

# CCM

## THE CONVERSATIONS ISSUE

*LISTENING &  
LEARNING WITH*

**MARK LOWRY,  
ANDREW GREER &  
MARK  
SCHULTZ**

1-ON-1  
WITH  
**MARC  
MARTEL**



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## Dinner Conversations

### DINNER CONVERSATIONS

The new dynamic duo of Mark Lowry & Andrew Greer anchor our intro into December with "The Conversations"



## Mark Schultz

What happens when we think of Christmas from a different perspective?



## Martel

How does this unique & talented artist consider himself to be "rooted in Christmas?"



## 2017 Christmas Gift Guide

## Reviews

New music from Skillet, *The Star* Soundtrack, Marc Martel, Matt Hammitt + more!



# OUT & ABOUT

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# ***LOWRY & GREER***

**CCM**  
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# Mark Lowry & Andrew Greer

## The Art Of Conversation

How do we best learn from each other?  
Lending an ear, taming the tongue.  
Lowry & Greer talk about listening well.

By Kevin Sparkman

With all of our Googling, texting, instant messaging, Instagram'ing, Snap Chatting, Facebook Live'ing, and Face Timing, among others, it's no wonder that slowing down enough to peacefully share a meal—in the same room, face-to-face, with no distractions—just for the sake of it, is now and unfortunately a bit of a novelty these days.

And although they might not completely buy in to that notion, the recent collaborative efforts of singer-songwriter-comedian extraordinaire **Mark Lowry** and artist-author **Andrew Greer** offers to shine a big, bright light on a practice that's growing ever increasingly dim. But rather than perpetuating its current oddity in typical American homes—and even in church settings, of all places—the intentions and invitations of Lowry and Greer are made loud and clear right from the get-go...

“...there's one seat left at the table, and it's yours—come join the conversation,” states Lowry, with a familiar and welcoming grin, upon every introduction to each ***Dinner Conversations with Mark Lowry and Andrew Greer*** video Podcast episode. “Funny,” one might say, “But, don't I need a laptop or a phone to watch these—is this defeating the purpose?”

As you will read, the point of it all is to listen, learn, and to be moved to participation—and if it takes just one more YouTube session or Podcast download to foster a genuine, engaging, and meaningful conversation to happen in only one home, it will have been worth the effort for this seasoned singer and aspiring artist. *CCM Magazine* Managing Editor Kevin Sparkman joins this unlikely pairing at the table...it's now time for you to pull your chair just a little closer.

***CCM Magazine: Can you give us an idea of how this whole Dinner Conversations thing got started?***

**Mark Lowry:** Because of you at your magazine. **Celeste Winstead** called me and said that y'all wanted to do this, or it was her idea—she may have forced it on you, I don't know how it happened? I went over there to the studio, and I loved the setup—the two chairs facing each other...it was intimate, and [Andrew Greer] asked really good questions. I thought the interview was good.

***CCM: So you did not know Andrew before our Features On Film shoot?***

**Andrew Greer:** No, I don't think we had actually officially met.

**ML:** I don't recall meeting you. Do you?

**AG:** No, I don't recall meeting you either. I think it was the first time, which is maybe part of the experience of it, the chemistry? It was actually a first-time conversation. Of course I knew Mark's career and was definitely interested in where the conversation might go.

**ML:** You started off by saying you were nervous—you were scared about that. I watched the front of the interview, you said, “I’m kinda nervous about this...” I was kinda taken off guard, why would you be nervous—I could see you being nervous with somebody who doesn’t know how to talk? That would be hard for an interviewer, I would think.

**AG:** You never know. You never know when you walk into something. There’s terrible interviews. I think we have lost the art of conversation in our culture in general. Then when you have an interviewee come into an interview, like Mark coming into that one—and I don’t know him, I know of him—I know what he can do on stage, but what can you actually say from your brain and your heart that’s not planned? Mark has a lot of unplanned thoughts.

**ML:** They’re all unplanned. I don’t even know what I’m thinking until I hear myself say it. That is part of my routine, too. So, I just went back into my routine. It’s the truth. Even my routine comes from the truth of my life, that I am a talk-thinker. My mother was, too. I can hear myself talk and know what I’m thinking. There are a lot of us out there. My dad can actually think through his whole sentence before he says it. If I think it through, by the time I get to the end of the sentence, I’ve forgotten what I was gonna say...it just has to be spoken.

Anyway, I called [Andrew] one night and said, hey let’s do this. I was thinking about retiring and I thought, well I need to do something. I know that through Facebook, I’ve found that you can sit on your couch, or your Lay-Z-Boy in my case, and pull out your phone and do a “Live” and reach more people than you’ll ever reach in a tour—in just one moment. If it’s really about reaching people, if you don’t need the money or the work, I thought, “Stay home.” So, I called him, and it turned into all this. He really took it to the next level.



I thought we would do our conversations like we are right now, but we'd just have our phones out and edit it. I thought that'd be cool. I'd watch that. I love Podcasts and YouTube videos, as long as they've got something to say and keep it interesting. We did it to a new level.

**AG:** If there's going to be "this," what I was hoping for the level of conversation that we could actually have with the guests in the room, going off the inspiration of that, Mark and I are able to have good conversation, that we're conversationalists, and then to inspire that, encourage that in other people. I just started thinking, because of where we are culturally, I would love for these to have posterity, to live in posterity. As a way to say, "You can have these conversations at home, too." There is not a subject you can't broach, within the safety, within the sanctuary of the communion of conversation.

**ML:** ...eating, and we love both.

**AG:** Yeah, food.

***CCM: You regularly mention the word "communion" in this context. Andrew, our readers might know you best through the Christmas articles that you write for us year after year. So, how does that idea tie into these particular conversations?***

**AG:** I think communion is a bit of posture. What I love, and what I would like to bring in is this idea, is that we're all coming to the table curious about God. Not sure of...? We're still discovering, hopefully...in a relationship you're constantly discovering one another. In conversation, that's part of what conversation prompts is discovery of one another. I'm asking you about you, you're asking about me, we're listening, we're interacting. I see communion as an interaction between us and God, where we're

actually listening and talking, as a conversation with God. God's the one who set the table. Mark and I get to set the table for Dinner Conversations, and invite our guests in. God is the one through Jesus who has set the table for communion.

We're all invited, that's why it's safe, because we're all invited, regardless of who you are, or where you've been, or what you've done, or any of that.

**ML:** The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Mama wrote that. She wrote that song. Anyway, she's dead, but she wrote that. It is true. I think of it in more simple terms, that we just eat and talk. Hopefully it will go somewhere good, and if it doesn't it'll hit the editing floor. I think what I want is for us to forget the cameras are even there. When I do a live video, I've never stopped on a video to change the tape. They better stagger the tapes, cause Mark ain't stopping. The camera is just another set of eyes in the seat. In my eyes, that camera is a person.

**CCM:** *Mark, we love how you introduce the start of each Dinner Conversations with something to the effect of, "We have an open seat at the table."*

**ML:** We want them, and through Facebook Live and through all these, everybody can comment. We know what they're thinking, they're adding to it. It is a conversation. They just do it from their homes on their computer or their phone and join in on the conversation.

**AG:** I think, even extending past social media or comments, is that if we example, I think it requires to learn the art of something like conversation. It was exemplified to me as a kid growing up. My dad would sit around the table with us at dinner and ask, "What do you feel about 'this?'" "What do you think about 'that?'"

Even as a six year old, I was asked how I felt about something, as if what I was thinking and feeling was a legitimate response in a very adult world.

That table was set for me early on in example. Some people were not invited to a safe place around the table.

**ML:** ...and still aren't.

**AG:** Right, and might not know what healthy conversation is. That may be in their church, they're not able to have good conversation, it may be at home. What we want to say is, this table is that safe place. Maybe that will inspire in them, or prompt in them even, the courage to begin conversations that can be hard to start. We think once you start them, that there can be a safe place there to learn new things.

***CCM: Recently, you both had Sandi Patty featured at the table, and were focused on discussing blended families —not something we hear in Christian media a lot.***

**ML:** There's a lot of divorced people out there. Even the Christians, half of them end up divorced, isn't it? I think the statistics. We've got to think about blended families. I think that episode is one of my favorites, because [Patty] laid out some wisdom. For anybody going through that, trying to blend two different families, I think you should see that episode, because it's quite amazing—stuff I didn't ever think about. I've never been a part of a blended family.

**AG:** Isn't that interesting how that conversation then makes us sensitive to, I'm not part of a blended family either, but there are blended families all around me. [Patty] kept saying what she and her husband, her second husband **Don [Pelslis]**, now do for others as people ask their advice. She says, "Here's what not to

do.” Maybe through some of our conversation, people are sharing their experience and their wisdom, and maybe someone else gets a leg up? Maybe they’re still young and not married yet, or maybe they’re thinking about marriage? Through the wisdom and experience that’s displayed through the conversation, maybe they get to avoid, or, I don’t know, avoid painful things and learn from someone else to then implement that in their own life?

If we don’t talk, we don’t learn anything.

***CCM: Why is it so important to listen?***

**ML:** Oh, that’s a good question. I don’t know? I seldom do it.

**AG:** You do, in your own way. I think when we listen, there is a posture of humility in that, too. When I actually conservatively tell myself, “Andrew, stop talking and listen.” One, I am telling that person just with my body language, with my focus, that they are important. What you have to say is invaluable, even if we disagree, and even if we vehemently disagree. [By listening], I’m saying, “You are valuable.” I think that, in turn, inspires in them a respect for me, as well. They may not agree with everything about me. They may not agree about things in my life. They may not agree about everything from politics, to social topics, to denominations. We [might] have a lot of disagreements.

When you listen, it inspires us to actually see what I think is most common about us. It brings us together, and it also says to me, “My voice is not the only voice out there, it’s not the only idea out there, and it’s not the most important one.”

**ML:** Listening...it's impossible to have a conversation if you're not listening. It's just a monologue if you're not listening.

**CCM:** *Mark, tell us about your experience being on the other side of the table.*

**ML:** It's harder. You have to read up on people, and you have to know who you're talking to and what you're talking about. It's fun because I am usually the one being asked the questions, and it's fun to dig a little deeper into somebody else's life and find out what brought them to this place. You see, I was raised to worry that everyone I met, if I didn't tell them about the Lord, their blood would be on my hands. Since I have realized that is not my responsibility to "save" anybody, I have more opportunities to tell people about the Lord because I'm listening.

When I meet someone, I first ask, "How are you, how did you get here, where are you headed...?" That's usually on a plane, or something. "You're going to see your grandkids, isn't that fun at Thanksgiving?" I just met a lady on the plane to Nashville yesterday, we talked about this. You find out where they come from, what brought them here, and how did your lives intersect. Don't ask "that" question, "that" might scare them. It could lead to a really deep, wonderful conversation where you could plant seeds in someone's life. You don't always have to harvest. Everybody wants to harvest, so we [get to] have that notch on our belt. "I had 35 saves this weekend..." Instead, sometimes you just water. Sometimes you plant, and every now and then you get to harvest and see someone come to know the Lord.

It's fun to be dug into, too. I enjoy that. [Andrew] dug in on that [Features On Film] we had, to where it made me think of things I'd never asked myself. Then I got to hear what I believe on that. I like that. It's fun to dig, and it's fun to be dug.

**AG:** You talk about the lady on the plane, and us listening and learning to listen, which inspires good conversation. I think conversation that kind of dialogue and interaction with people can create an open channel for the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is beyond my comprehension, how It works and moves. Then that takes away my responsibility, too. To have interactions with people that then gives this open platform for the Spirit to do what It's going to do. I get to just relax into it and enjoy it.

**ML:** Nobody's eternity is now resting on my shoulders, and it used to. I can just love people for where they are, and maybe turn them one degree even. It's a little bit. Well, I'll tell you a story. I was with **Tony Campolo**. We were in England. This guy walks up to us out of nowhere and starts talking to us about the Lord, but he needed the Lord. He evidently knew Tony had some anointing, or something, I don't know. He starts talking to Tony and me about the Lord. We prayed with the guy, he didn't come to know the Lord in that moment. It was the most horrendous story. This guy came from nowhere, and he was going to nowhere. Where he came from, there was no family, and he was headed toward a place where there was no family. No one waiting for him. It was a very sad story.

I left that conversation heavy, kind-of sad for the fella. Tony left skipping. I said, "How do you hear something like that, and it doesn't weigh you down?" He said, "He's not my problem," which [at that time] I thought was kind-of cold and awful. But it's the truth. He's God's problem. You're not my problem, you're not my kid, you're God's kid. I'm not gonna spank you, because you're not my kid. Boy, that frees you up when you realize, "You know what, I'm gonna tell you the Good News—but you believe it or not, not my problem." That way I can love you without an agenda. I love you...I can love you...it isn't love

if there's an agenda. It isn't love. If the only reason I love is so I can win you to my way of thinking, that's not love.

**AG:** That's manipulation, control.

**ML:** I want to learn to love without an agenda. That will woo the bride to the bridegroom. We're all wanting the same thing. Some people want to argue the baby out of the womb, it never works. I'd rather woo her. I do think you can woo the bride to the bridegroom, but you don't do that by scaring her.

**CCM:** *What have been some of the more memorable or enjoyable moments in recording Dinner Conversations?*

**ML:** Well, they've all been...

**AG:** [Yelling toward **Mark Schultz** waiting in the other room] Mark Schultz was a fun one. He was a rowdy one.

**ML:** He is fun. That adoption thing, that was interesting. I think they've all had their own thing. I also think we're just getting into it. I think neither one of us are totally relaxed yet to where we'll be just like this. We are talking. You're supposed to be interviewing us, which you are, but it feels more like a conversation. You just do it, rather than plan it, or whatever.

**CCM:** *We would assume that there has been a few surprises in this for you...*

**AG:** I think the one we did with **Nicole C. Mullen** about race in the church was really a beautiful conversation. One I didn't quite expect. I know Nicole, but didn't necessarily know she had that level of depth of thought about that specific issue. She said some really profound things about [that subject], talk about

again, us having a safe place for conversation with two white guys and an African American woman. Just being able to sit down and talk, and not even let race be a thing.

The **Point Of Grace** girls are always, always easy to talk to, and have a lot more depth of thought than I think they've ever been encouraged to talk about.

**ML:** I don't know that we've cut too deep yet, either. I think we could cut deeper as we go along, as learn how to do this. How to get close to offending, but don't. Just cut a little deeper...are we really getting to the bottom of this? We may never, but it's fun trying.

**AG:** From a music industry standpoint, too, there's give and there's take. The interviewee in the situation, I think that's how you can kind-of prove your point with conversation and communion. That opens the heart, that opens, that breaks the ice. You do sit down and do interviews, you've been trained, you've just released a project and everything's about that.

### ***CCM: How necessary is this?***

**AG:** I'm still in the ring, kind of finding my way, and very achievement oriented. To do something like this, and just to be encouraged to do it because there are good things that come from it, that conversation is important... I think that has been a large part of what [Mark Lowry has] spoken into me about this, whether [he] knew it or not. It's actually seeing the value of the content, not, "Are we number one, are we selling as many as we should?" [Mark] is in a more relaxed place in [his] life and career. [Speaking to Mark] You may have always been there, I don't know. It helps you relax. You know what I mean?

**ML:** I remember when I had the drive. I do. It was never about the money, it's never been about the money. I'm thankful for the money. I thought I'd be sleeping on preacher's couches for the rest of my life. I've done what I loved and the money came to me. That's the truth. What I believe. I really believe this. I'm not in this music because I couldn't make it in some other kind of music. I love this music. I love this message.

***CCM: You're five episodes in, what can we expect from the rest of the first season of Dinner Conversations?***

**ML: Russ Taff.** He talks about his addiction with alcohol and how he's handled that through the years. What a great story.

**AG: Ron Block from Alison Krauss and Union Station, Buddy Greene, Nicole C. Mullen,** of course, with matters of race in the church. We've got an interesting episode about [human] trafficking that we've yet to actually film, but something that's kind-of been new to the show and something we're interested in telling people about and how they can help. CCM



# **MARK SCHULTZ**

# Mark Schultz — The Christmas Shift

Christmas, from a different kind of perspective—  
a conversation with Andrew Greer

By Andrew Greer

Music is big-time at Christmastime—especially in Gospel music. The holiday recordings of artists like **Amy Grant**, **Michael W. Smith** and **MercyMe** encapsulate some of the most popular works in the history of Christian music. And though **Mark Schultz**—one of this month’s cover boys—has yet to record an entire holiday album (consider that on the top of *our* Christmas wish lists, Mr. Schultz), over the past three years his platinum-selling singer-songwriter prowess has been enduringly paired with December’s finest musical offerings thanks to his holiday heart-tugging song, “Different Kind Of Christmas.”

Provoked by a conversation with his wife, **Kate**, in which she expressed her deep feelings of loss during the holiday season after her dad lost his battle with cancer, Mark—with the sensitive assistance of songwriting legend **Cindy Morgan**—turned his wife’s raw emotions to the rhythm and rhyme of a verse and chorus in a bold ballad exploration of the lonelier side of the season. Going viral in 2014, the now-Number One song, and motivation for his current Christmas tour, has captured the ears and emotions of millions upon millions of listeners—a testament to the massive relatability of its’ contents and a witness to the fact that life does not take a breather ... even at Christmas. Enlisting Schultz’s laidback conversational demeanor to relax into this sensitive side of the season, the storytelling songwriter helps us mine the messiness of life—especially during the holidays—in this “Conversations Issue” chit-chat.

***CCM Magazine: You married your wife when you were 35-years old. You started having kids at 40—so your kids are still young.***

**Mark Schultz:** Yes. 5, 3, and 1.

***CCM: So Christmas in your household is ...***

**MS:** ... a blur. There were seasons when I would put up a Christmas tree and just look at it. Now we put up a fence around the tree because it gets yanked on, pulled over. We had to make a moat around the tree. It seems like we've always got a 1-year-old running around the house. [*Laughs*]

***CCM: Growing up, what was your experience of Christmas?***

**MS:** I have an older brother, younger sister, and we have a bunch of cousins, so, for me, it was going to my grandma and grandpa's house and everybody piling into the beds downstairs in the basement. We're all packed in there, but when you're younger all those older cousins—they are like heroes still to this day for me. In my mind, they're just giants.

***CCM: Many of us have heard your adoption story. You think about Jesus being birthed into his family, but in a sense, they were his adopted family. Do you sense a closer identification with Jesus through being adopted?***

**MS:** I had such a great experience being adopted, so it's not a big jump for me to say, "Oh, we could be adopted by God." That's not true for everybody, but I've lived it.

Growing up with my mom and dad, I thought, *I want you to be proud of me. I want to do something so you never say, "Did we*

*make a wrong choice?"* But they've never made me feel like, *Hey, you have to do this or else...* They say, "There's nothing you can do to make us love you more. There's nothing you can do to make us love you less." That's an echo of what God has said [to us].

***CCM: Yes. Isn't Jesus God's response to our questions of worthiness and need to be approved by our actions?***

**MS:** I've tried to overachieve my whole life. I was the quarterback on the football team, or I was singing and then it was a record deal and doing shows. In a way, I am saying, *Am I good enough yet?* I know there are folks that live like that in their faith. *God, I've just got to do more. I've got to do more.* It's a great place to [hear God] say, "You don't have to do any more. There's no more or no less."

***CCM: A few years ago, you wrote a song with our good friend Cindy Morgan called, "A Different Kind Of Christmas". The success of the song has been a bit surprising considering the content was birthed from such a sad experience, right?***

**MS:** Yeah, real life. We moved in next to my in-laws, and six months later our first son was born. My father-in-law got to hold him, then he got cancer and died six months later. When Christmas rolled around, I was in my office writing songs and my wife walked in. Now let me stop right here—ever since my wife was young, she and her dad would put cookies and the milk by the fireplace. The next morning the milk and cookies would be gone and there would be a note from Santa. It would say, "I came down the chimney last night, and I ran into your dad. He told me you're about the greatest thing that's ever happened to him. He loves you so much, and he's so proud of you. Hope you have a great Christmas. Love, Santa." Even when she

was in college, she loved leaving the notes for Santa to see what he would have to say. When we got married, the notes changed. They'd say, "Your dad thinks you're the greatest thing in the world. Your husband needs to learn how to fix some things around the house, but he's okay, too." [*Laughs*]

So when her dad passed away, that all changed. She walked into the office and said, "We've got the same tinsel, we've got the same lights, we've got the same decorations for the tree, but it's a different kind of Christmas this year because Daddy's gone." I started writing "Different Kind Of Christmas" about the legacy somebody leaves. You can't replace it. You can only pass it down.



**CCM:** *In some ways, the song is an antithesis of “Have a holly jolly Christmas”—it willingly explores the lonely aspects of Christmas that, I think, are a reality for most people who have lived any adult life. It doesn’t mean everyone’s sitting in a depressed stupor all Christmas long and they don’t find the points of light in the season, but isn’t it interesting this song resonates more deeply than the “happy” songs?*

**MS:** What I realized was that this song wasn’t meant to serve my career. This song was meant to serve people. It went out and found people that were walking through [grief] and they could say, “That’s me this Christmas. I don’t feel so alone.”

There was a literal hole in the middle of Christmas that first year [after my father-in-law died.] We were faking our way through being happy and joyful, but the person who loved Christmas more than anyone was gone. We were doing all the same stuff, but it just had this sinking feeling to it. That happened for a couple of years. I was so wrapped up into, *Christmas isn’t like it used to be*. And then my kids came into the picture. Instead of trying to live in the past and *What am I missing? What am I not getting anymore?*, I ask, *What can I give?* We have reflected that back on to the kids, so now they’ll grow up having that same legacy passed through us.

I think it’s just healthy to say, “It’s Christmastime and here’s everything that’s going on.” I don’t think it’s healthy to say, “We’re not talking about that. We’re going to shut that door. We’re only going to play the happy stuff.” It’s healthy to invite that [pain] in and sit with it for a while. That’s just part of what this Christmas is about. CCM



# ***MARC MARTEL***

**CCM**  
MAGAZINE.COM

# Marc Martel — Rooted In Christmas

The unique and talent-rich vocalist sits down for an Advent conversation with Andrew Greer

By Andrew Greer

Wherever he goes, **Marc Martel** makes quite the impression. Though he cut his professional musical teeth on the sophisticated sounds of his highly applauded Christian pop-rock band, **Downhere**, more recently the vocalist extraordinaire has piqued the eyes and ears of hundreds of thousands of households across the world as the leading man for the official **Queen** tribute show, *Queen Extravaganza*—the result of a personal recruitment by the band’s living legend members, **Brian May** and **Roger Taylor**, in 2012.

After his recording of “What Child Is This?” showed up in the Top 10 at Christian radio last year—a return to his roots, of sorts—the born-and-bred Canadian singer-songwriter began thinking through a second seasonal set list, beautifully collected on this year’s *The First Noel EP*. Comprised mainly of faith-focused holiday songs, the six-song record dazzlingly demonstrates the light of Martel’s spiritual heart through the purest offering of his golden-throated chops.

Whether wowing an *American Idol* audience, wooing vocal legend **Celine Dion** (by request of Ms. Dion, I might add), or charming capacity crowds as a part of this year’s K-Love Christmas Tour, Martel carries his spiritual roots with him whatever platform his musical prowess affords him—also affording us this thoughtful conversation about art and faith at Christmas.

***CCM Magazine: What is the Christmas experience like for you, being from the “Great White North?”ou’re Canadian, right?***

**Marc Martel:** Christmas is one of those [holidays] that is spread across North America pretty evenly. Well, I don’t know that much about Mexico, but I think Canada and U.S. Christmases are pretty monogamous. Monagamous?

***CCM: [Laughs]***

**MM:** It was the quintessential North American Christmas, but with a French Canadian flare. The food might have been a little different, but we always spent the night in a sleepover with the cousins and the grandparents. My dad, being a pastor, the spiritual side was very important—very present.

***CCM: What we consider definitive Christmas recordings are typically chock full of hugely orchestrated, anthemic-produced tracks. Your Christmas EPs remain concertedly restrained, in a good way. Is that reflective of how you feel about the season?***

**MM:** Part of that is because it’s more expensive to hire orchestras and choirs. Part of that is, as a Canadian, maybe I have a higher appreciation for subtlety, and I’ve been discovering my voice more in recent years—figuring out what I sound like outside of rock ‘n’ roll. The more low key stuff allows me to just be a singer and let the music sort of support that, instead of finding my little window of sound amidst big guitars.

***CCM: Speaking of big guitars, you were in the Christian music limelight for several years as the front man for your band, Downhere. Now you are fronting a wildly successful run of Queen Extravaganza, and becoming this sort-of poster boy for cover tunes gone viral—which has afforded you tour dates in halls and on platforms with artists that I can only imagine growing up a pastor’s kid, and as a part of a largely contemporary Christian music band, you never even dreamed of. Does this season of your career feel completely detached from the first part of your career?***

**MM:** It definitely feels like a new season. When Downhere ended in 2013, the first Queen tour I did overlapped with a Downhere tour. It was a seamless transition for me as a musician. I was going from one type of music to a slightly different kind of music. The big transition was the people I was with, because all of a sudden I wasn’t in that bubble of contemporary Christian, which you really get used to. It becomes a very safe place. I wasn’t in that environment anymore.

***CCM: Did you feel unsafe?***

**MM:** No, I’m pretty firm in what I stand for. I was never the wild child—my brother took care of that. [Laughs] I’m pretty good at falling in line for whatever the purpose is at hand. There’s a bit of a natural leadership that comes out of my personality somehow that people sort-of sometimes look up to. I’ve had it said to me more than once, “Whenever you are in a situation, it just feels more calm and peaceful,” and I really like that.



***CCM: Now being in more “secular” settings, do you feel like that has had a certain impact on your faith—on how you define or experience your faith?***

**MM:** I pretty much formed the foundation for my faith earlier in life, even before I was in a Christian band or went off to Bible College in the 90s.

I grew up in a pastor’s home, so for a good chunk of my youth my parents’ faith was my faith. And then I went through the whole thing where you have to figure out, “Why do I believe this?” Is it just because of your parents? And so I had gone through those motions, so that when I got into a situation where I was outside of my comfort zone, there wasn’t any fear involved. It was exciting to branch out and be a little more well-rounded when it comes to my understanding of the world I live in.

***CCM: Thinking about Downhere—as a songwriter and as an artist you’re really putting a lot of your personality into the music you’re inviting people to listen to. Since your more recent successes have come through setting your voice to other people’s songs, is there tension, an internal struggle, between the songwriter-artist and the cover artist? Do you wonder, Am I still expressing myself as an artistic being?***

**MM:** There’s nothing better than writing and performing your own music and seeing a crowd react really well to that. Downhere never really played covers unless we were leading worship, and then in the second half of our career, when the **Freddie Mercury** comparisons started, we played a Queen song every now and then. But it was very rare. We were very strong-minded songwriters, and we wanted to get our message out.

But over the last few years, my thinking has changed a lot. There is value in music. If we believe that music is a gift from God, then we can't say that only music that talks about God is a gift from God. There's just so much to learn outside of contemporary Christian music, different ways of expressing emotions like anger and disappointment. It's been really enriching for me as an artist to get to know some other artists' stuff and seeing the value in it, even if it's not written from the exact [perspectives] of my beliefs.

***CCM: That belief that music is this spiritual connector—no matter what stream of religion or faith you come from—music has a way of connecting us to one another and to God. So a Christmas recording seems like such a double-whammy for you considering Christmas songs are some of the most covered tunes in Creation, and are strongly spiritual in nature.***

**MM:** As a musician, whether you like it or not, you're always picking apart and internalizing music, and thinking how would I sing this—especially with sacred Christmas music. It's more meaningful [for me] because it connects with me on a different level. So I would say there's a difference between me covering "Don't Stop Me Now" and "The First Noel" ... although I don't like to be stopped. [*Laughs*] [These songs] reach deeper into my soul inevitably.

***CCM: Don't you think it's interesting that our celebration of Christmas falls during the darkest point in our physical calendar? Yet, for so many, this season of Advent—of longing and expectancy—is this launching point for hope, a light in the dark. How has this Advent hope influenced your life?***

**MM:** My favorite thing about the story of Jesus is how God flipped expectation on its head. That's how I approach the Christmas season. Advent is about waiting for this flicker of light, which of course the Jewish people were highly expectant of for centuries, and they were almost losing hope about it, and then all of a sudden, this baby comes and this guy starts to declare that he's the Son of God. It just wasn't what they expected. They weren't expecting a flame, they were expecting an explosion in the sky or something like that. But it's so beautiful that God would make what seems small the most important thing. That's what focus on in my faith, remembering the small things like humility and grace and forgiveness and love. That's the biggest takeaway I have from Christmas every year.

***CCM: In a way, I think Advent is more than a posture for the holiday season. It's this idea of perpetual expectancy, especially in a culture that's so rife with strife and dissension.***

**MM:** When you say that, it's a posture of expectancy that I think we should carry around all the time ... What is God going to do now? That's just a good way to live. CCM

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Dec. 1, 2017

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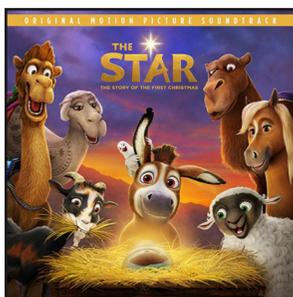
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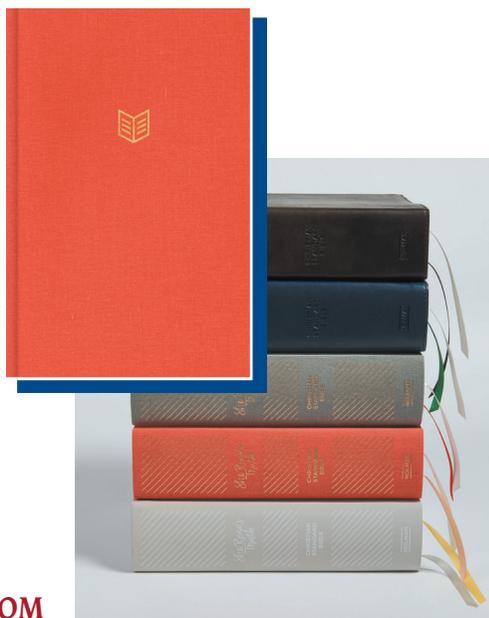


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CHARACTERISTIC	EXPLANATION	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus is the Son of God.	Though Jesus called the disciples, the Pharisees, and Jesus himself "of four parents, truly the Son of God is the Son of God."	16:17b, 27b	11:20-31	19:5-9	1:1
Jesus is God who became human.	Jesus is both fully God and fully man. The deity and humanity of Jesus are explained through the testimony of the gospel writers and the disciples.	1:1	1:1-8	1:1-4	1:1-14
Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.	Jesus is the Messiah, the promised deliverer of the nation of Israel and of all humanity.	16:16b	8:29	9:20	4:42
Jesus came to save sinners.	Jesus purposed on earth not to save sinners by taking their punishment on himself.	9:13	2:17	19:10	1:7
Jesus has power to forgive sin.	Because He is God, Jesus has the authority to forgive sin.	9:1-8	2:1-12	9:1-5	1:4-11
Jesus has authority over death.	Jesus has the power to raise the dead. He conquered death through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection.	9:1-8	5:20-26	7:11-15	11:1-14
Jesus has power to give eternal life.	God has given Jesus authority to give eternal life to all who believe in Him.	10:17	8:17	9:11	1:12
Jesus healed the sick.	Jesus has power over all physical sickness. While on earth, He healed many people, from blind men and lame men to leprosy.	8:16-17	1:34	14:13-14	4:34
Jesus taught with authority.	As the Son of God, Jesus has authority over heaven and earth.	23:2-10	4:1-11	4:14-15	1:22
Jesus is compassionate.	Jesus showed compassion for all people—those who were lost and those who followed Him.	9:13	14:14-21	15:1-2	1:4-11
Jesus experienced sorrow.	Jesus experienced sorrow and many other emotions.	26:38	8:23	22:44	1:9
Jesus never disobeyed God.	Jesus lived a perfect life without sin. Even though He was tempted, He yielded back to His Father to obey Scripture to the letter.	4:1-11	1:13	4:1-15	1:13

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The Bible is a complex work in which many stories continue to tell one story. As you read the Gospel of Luke, consider reading the additional passages to discover how the whole of Scripture works together.

Book 3  
 Luke 1:1-4  
 Luke 2:1-7  
 Luke 2:8-20  
 Luke 2:21-40  
 Luke 2:41-52  
 Luke 3:1-2  
 Luke 3:3-17  
 Luke 3:18-22  
 Luke 3:23-38  
 Luke 4:1-13  
 Luke 4:14-30  
 Luke 4:31-44  
 Luke 4:45

Book 2  
 Luke 5:1-11  
 Luke 5:12-16  
 Luke 5:17-26  
 Luke 5:27-32  
 Luke 5:33-39  
 Luke 6:1-11  
 Luke 6:12-16  
 Luke 6:17-26  
 Luke 6:27-36  
 Luke 6:37-42  
 Luke 6:43-49  
 Luke 7:1-17  
 Luke 7:18-23  
 Luke 7:24-35  
 Luke 7:36-50  
 Luke 7:51-54  
 Luke 7:55-8:8  
 Luke 8:9-15  
 Luke 8:16-18  
 Luke 8:19-26  
 Luke 8:27-33  
 Luke 8:34-39  
 Luke 8:40-56  
 Luke 9:1-17  
 Luke 9:18-22  
 Luke 9:23-27  
 Luke 9:28-35  
 Luke 9:36-45  
 Luke 9:46-48  
 Luke 9:49-55  
 Luke 9:56-62  
 Luke 10:1-16  
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 Luke 10:25-37  
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 Luke 11:1-13  
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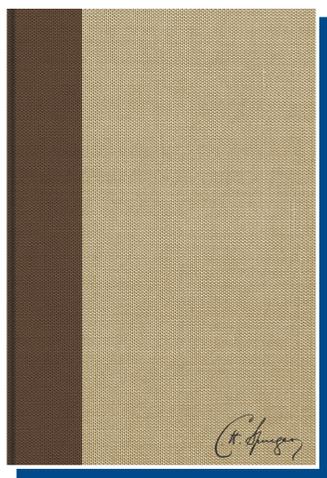


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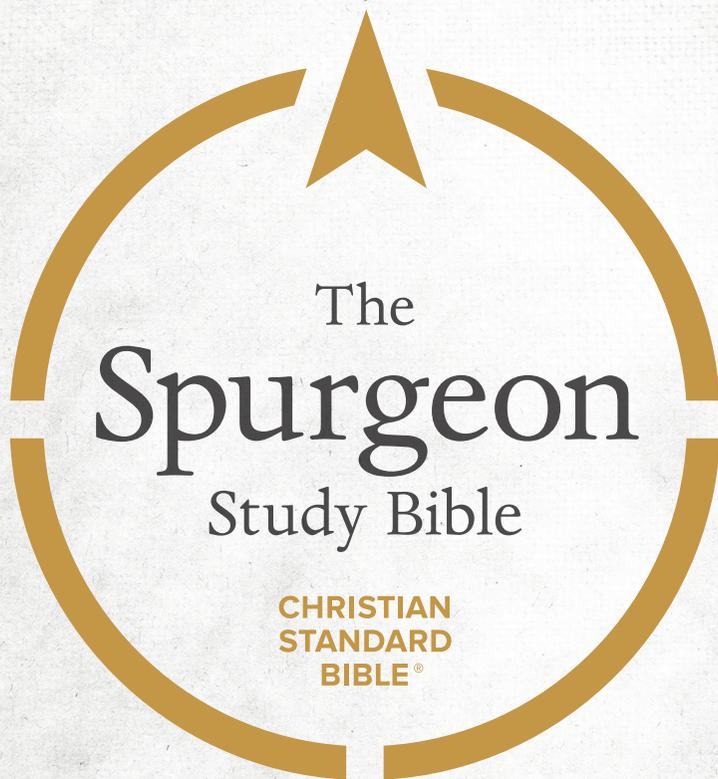


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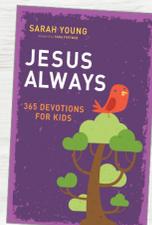
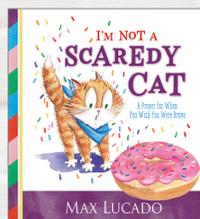
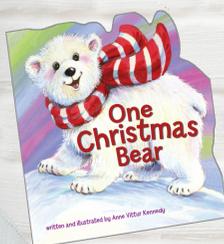
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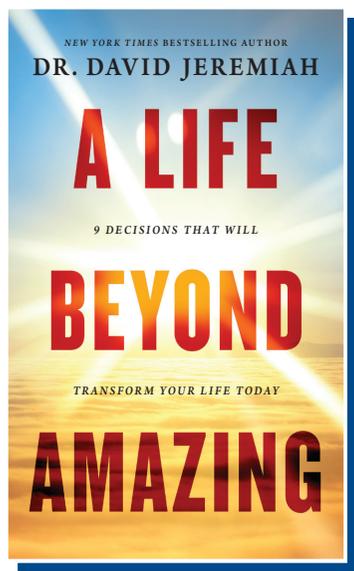
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In *A Life Beyond Amazing*, Dr. David Jeremiah focuses on nine qualities that compose a life-beyond-amazing. He unpacks what it means to become the people God wants us to be and explores how the Holy Spirit helps us to develop these qualities in our lives.

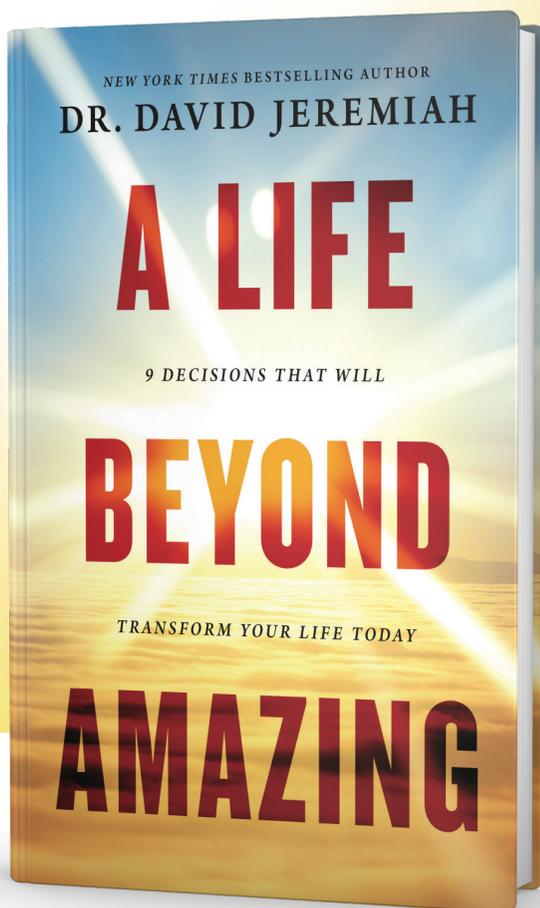
*“A life beyond amazing doesn’t have to start when we step into heaven,”*  
says Dr. Jeremiah. *“A life beyond amazing can be lived right here on earth.”*

*A Life Beyond Amazing*  
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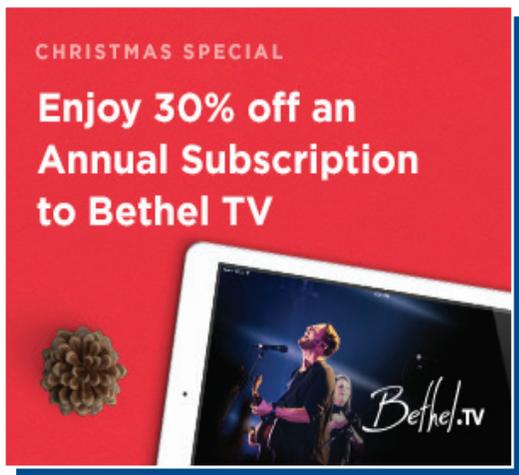
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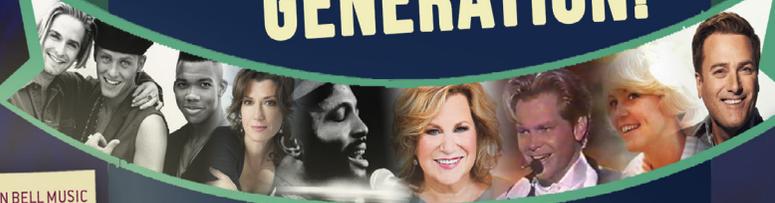


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