settings.

"In Your Presence" is a powerful congregational number, while "Falling on My Knees" is ideally suited for a devotional time. **Charles & Taylor**'s appearance on "You Are The One" is turned into a particularly poignant number near the album's end. Gospel fans will thoroughly enjoy *Sounds Of Revival II* with the hope of more to come.

—Matt Conner

Steven Malcolm

Steven Malcolm

(Word Entertainment/4 Against 5)

FOR FANS OF:

Lecrae, KB, Andy Mineo

WE LIKE: "Party In The Hills"

(feat. Hollyn & Andy Mineo)

★★★★☆



Not since **Lecrae** has Christian hip-hop experienced an innovator and entertainer to the degree of **Steven Malcolm**. The rapper-writer, who's currently making a major splash warming up for **Winter Jam**, takes the most immediate sounds from radio, hints of trap, regional flavors and reggae influences to sculpt a diverse label debut worth discovering.

Lyrically speaking, he puts faith into practice with shared emphasis on autobiographical revelations and cultural relevance, calling on all to celebrate life throughout "Party In The Hills" (featuring **Hollyn** and **Andy Mineo**—which can also be heard on Hollyn's new album **One-Way Conversations**, **Gotee Records**) providing a motivational anthem to pursue personal passions in "Hot Boy" and serving up some soulful inspiration on a stirring collaboration with **Blanca** during "Never Let You Go."

—Andy Argyrakis

David Dunn

Yellow Balloons

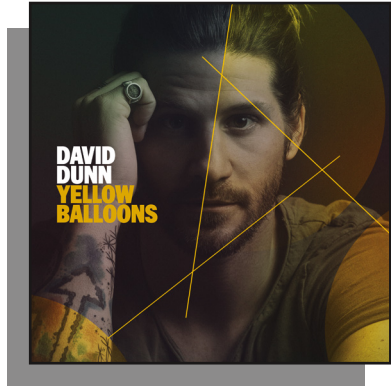
(BEC Recordings)

FOR FANS OF:

Jonathan Thulin, Chris August

WE LIKE: “Open Arms”

★★★★☆



David Dunn's label debut, ***Crystal Clear***, made waves with its slick synth soundscapes and hypnotic pop compositions. Those textures remain in place on Dunn's latest, ***Yellow Balloons***, even as he takes a lyrical turn toward more vulnerable, personal stories.

Balloons is rooted in family tragedy, and songs like the title track, “Open Arms” and “I Wanna Go Back” speak to the questions, doubt, fears and confusion of such moments. God is ever-present even if the neat and tidy endings aren't yet in place, and Dunn's authentic new release gives voice to that reality.

—Matt Conner

Kat & Jared

Kat & Jared EP

(Natives Music Group)

FOR FANS OF:

LaRue, Jesus Culture, Ginny Owens

WE LIKE: "We Want To Know You"

★★★★☆



Fans will recognize the skillful string-work from former **Flyleaf** guitarist **Jared Hartmann** as we are all introduced to his wife's stunning vocal leadership in Christian music's newest performing husband-wife duo, **Kat & Jared**. The couple firmly plants their musical roots and ministry in Temple, TX, where they lead in worship at **Bethel Church**.

The EP brings a masterful blend of intimate worship with a pop sensibility that serves to confirm Jared's versatile talent. This project will quickly and easily reside in your worship playlists and certainly whet your appetite for more offerings from them in no time.

—Kevin Sparkman



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