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December 2011



The Bowlings

Also In This Issue



Marshall Hall, Gloria Gaither, Karen Peck & New River and Christy Sutherland

Publisher's Point

by Rob Patz



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December 2011



Letter from the Editor

by Rhonda Frye
"The Gift of Grace"

Welcome to the last edition of Scoops Magazine in the year 2011! What a year it has been. The months are zip-ping by me at lightning speed and honestly, I'm surprised it's December. It has been an amazing year for me personally. I have made the most wonderful friends since coming on board at Scoops Magazine. Not a day goes by without me thanking God for the grace He's extended to me by allowing me to serve in this role.

This month, we are celebrating the Gift of Grace. When Jesus came to earth, He set the dispensation of grace into motion. Really, there isn't a word that could adequately describe His grace; it is too extravagant to explain. All I can say is, I have encountered extreme grace first-hand many times in my life and every time, it's a humbling experience resulting in gratefulness.

This month, I had the chance to talk with the Bowlings. It was a pleasure just to be in their presence. They truly shine with God's grace! Every time our conversation turned toward the Lord, the sweetest spirit came forth in Mike, Kelly and Terah. As a writer, it's sometimes hard to capture the tone of voice and spirit that is displayed in an interview. As we talked about grace, it seemed their voices hushed and words emerged from somewhere deep within as they shared from open hearts about a topic they know well and cherish.

"His grace is amazing just to think that He would give his Son on an old rugged cross for us to be saved for somebody that didn't deserve it- we had done nothing good," Mike said in the most humble way almost as if he were still shocked by it. He explained that most people have a tendency to think their sin is too big or too much for God to handle and therefore we don't deserve His grace. "It's the truth," Mike said, "I think people deal with unforgiveness- they can't forgive themselves for the things they've

done and that's the very reason He died so that he could cover us with his blood." I agree with Mike as he added, "I don't think we should take his grace for granted and abuse it or anything, but I don't think our human minds can truly fathom how broad, how high, deep and how wide that his grace really goes."

Being that it's Christmas, the season of giving, I asked Kelly about giving grace away. Grace giving in the home, in the form of forgiveness, is the first thing that came to her mind. "We can give his grace away, obviously grace is freely given from God, but we can be gracious with other people. We can be forgiving even when we don't feel like being forgiving. I think of the times- as being married and being a mom. We all have bad days, but on those bad days when your husband looks at you and says, 'It's ok- I love you anyway' or your kids say 'It's ok, mommy'- that's the description of grace. Grace means loving you in spite of anything- they love who you are." Well stated!

My desire is that you see God's grace woven in our stories this month. Keep in mind, the most wonderful thing about God's grace is that there is an endless supply! My prayer for you (and me) is to give His grace as freely as we have received- that's the key to winning this world to Christ! Romans 2:4 tells us that it's the kindness or the goodness of God that leads people to repentance. If we all mirrored the goodness of God by extending His grace, we would turn this world upside down!

My Christmas gift to you is to leave you with the lyrics written by Annie Johnson Flint (1866-1932). May your Christmas be filled with much grace. And.. May you give it away because there is more!

He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials He multiplies peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Table of Contents

2	Publisher's Point
3	Letter From the Editor
6	Contributors
8	Life, Love, and Legends
9	Christy Sutherland
12	Women of Faith Experience
16	COVER STORY - The Bowlings
20	Media and The Gospel [Part 3]
27	Bill & Gloria Gaither's Homecoming Christmas
31	Grace Shocks and Multiplies
33	Marshall Hall
36	Do I Really Want God's Will for My Life?
39	New Music for December
44	Voices Won Celebrating 10 Years
48	Amber Nelon
50	Christmas with The Diplomats
53	Yes! You Can Stay Fit for Christmas
55	Rachel McCutcheon
57	Visiting the Museum of Flight
58	Homeland's Scott Godsey
61	How Will We Use Our Gifts?

Mission Statement

SGNScoops exists to promote the gospel by unveiling what is intriguing and real about Southern Gospel and Christian Country music. With integrity, we aspire to strengthen Christians, highlight people who are fulfilling a call to minister and emphasize the music that inspires audiences and glorifies God.



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Contributors

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Rob Patz is the President and CEO of Coastal Media Group. Rob has an 18 year history in radio hosting the nationally syndicated radio show, "The Southern Styles Show" since its beginning in 1993. Rob is also the owner of the internet's #1 Southern Gospel station, SGMRadio.com. In

2009, Rob Patz acquired SGNScoops.com, including the all- digital Scoops Magazine and the Diamond Awards. Rob has taken part in several Christian television projects working in front of the camera and also has helped create several syndicated television programs as well. Rob does voice work for various outlets including fortune 500 companies as well as emceeing concerts and special events. Email Rob at rob@sgnscoops.com.



Rhonda Frye is an ordained minister serving as the Associate and Worship Pastor at Rock Pointe Church in Fort Oglethorpe, GA. She is a recording artist, songwriter, preschool music teacher and sings with family trio, "Rhonda Frye & RiverSide." Rhonda is from Ringgold, GA and is supported by her husband and their 3 children. To learn more about Rhonda Frye Music Ministries, visit: <http://rhondafrye.com>

supported by her husband and their 3 children. To learn more about Rhonda Frye Music Ministries, visit: <http://rhondafrye.com>



Lou Wills Hildreth appears on the Gaither Homecoming Videos, and is a founding member of Texas First Family Of Gospel Music, the "Singing Wills Family." She helped pioneer Christian television as host of "Wills Family Inspirational TV." After moving to Nashville in the sixties, she was the

first woman to own an artist management agency. Lou is an inductee of the Texas Gospel Music Hall Of Fame, GMA Gospel Music Hall Of Fame, SGMA Hall Of Fame at Dollywood, and the Christian Music Hall Of Fame. She is a recipient of an Honorary Doctorate Of Sacred Music from Louisiana Baptist University. Recently, Gaither Homecoming Magazine named Lou in the "Hall Of Honor" series, and the Southern Gospel Music Guild gave her a "Lifetime Achievement Award." Lou is celebrating a 65th wedding anniversary in 2011 with Howard, and they live in Houston near son Dr. David Hildreth and daughter Kathryn Mumaw, and 4 grandchildren. Visit Lou at: <http://louhildreth.com>



Victoria Shirey first took the stage at 3 years old. Strong vocal abilities and harmonies are a God given talent that started in her at a very young age. Along with writing for SGN Scoops, she designs websites, is a Producer and Background Vocalist

for Homeland Records out of Gallatin, TN and is a part-time cruise director for Paradise Tours & Travel. Victoria writes and arranges most of The Shirey's music as well. Most importantly, she loves the Lord with all of her heart and makes it her goal to let the love of God shine through her.

Visit victoria at: <http://theshireysministries.com>



Sandi Duncan Clark and Cliff Clark make their home in Easley, S.C. where they enjoy traveling, gardening, and the beautiful South Carolina weather. Sandi has worked in journalism for more than thirty years, and she is thankful that her love for God and

Gospel music provides a great opportunity to positively impact the careers of so many in Gospel music.

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Through a series of events, Jeff Hawes has moved from the classroom where he taught high school English in Jackson county, Alabama to the tour bus of gospel great Karen Peck & New River. Jeff chronicles the fulfillment of his gospel music dreams and his road

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Contributors

December 2011



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John Mathis Jr's life and musical influences have given him years of experience in the music industry in the areas of songwriting and music publishing, radio, publicity, A&R and recording. Another influence in John's life has been ministry. His grand-father was a church-planter and minister for

43 years, his father was a national evangelist. John has spent a number of years as an evangelist, pastor, worship director and public speaker. Currently, John works with Mansion Entertainment in the aspects of media promotions, publishing and recording while continuing to write, manage his own music catalog and occasionally speak. www.themansionentertainment.com
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Jennifer Campbell is a singer, songwriter, musician, and middle school English teacher from McAlpin, Florida. Along with her passion for teaching, she has an even greater passion for ministering to others, spreading the message that there is joy around the bend. She serves as a group leader for

Women of Faith, designs websites, and writes an inspirational blog at <http://jenniferjoycampbell.blogspot.com> Learn more about Jennifer at <http://jennifercampbell.net>



Rob Estep is a vital part of the ministry of the popular group, BEYOND THE ASHES. Currently serving as the Office and Road Manager, his wealth of experience in office management skills makes him a true asset to the group.

His expertise of handling daily operations and road responsibilities go unsurpassed in quality. Rob has worked full time alongside of Anthony Facello for the past two years. Rob's Music Pastor Father exposed him to all genres of music growing up, therefore since childhood; he has had a rich love for Southern Gospel Music. Rob studied business at Columbus State Community College, is a HUGE Buckeye Football fan, and is single- but open to dating when the right one comes along. Email Rob at: robstep@sgnscoops.com



Canadian-born Lorraine Walker has a love for Jesus Christ, music and writing. The combination of these passions has produced artist features and monthly columns for Southern Gospel publications including SGM Radio website and SGN Scoops Digital

magazine. Lorraine desires that the power of the written word will glorify her Lord and bring readers closer to the love, peace and majesty of the Almighty. Email Lorraine at lorraine@sgnscoops.com



Evie Johnson-Hawkins is a native of Somerville, AL and has always had a passion for Gospel music and writing. She has written for newspapers and magazines and used her talents to develop EHA-Nashville, a management/consulting agency for the music industry. Visit: <http://eviehawkinsagency.net/>



Pete Schwager is a full-time web developer and also owns his freelance design business, Cre8able Media. He enjoys all things technology related and also loves learning more about Christ through Bible study and other reading material. He is married and

has two small children. They live in Ringgold, GA. Find him on the web at <http://cre8able.com>

Life, Love & LEGENDS

by Lou Wills Hildreth



What a privilege to greet you at this glorious Christmas season. May the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, bring extreme joy, warm, comfort, and precious peace to you! I am honored to be on the team of this powerful magazine SGN SCOOPS with Publisher Rob Patz, Editor in Chief Rhonda Frye, and a host of talented writers. Our mutual desire is to spread love and to broaden the impact of the gospel on today's culture. My personal passion is to be an encouragement to those who are now carrying the banner for Southern Gospel music.

Lately, I have been feeling a strong sense of urgency to remember those pioneers who paved the way for our beloved music. The establishment of Southern Gospel's first quartet in 1910 by James D. Vaughan, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, set the course. At the peak of his success, Vaughan had a total of 16 quartets on the road singing and selling his songbooks. In 1924, V. O. Stamps founded the Stamps Music Company, and Texas became a stronghold of gospel music. Later it became Stamps Baxter Music Company as J. R. Baxter came aboard. The Stamps Quartet, organized in 1924 by Frank Stamps, was broadcast daily on KRLD, Dallas, and "Give The World A Smile" became a national theme for our music. I am thankful for these legends that inspired my family to sing and become known as Texas' first family of gospel music—the Singing Wills Family. We began in 1938, but in the 60's and 70's, our ministry expanded far beyond Texas as our TV series "Wills Family Inspirational Time" was being shown nationally. I cannot remember a time in my life when I was not involved in gospel music. My dad "Pop" Wills was

President of the Texas-Oklahoma Singing Convention in the thirties, and the Wills Family Quartet traveled those Texas-Oklahoma roads, representing the big "T & O." In my book "Deep Within My Heart" I describe the excitement of an appearance by V. O. Stamps at one of those conventions. In an interview with Bill Gaither on the Homecoming DVD "Nashville Gospel" we talked about those early days and the influence of those pioneers. Bill was intrigued that I had met V. O. Stamps, and I reminded him that I was a little girl at the time. In the interview, I thanked Bill for the impact the Homecoming videos have on gospel music today and for the joy of appearing on them. There is no doubt that God's favor has been on the outreach of Bill and Gloria Gaither, in their songs that took our music from the singing conventions to the church platform, and to the world with the Homecoming videos. As we close the year, I pray God's blessings on the artists and industry personnel who are taking gospel music to a new level.

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CHRISTY'S MIRACLE OF GRACE: CHRISTY SUTHERLAND

BY RHONDA FRYE

Christy Sutherland's story is nothing short of a miracle- it's a beautiful picture of God's grace. With a combination of Christy's faith, and divine grace, Ms. Sutherland launched a career in Christian Music just a few very short years ago. Completely unknown at the time, Christy released two independently created mini albums and has been amazed at the success. In 2009, she received the Visionary Award for Southern Gospel Female Artist presented by Christian Music Hall of Fame and she also received a Diamond Award in 2010 for Christian Country Female Vocalist.

In the past five years,

Christy has shared the stage with some of the greatest in gospel music. Artists such as, Jason Crabb, Karen Peck and New River, Brian Free and Assurance, Gold City Quartet, Guy Penrod and more. She has appeared on the 700 Club and the Hour of Prayer Television Shows, and performed at the late Jerry Falwell's, Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University. She has taped her first Gaither Homecoming Series and has starred in Louise Mandrell's Christmas Extravaganzas in the past few years.

Christy Sutherland possesses vocal talent and style that blurs all Christian musical genres AND she

is a gifted songwriter as well. Well-known artists such as Sandi Patti, Kim Hopper and the Greens have recorded her works. Triumphant Quartet landed in the top 5 with Christy's "Somebody Died For Me." Her Christmas composition, "Cry in the Dark" was picked up for a Lifeway Musical and "God Is In This Place" was published in a Word Choral Collection. More than 40 of Christy's songs have been recorded in the past four years.

Grace For The Early Years...

Christy's success story begins with her broken heart. Although she grew up singing in church all of her life, she chased the dream of having a career in Country

Music. She worked for a decade in Nashville and during that time she claimed two major- label recording contracts and a staff writing position for a major publishing company on Music Row. Unexpectedly, her Country Music Career came to a screeching halt when she was let go of her writing position and dropped from her record label. Emotionally, Christy hit "rock-bottom" when she realized her dream was over.

In reality, the dream was far from over; God had a much bigger one. Even during Christy's time in Country Music, she held tightly to her faith, but God had huge plans for Christy to share her faith

through Christian Music and Songwriting. At the crumbling of her Country Music Career, God's providential plan had sprung into action.

Following Music Row's rejection, Christy was forced to find other work and took a position selling cosmetics in a department store. That was surely the last place she wanted to be, but it ended up being the very place she needed to be to meet the man of her dreams, Matt Dudney. This was the beginning of God's dream for Christy!

Matt Dudney, son of Country Music Star, Barbara Mandrell, and Christy married in July of 2006. Since then, Matt has been Christy's biggest supporter and encourager. He left his career to personally manage Christy's music career. Superstar, Barbara Mandrell has welcomed Christy into the family and has become a mentor and huge supporter of Christy's music. In fact, Barbara came out of retirement and into the studio to co-produce Christy's latest album. *Grace For Now...*

During the 2011 National Quartet Convention, SGN Scoops had the privilege of talking with Christy about the latest happenings in her ministry. Christy is very excited about her latest album, *GREATER STILL* scheduled to be released in late November or early December.

Christy was inspired to write the title cut, "Greater Still" by a real circumstance. Christy shares: "I was at Baptist Hospital in the ICU unit about 5 years ago visiting my cousin, Nicole, Louise Mandrell's daughter. Nicole struggled with drug abuse and she had overdosed. Aunt Louise had called us and said the doctors were saying she was going to die."

Christy continues, "It was just horrible seeing Nicole like that with all those tubes- she was in her early 20's. I just kept thinking, she's going to be ok- she HAS to be ok!" Christy shared how she just kept thinking over and over in her mind, God is GREATER than this! "God is greater, He's bigger than the drug addiction, He's greater than the tubes, He's greater than the diagnosis," she said with much conviction.

Nicole had been diagnosed with "leather lung" a condition when the lungs literally dry up and shrivel. "Wouldn't you know it," declared Christy, "God had the one doctor at that time in the nation who had the cure for leather lung at Baptist Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee that Thursday morning! And God used him to bring healing to her!" Christy gives God the praise for Nicole's complete healing. "She's been sober five years, she's a drug counselor working with families with



children on drugs," Christy explained.

Christy sang a few lines "Greater Still" in the Scoops booth and explained how as she paced the halls of the hospital, she kept hearing the melody and the words "Greater Still." It took her a couple years to actually finish writing the song because she would become overcome with emotion as she tried to write.

"Mom Barbara," as Christy fondly refers to Barbara Mandrell, co-produced the album and encouraged Christy to ask Jason Crabb to sing it with her as a duet. Crabb and Sutherland recorded the song and it was released

to National radio in September. The song has received positive feedback and has been received well by audiences. "I tell people all the time," Christy explains, "No, you can't beat the addiction, you can't do this on your own, but HE can do anything if you ask Him to do it. He wants to and is waiting to deliver. He's literally running to you!"

Another selection on the new album that is dear to Christy's heart is, "Keep On Waiting."

"My husband and I have been trying to have a child for a couple of years. Several months ago, I was really upset when we weren't pregnant. I actually felt angry with



photo by Phillip Morris

"The Old Path" is more

Christian Country, there is Southern Gospel and there is 'The Lord's Prayer' that's a capella- which doesn't fit any genre." GRACE TO GIVE

God has been gracious and kind to Christy Sutherland and it's a blessing to see her extend the grace to others as it's been given to her. Christy signed an exclusive distribution agreement with Family Christian Book Stores earlier this year, meaning her new album will be sold exclusively through Family Christian Bookstores. Family Christian sponsors a foundation called The James Fund. The James Fund is a Non-Profit organization dedicated to meeting the needs of orphans and widows around the world. A portion of all of Christy's sales will go toward the James fund.

"The James Fund is a

wonderful organization," Christy explains, "and

is based on James 1:27 which commissions the church basically to care for widows and orphans." Christy continues, "They build orphanages all over the world, they support widows and are involved with getting girls out of human trafficking situations." She adds, "I knew when I met them {executives of Family Christian} they were the real deal. Not only do they help orphans and children, but they teach skills. They teach them how to make things and pay them really well- not just enough to make a living, but to save to go to school so that their children can go to school." Christy continues, "My husband and I are planning on going to Guatemala with them and visiting one of the orphanages."

Christy (along with co-writer, Regi Stone) has recently written a theme

song for the James Fund called "Show the Love" and it has been heavily used for promotional videos.

Grace For The Future

The beautiful thing about God's grace is that it is endless! God has an endless supply and it will be amazing to see what Christy Sutherland will do next by the grace of God! Christy is definitely one to keep watching for great things!

Keep up with the ministry of Christy Sutherland by visiting her website at

<http://christysutherland.net> also on facebook and twitter.

To learn more about the mission of the James Fund and how you can be involved, visit <http://www.jamesfund.org/>.

God. I know that sounds horrible, but that's actually how I felt," Christy confessed. "God made me, He knows how I feel, so I told Him, 'I'm angry, I'm tired of this and I'm sad!' As I was telling Him these things, I heard this song 'Keep On Waiting' going through my head. As I sang this over and over, I began feeling stronger."

In concert as Christy sings, "Keep On Waiting" her faith rises and she tells the crowd to go ahead and send in the diapers! "It's just that I know God is so good and I know His timing is perfect," Christy says with her contagious smile. "There is a reason for everything and I wouldn't have this song if I had gotten pregnant the first month we tried," she adds.

The new album includes a collection of different styles of music. Christy explains, "'Keep On Waiting' is black gospel,

Patience Really is a Virtue: My Women of Faith Experience



By Jennifer Campbell

**Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.
Psalms 37:7 (NIV)**

Have you ever had a frustrating experience? Or was there ever a time that your patience was tested? Surely, all of us have been frustrated or lacking patience at some point in our lives. It is during these times that we need to call on the name of Jesus to calm our spirits and bestow upon us the divine patience that only He can give.

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend the Women of Faith conference in Tampa, Florida. Little did I know that my first experience as a Women of Faith Group Leader would not only uplift and inspire, but it would also bring me closer to His throne, strengthen my faith, and increase my patience.

The alarm clock sounded. I woke up on time. Yet I drove out of the driveway fifteen minutes late at 5:45 a.m. Still, I had allowed adequate time to get to my destination, so I was not too concerned. The only thing that concerned me was the fact that my phone picked this particular morning to malfunction. Making this three and a half hour journey without a properly working cell phone had me a little on the edge, to say the least. Quickly, I composed myself and began to pray...for my phone. Shortly after, my phone began to run like a Swiss watch.

I'm so grateful that God even cares about the little things. It wasn't until the last few miles of my journey did I realize just how God's hand had covered much more than my phone.

The last four and a half miles of Interstate travel took more than 45 minutes to navigate, due to a three-car pile-up. While I am certainly not an expert on vehicular accidents, it appeared that the accident had likely taken place approximately fifteen minutes prior. Fifteen minutes. The amount of time I was delayed. Immediately, I began to pray for those involved in the accident, that their lives would be spared and that God would place His hand upon them. And I quietly thanked Him, too, that I was spared from this accident.

Upon my arrival in downtown Tampa, I had difficulty finding my way through the maze of construction and detours. Yet I ended up in a parking garage, parked right next to a dear friend I had not seen since last year's Women of Faith event. The entire weekend was a waterfall of unexpected blessings like this one. From a seat right next to the Porch Pals the entire weekend to spending time with dear friends, everything was better than I could have ever imagined. And some moments were so special that an experienced screenwriter could not have penned them so beautifully. There were so many highlights, including my visits with Sheila Walsh, Mary Graham, and so many other special people who have grown so very dear to my heart, along with the sweet spirit that was present throughout the arena. These moments made a wonderful weekend even more precious.

Of course, the weekend would not have been as meaningful without the encouragement and inspiration presented by the Women of Faith team. One pivotal moment was when my question was answered by Sheila Walsh and Dr. Henry Cloud during the Q&A session on Friday afternoon. It was as if God was speaking through them, for the Holy Spirit knew exactly what I needed to hear. Natalie Grant's soul-stirring rendition of "It Is Well With My Soul" brought to mind 2 Corinthians 2: 15 (NIV): "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." This scripture exemplifies the way that all of the Women of Faith speakers and artists dedicate their lives to sending off the sweet spirit of the Lord to thousands of women every year.

Every moment of the weekend was incredible. And the entire time, I wondered, how would the weekend have



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been if I had not left fifteen minutes late? What would it have been like if I had gotten angry instead of getting through to the throne of grace? All weekend, I told others of my journey to Women of Faith this year. And the entire time, I felt as if I was walking on cloud nine. My smile was wider, my steps were lighter, and I am sure I was beaming with joy because I was filled to overflowing with the goodness of the Lord. Little did I know, amidst the fullness of joy in my heart, that God was still preparing another test of my patience.

On Friday night, I walked out of the arena when the event was over, expecting to find the shuttle waiting to transport me to my nearby hotel. Yet, countless buses, vans, cars, shuttles, and taxi cabs drove by, picking up ladies from all walks of life. All except for the shuttle I



was waiting for. Fifteen minutes went by. The hotel said they were on their way. Fifteen more minutes passed. The shuttle driver relayed a message via telephone that the roads were blocked. The police said the roads were clear. Twelve ladies remained. The other 7,000+ had found a way to their accommodations for the evening. A taxi cab came by and took four ladies to our hotel for two dollars each. Inexpensive? Yes. Did I go? No. Something tugged at my heart, urging me to wait. Just wait. After waiting for over an hour, the shuttle finally came. Apparently, the shuttle driver was having a difficult night. We had been asked to stop by the front desk when we arrived at the hotel. The manager apologized. Our patience was rewarded with \$100 being deducted from our bill. God amazed me once more by turning this aggravation into a blessing in disguise.

Sometimes, God wants us to wait patiently to avoid a harmful circumstance. Other times, He wants us to wait patiently for a blessing that He has in store. Psalms 37:7 (NIV) says, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." God's word does not call us to fidget and become frustrated while we are waiting. Instead, it says that we should "be still" and "wait patiently." So, the next time you're in line and someone in front of you seems to be using their debit card for the first time, wait patiently. God may use you to minister to them or someone around you. Or if your flight is delayed, remember that God may know something you do not. Even a small delay could be the difference between life and death. Our Heavenly Father truly knows best.

When I think back to all of the times God has protected



me from harm, and I consider the times when I didn't even know harm existed, I fall in love with Him all over again. He loves us unconditionally. There is never a time in your life that God is not thinking about you. He wants you to listen to His still, small voice. Sure, you may have to wait. Every day, I am reminded that patience really is a virtue. At times, it may be a struggle to demonstrate patience, especially after waiting for days, months, or years. But God's word says that like Abraham, we, too, will receive what is promised if we wait patiently on Him (Hebrews 6:15). Be still. Wait patiently. And see God move.

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Experiencing God's Sufficient Grace: The Bowling Family

by Rhonda Frye

Without a doubt, The Bowlings are a favorite in Southern Gospel Music today. Mike Bowling, Kelly Bowling and Terah Penhollow, have only been singing together for almost three short years. In this time frame, the Bowlings fine-tuned their sound, claimed their style and marked their place in the Industry. It is also during this time period that if "the enemy" would have had his way, their ministry and lives would have come to an end. Not only did God's amazing grace save their lives, but His provisional grace has met every need as they have made their way from an accident scene back into the music scene.

At the 2011 National Quartet Convention, SGN Scoops had the privilege of talking to the Bowlings to find out the latest endeavors in their ministry. We talked about the formation of the trio, new music, updates and thoughts regarding the bus accident AND their Christmas traditions. The Bowling Family is a perfect fit for December's Issue- "The Gift of Grace!"

Although Mike, Kelly and Terah have

only been singing as a trio for nearly three years, they are hardly new to the industry. Mike Bowling has been singing since he was a young boy with a professional career beginning at age sixteen. Mike sang with several well-known groups such as The LeFevres, The New Hinsons, and the Perrys, and achieved great success as a solo artist. Kelly and Terah began their singing careers in their teenage years too singing with their siblings for many years as "The Crabb Family."

Before coming together as a trio, the Bowlings have claimed many awards and have been granted the opportunity to minister in a variety of venues. Collectively, they have garnered three GRAMMY® nominations, nineteen Dove Award nominations, eleven Dove Awards and eighteen SoGospel awards. They have been regulars on the Grand Ole Opry, made multiple appearances on Gaither Videos, have made numerous television appearances and have performed across America as well as internationally. Collectively, they have sold more than 1.2 million

recordings and many of their songs have landed on the charts in the number one position.

When Mike and Kelly married, Mike was singing with the Perrys and Kelly was going strong with the Crabbs. "The early days were tough," Mike explains, but we knew it wouldn't be forever." The Crabb Family already had enough singers; there really wasn't any room for another one," he said. "We knew we would sing together some day and we didn't rush."

Eventually the time came for the Crabb family to retire as a group and they parted ways. "It was like a death," Kelly recalls.

"We were all so comfortable where we were," Terah adds. "Singing together was like breathing. We had been together so long that we didn't even have to think about what we were doing anymore and maybe that's why God moved us."

Kelly continues, "There was unity there too-we had such a bond. We shared so much together and that

was hard to leave. The stage part was hard to leave, but it was hard to leave getting back on the bus with your best friends- Five of my best friends in life. It was like a funeral."

After the split, Mike and Kelly teamed up to sing and the other siblings pursued other opportunities in music ministry. Mike explains, "Terah had decided to come off the road and be a stay at home mom and everyone was cool with that. Once, we needed someone to fill-in for us and we asked Terah. Once she did, she realized what she had given up and that the calling was still on her life."

People that have followed the Crabb Family for years have enjoyed watching Terah emerge to the forefront. "Many people are noticing how Terah has started to shine," Kelly says. "That makes me so proud



of her because she is shy." Kelly continues, "Well..... sort of shy, but to see her come out of that shell has been wonderful. It's like the Lord has been peeling back layers and I think that's a wonderful thing to see somebody go through and then see God step them forward."

Mike adds, "I love our harmony together and I'm just really excited about the future. It's a good thing to know that people are liking and appreciating your sound and what you're doing. "In the short three years we've been together, we've been through a lot together," Mike recalls.

Indeed the Bowlings have been through a lot together. Just when they were going strong, their new dream came to an unavoidable stop. On July 1, 2010 near Charlotte, North Carolina, the Bowling's bus collided with a tractor trailer sending eleven people to the hospital. Mike and daughter, Katelanne were air-lifted to the hospital from the scene. Both Mike and Kelly sustained serious injuries requiring many months of medical care. Mike still suffers severe headaches from the brain injury, Kelly was confined to a full body cast for months and perhaps Terah's greatest injury has been emotional trauma from witnessing the entire horrifying accident.

God supplied healing grace as they endured medical treatments, shed tears and dealt with panic attacks. God has been gradually healing them and they are finally getting back on track. "We are just slowly easing back into all of this and we're just starting to feel normal again," says Kelly. "We're feeling really good, we're not quite the same. Mike definitely isn't quite the same, his injury was definitely worse than mine, but we've just learned to take it easy and to be careful. Considering where we were this time last year, we feel awesome!"

Mike adds, "I'm doing great! I still have headaches, but I can't complain because we've come so far. We really appreciate everyone's

prayers! We have our good days and bad days, but of course I don't



remember the wreck due to the head injury." I still deal with having to put the kids back on the bus just dealing with the whole fright with worrying about it happening again."

"Terah and Kelly remember so much more about the wreck and they have had some post traumatic issues to go along with that," Mike explains. "It's a whole lot worse on them, but they are doing good. We're healing physically but mentally as well."

Mike and Kelly's children have bounced back since the accident. "Our girls are doing great," explains Kelly. "Kids bounce back quicker than adults do any day. They are very resilient. They talk about it as if it were a trip to the mall. They will say, 'remember that one time we had that wreck?' I thank God they are so resilient! Sometimes they are the ones to inspire you to be fearless because they are so fearless."

God also supplied grace when the time came for Kelly and Terah to step back onto a bus. Getting back on the bus for a full weekend for the first time was frightening

but could have been worse. The first time back on board was for a Crabb Celebration Tour with brothers, Jason, Adam, Aaron and the band. "I think if our first time would have just been Terah, Mike and I, we would have been so scared," Kelly admits.



"There were so many people to distract us from the fear, they kept us laughing," Kelly recalls.

The Bowlings have been changed due to the love shown to them during the recovery period. "We experienced so much grace through the wreck and through all the compassion shown to us. We had meals cooked for us, cards sent to us and people that just really went out of their way that could have just gone about their daily business and said 'I'll pray for them, that's all I can do,' but people went above and beyond," Kelly says. "We will never forget how well we have been treated in the past year," Kelly explains. "Because we went through so much pain and we experienced so much love- our compassion level has changed," she continues. "Now when I hear of someone else going through difficult or emotional pain, my heart is more burdened for them than it used to be. It makes me want to do something rather than sit and

do nothing."

The Bowlings will never view the concept of "The Body of Christ" ever the same. Mike shares: "People are still praying for us daily. You know people are your friends, and you know people like you if they will buy a ticket to come hear you, but until something like this happens you never know in depth how much they love you. We had never been at a point in our life where we were jobless. We had no income whatsoever for several months. Just to see people send checks and different organizations donate money- I'll just be honest, I was in tears every day. We were amazed at God's provision."

Even before the wreck, it was important to the Bowlings to choose relevant songs that could touch the hearts of people. The Bowlings are also known for their ability to be real and transparent with audiences during concerts. Some songs they've been singing for a long time, but they are still fresh. "Even as singers, we go through things and the songs still hit us because our circumstances change and we go through different things," Terah explains. "We experience those songs in a different way every night. Like 'Please Forgive Me,' we've sung that song since 1998, but it hits us differently every time we sing it." Mike adds, "We've always picked songs that would minister to hurting people that were going through trials, the broken hearted and especially the lost," Mike explains. "Ever since the wreck our songs that we've been singing for the last couple of years like 'Your Cries Have Woken The Master' and 'Lord I Need a Miracle Today,' have become so much more real. We've lived those songs and we feel them a lot more than we used to."

Since the accident, The Bowlings

have made their way back to the studio and have released a new album called FEELS LIKE SUNDAY. "The new album includes hymns, praise and worship songs and just old songs from our childhood," Kelly shares. "It's a collection of songs we've grown up singing for altar calls. It's black gospel to contemporary to songs in the hymnbook."

One of the contemporary cuts on the album is titled "Jesus Messiah" and features an angelic children's ensemble made up the Bowling children, Gracie, Hope and Katelanne, Terah's son, Logan and producer Terry and Rhonda Thompson's daughter, Kady. "The kids poured their heart into it," Mike shares. Indeed they did, and it's a sweet blessing to hear!

Mike says he doesn't have a favorite song from the new album- he likes them all. "I hate to pick a favorite," he says, "it's not our usual album where a theme carries through- it's different, every song is different. People are enjoying it!"



Terah and Kelly along with their brothers are scheduled to release a new Crabb Family album in February 2012. Kelly shares: "This all happened rather quickly. We talked about it, decided to do it and

just went for it. It's been really fun because I haven't been in the studio with Adam, Aaron, Jason and Terah all together in at least five years. The timing felt right and we're doing the Family Celebration Tour so we put together some fun and really great songs."

Christmas is most definitely the most wonderful time of the year



for the Bowlings. Mike and Kelly's home is filled with warmth and laughter as they make memories each Christmas Season. As a family, they bake cookies; watch Christmas movies, read Christmas books and the Christmas story in the Bible. Their three children can tell anyone the true meaning of Christmas and the whole Christmas Story. In addition to traditional Christmas activities, Mike makes the Christmas Season a joyous occasion! "Mike makes it a whole lot of fun- he is the Christmas poster child! He's just like a five year old little boy at Christmas- He loves it. Our kids know that Daddy takes Christmas very seriously, but they know it's not just about the 'santa-thing.' Obviously we celebrate the real meaning of Christmas," Kelly shares.

The Bowlings love to decorate every room in the house for the season. "Mike does have an

obsession," Kelly laughs, "He loves Santa Clauses!" "He loves the older ones, the ones from the 50's & 60's- I'm talking he's obsessed," she giggles. "If a package comes to the house between October and December, I know what's going to be in it- It's going to be an old Santa Claus. It may be big, small-but there will be some Santa Claus." Kelly

expects more Santas to arrive to add to Mike's collection. "He's obsessed with them, and I think it's adorable," Kelly smiles and admits. "I tease him, but it's adorable."

Christmas morning is very special for the Bowlings. Kelly shares: "Usually my mom comes over to watch the girls open gifts as well as Mike's mom so we're surrounded by family. I love Christmas because you get to stop and forget about work and forget about the problems that you have. It's a great day to focus on how much you love your family and all the reasons we have to be thankful. Everything stops and we can think about all the things our Savior has done for us."

More than anything, the Bowlings are feeling blessed this Christmas Season. Kelly explains: "If there was ever a time in my life I've ever been in love with my job, it's now! We sing to the sweetest people in the

world. I've done this since I was 17, Terah since she was 13 and Mike has longer than us. Thinking back to last year- For seven months I wondered if I ever would sing again. I wasn't sure if I wanted to sing again. I wasn't sure if I had the strength to get back out there and do it- Just to be honest, I was feeling hopeless. I wasn't bitter at God, but I was just sort of through with singing for the moment. I had no desire to travel! The Lord has restored so much. We love our job and we love those people that come to hear us and listen to what we have to say."

"As I think about my whole life, I realize how blessed I am. I was thinking this morning of how many dreams He's allowed us to see come true. We are blessed- more than singing, but to have family and to have children. Dream after dream He has blessed us with. Just to be a mom is a dream. To have a sister is a dream. To have a brother is a dream and to be a wife is a dream. God has allowed one dream after the other to be fulfilled in my life. Way more good has ever happened to me than bad!"

The Bowlings have indeed experienced the provisional grace of God and have found it to be more than sufficient. To learn more about the ministry of the Bowling family, visit www.thebowlingsonline.com.

"Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace."

Jerry Bridges

MEDIA & THE GOSPEL

Part 3: The Media Speaks

By Lorraine Walker

Christian media is a positive force in speaking to the world about faith-based arts. Music, film, books and every area of the arts that have a Christian emphasis can be promoted through radio stations, printed media and the internet. The people involved in spreading the news about Christian arts play a huge role in presenting the Gospel to the world. The question asked in the first two parts of this series, relates to the audience. Just as artists need to be aware of their niche audience, the media must decide who their audience is and focus their efforts toward that demographic.

Is Christian media really just 'singing to the choir' or can it make a difference in the secular world? In the first part of the series, we looked at Christian films and how they present the Gospel. Many of the art forms are media in themselves, and reach an audience that only they can touch. Southern Gospel artists have their fans as well; a group of listeners that some would say is diminishing and needs to be expanded. Can media assist with this expansion?

In the last of this three-part series, we look at how those involved in the promotion of Christian music view themselves. Is it possible for the magazines, websites,

blogs and radio stations that promote Southern Gospel to really reach their world with the Gospel? Should that even be their focus? What is the heartbeat of Christian media?

Mike Jones, owner of Radio CIA, an internet-only radio station, based out of Fort Worth, Texas talks about his reasons for running a 24/7 Christian station. "God's message will reach people, if we just spread it," says Jones. "Mark 16:15 tells us to take the Gospel to the world, and the Internet has a powerful reach. I know of several people who have accepted Christ as a direct result of listening to Radio CIA, and that's a good enough reason for me to keep the station on the air!"

Many media people refer to the Great Commission of Christ when asked about their work in this industry. However, we often wonder if our words, like that of the music we promote, are only reaching those who have already heard and accepted our faith. Are those involved in the entire Southern Gospel industry in reality only preaching to the choir?

Stephen Gannon, former Southern California Regional Manager of K-LOVE and Air1, and currently a business development consultant in Christian music,

offers this perspective. "Embedded within the music, melody, and lyrics of Christian music are words written by men, but words designed around or even quoting words of scripture," says Gannon. "God promises that His word will not return void, without achieving its purpose. So throughout the United States and increasingly the world, God's very words are going out to people nonchalantly in their cars, in their homes, at work, even in prison."

Gannon continues, "These people may have just had a fight with their significant other. Some of them have spouses who have said they are leaving. Others have just been informed they are nurturing a malignant tumor. Some have daughters and sons being shot at in Afghanistan. Others have children who didn't come home from school. Some have lost everything in a financial collapse."

"For those people and for others who are listening to Christian music, God's word reaches down to their hearts and minds, and touches nerves between heart and soul, joint, and marrow, in places where no other words are allowed to reach, and infuses people with hope and encouragement." Gannon concludes, "The question was, 'Is Christian music effective in reaching people with the gospel?' Yeah, I would say that it is." As Christian music reaches out with hope for those who feel hopeless, the media promoting that music assists artists in getting their words into the ears and hearts of the listeners.

Evie Hawkins, publicist with EHA Nashville, is involved with Christian artists and media. As an expert in artist management, she is aware of the assistance that media can provide. As a columnist for SGM Radio and SGN Scoops, she discusses the role that media has to play in the Christian music industry.

"I think SGN Scoops is the fastest growing SG media out there," says Hawkins. "I see it gaining popularity each year that Rob Patz has taken it under his wing. I'm involved because I want my grandchildren and great grandchildren to be able to know about my favorite music, Southern Gospel. The education and awareness SGN Scoops offers will help us all in our mission to pass this beautiful artform on to our offspring for generations to come. Thank you all for what you do!"

Rhonda Mitchell Frye, Southern Gospel artist and Editor-In-Chief of SGN Scoops, commented about this subject in her editorial in the August 2011 edition of Scoops. Frye



says, "I felt strongly I should stick to writing about what why we do what we do. Before all of us were saved, we were individuals; with a mind of our own to do what we wanted. When we stepped into a covenant relationship with God, we died with Christ then were resurrected to new life; no longer an individual but a part of a whole."

Frye continues, "Yes, a part of the body of Christ where He is the head. We have been integrated into a family! Each part works together, or should, for one purpose and that is to bring the lost to Christ. Everything revolves

around that. Period. Life is all about relationship with God. Period. God uses these parts and makes teams to win the lost, because He doesn't want anyone to perish. God uses many methods, but one is Gospel Music."

"He starts by whispering a message in song that will either inspire Christians or to convict and lure sinners to Him. He gives the music, then He uses a team of people to deliver it to the people and that's where we fit in. At Scoops, we are that link, that bridge that connects the artists and the message with the fans. We minister to the artists by providing encouragement and support and trust me, that's huge!"

"SGN Scoops is a tool. Gospel Music isn't just music. No! Lyrics are deep truths, biblical principles and often the very words of God, Himself. I'm a songwriter and I know what its like to feel the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit upon me when He gives me a song. So, as media, we play a huge role in getting those messages of hope out. We support the messengers and play a huge role in connecting them to the audience."

Stephanie Kelley, Graphic Designer for SGN Scoops, comments: "Anything that we do unto the Lord should not be judged by others or discredited. The Bible tells us that the Lord's word will not return void and I believe this is true with Scoops. God has used this platform to advance ministries who uplift the Name of Christ and tell others about Him. God has used Scoops directly in people's lives. Though we hear of some of the ways Scoops has been used, only God knows how many lives it has touched. Many who are blessed or encouraged will never tell us. Focus on God and do your best for Him and He will direct your paths."

What Kelley and Frye say regarding SGN Scoops can be directed to all who are working in Christian media. As a bridge from the artist to the audience, the media



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connects people to ministries so many may hear words that they may not have heard otherwise. Artists find their audience increasing and lives are changed by the power of the word of God.

Melissa Flores, General Manager of He's Alive Radio, comments: "Christian media ministries have learned in recent years to work well with others. It would seem that we have learned the value of promoting those who are saying things that need to be heard. Media is, by nature, a conduit through which ministry flows. For some ministries, Christian media is merely a megaphone for the amplification of other voices. Sometimes, the media ministry has a voice of its own, through the staff that has assembled around the mission. Each media ministry must be faithful to its own mission; giving air to the gospel in whatever way is most effective for them. He's Alive happens to champion the voices of others, while at the same time possessing a voice uniquely our own. That blend is one we relish."

Still, says Flores, there is room for improvement. "We could improve our presentation of the gospel by telling the story better. Our presentation, in most cases, is dated and out of touch with our times. The values and truths of the gospel never change, but our method of communicating it must, if we want to continue operating."

Flores has a personal connection to the work she performs at He's Alive. Media is more than just a job for this industry professional. "I work in Christian media because I'm called to it," says Flores. "Call me old-fashioned, but I believe there is an anointing on my life for communicating the gospel, and for connecting others to valid ministries through radio and the printed page. Media is no longer an elective for the church, but an integral part of reaching our world for Christ. Because it is evolving so rapidly, we have yet to see what Christian media will become."

Jonathan Edwards of KWFC Radio, agrees with Flores that the method of communication must keep moving with the times and increasing in the level of professionalism. Edwards says, "I think that we are giving a platform for our music to be shared with others thru radio, video or written word. We have a variety of outlets and I think we are beginning to tap what all is available to us."



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“How effective are we at sharing the gospel?” Edward says, “To be honest, we are not very effective. But then again my opinion is that evangelism is not the main point of Southern Gospel Music. Never has been and I don’t think it ever will be. Our purpose has been to encourage the saint and I think we do a good job at that goal. Please don’t get me wrong; we always present the gospel. But that isn’t our main goal and shouldn’t be in the radio business.”

“I think we need to become professionals in what we do,” states Edwards. “Southern Gospel has a bad reputation because of poor production, poor radio and poor talent. We need to be as good as the secular world. I try to be as good as my country counterpart when I am on the air.”

“Groups should be as picky about their sound as the secular world and fans should support our music as well as the secular fans support their artist.” Edwards continues, “I think we need to start living what we are singing and what we represent. How do we expect a Holy God to bless us when we are not even living and practicing what we are singing, playing or writing about?”

“I love Southern Gospel,” says Edwards. “I grew up on it and I think we have the best message. I love the interaction with the people, fans, groups and promoters. I love radio but I don’t think I would enjoy it half as much if I wasn’t playing my favorite music.”

Although Edwards’ opinion is that presenting the gospel isn’t the main goal of Southern Gospel media, not all share that view. Many media personnel believe that evangelism is the main goal, in concert with the encouragement of the saints. The Gospel Station Network is dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus. President Randall Christy loves this music and would like



to see its message carried to new listeners.

Christy says that a broader audience can be achieved through continuously utilizing the newest media and methods for promotion. “Media and cutting edge technology is the key to push Southern Gospel into the mainstream of our society,” states Christy. “Today, when you mention top names to the average person on the street, most of them do not know who the performers are. Only devout followers recognize the names of our most popular artists. I think there is a great opportunity to make Southern Gospel artists more recognizable through social media, satellite TV and radio.”

“Radio stations are for sale at their lowest level in decades, partly because owners do not consider Southern Gospel as viable,” Christy comments. “But it is viable if it is done correctly. Our network may not be the most profitable radio network, but it is growing and financially stable, due to several keys to success, including: Commitment to the true Gospel Message of Jesus Christ; Commitment to the greatest quality programming and music that puts our best foot forward, by which we never will be embarrassed; Commitment to ministry using southern gospel radio to draw together like-minded people who want to make a difference in the world.”

“Because of these commitments we have demonstrated that people will support and advertise with Southern Gospel radio if we consistently provide results in measurable terms, such as: number of souls saved through our global missions, numbers of new stations put on the air for gospel radio, numbers of orphans and widows provided for through our feeding and housing programs, and lives touched and changed through our kids camps, crusades, concerts, and efforts to clothe the homeless.”

Christy continues, “I believe that there is room for thousands more southern gospel radio stations in our country, and around the world, where people are hungry for something they can feel, something they can be a part of that’s making a difference.” He also presents a suggestion to media regarding their source of income. “Record companies and media outlets need to put more of an effort into promoting our artists without depending on so much income from the artists,” states Christy. “I see the current southern gospel industry as the only genre which is largely cannibalistic, feeding off sales of advertising marketed to the artists. We do not see this in any other genre. This trend causes the income stream of southern gospel media to shrink over time. We in the Southern Gospel media need to work harder to promote the artists and obtain our income from advertising and support from business and fans rather than depending

so much on income from artists promoting their latest project, website, etc.”

“The advertising dollars are out there, but it takes a lot of work to generate it. We should be looking for ways to partner with other media and promotions outlets to put our artists in front of people. I believe that media



outlets should see themselves as agents of the artists. As they become more popular and recognized by the average person on the street, they will sell more CD’s and downloads, and will drive more people to their websites and facebook pages, etc. I really believe that media outlets need to own more responsibility of promoting the artists in our genre. It is a difficult task, but other genre’s do it, so why can’t we!?”

As well as artist promotion, Christy feels that the media has a role to play in the Great Commission of Christ. “Every song we play should focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ,” says Christy. “Every artist we play should be a good witness for Christ, Patriotism, and Family Values, with positive charisma. We should seek younger artists and put them in the limelight to generate a future listening audience and to lead young people to Christ.” “Gospel is the greatest musical source of salt and light in that this music focuses on the grace, peace, hope, and love that people need today more than ever,” Christy states. “We have found for years that new listeners get hooked on Gospel because of the message and the uplifting effect it has on people who are searching, hurting and hungry for the goodness of the Lord. Time after time we have received testimonials, which say something like, ‘I just started listening to this station. I’ve never really listened to gospel before, but I’m hooked. This is exactly what I need to get my day going and to lift

me up when I’m down.”

Christy’s organization is dedicated to seeing the Gospel taken into all the world. “We at The Gospel Station Network realize we are not able to put southern gospel stations in every town in the world,” says Christy. “But we want to reach as many people in as many places as the Lord provides the means. We want to see one million souls saved through our World Mission Team global crusade organization over the next few years. To date, we have seen over 220,000 accept Christ in 9 different countries. We want to build more homes for widows and orphans. So far, our listeners have provided 15 of them. We want to raise enough funds to feed thousands more orphans, which we do every day in several orphanages and feeding centers.”

Christy echoes the hearts of the majority of Christian music media in his concluding words: “But most of all, when Jesus returns, we want to be found doing what we have been called to do: spreading the Gospel, one song at a time.”

Regardless of the type of Christian art form or media outlet, Christians with the call on their heart to ‘go and tell’ desire to reach their world with the love of Jesus and to be found faithful in His service. That is the driving force behind those following the call of Christ and those willing to assist those who are fulfilling their call. Whether on stage or off, both media and artists have their roles and are working together now more than ever, toward the same goal. We look forward to greater relationship and community as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

For more information on the media guests above:

Mike Jones, Radio CIA:

<http://radiocia.us/>

Stephen Gannon, Consultant:

<http://stevegannon.com/>

Evie Hawkins, EHA Nashville:

<http://eviehawkinsagency.net/>

Rhonda Mitchell Frye, SGN Scoops.

Ministry webpage: <http://rhondafrye.com/>

Stephanie Kelley, SGN Scoops. Graphics

Facebook site: <http://www.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.girgraphics.com%2F&h=mAQGHS7jU>

Melissa Flores, He’s Alive Radio:

<http://www.hesalive.net/>

Jonathan Edwards, KWFC Radio:

<http://www.kwfc.org/>

Randall Christy, The Gospel Station Network:

<http://www.thegospelstation.com/dyn/index.php>

The Christmas Story: Tell It and Tell It Again!

*Bill and Gloria Gaither's
"A Homecoming Christmas"*

By Rhonda Frye



There couldn't have been any better news to fall upon the ears of Joseph than those of Gabriel spoken to him in a dream 2,000 years ago. Matthew 1: 20b-21 says, "Joseph, son of David, the angel said, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will SAVE His people from their sins."

God is holy and sin is the obstacle separating God and man. Jesus came into the world to conquer the sin problem once and for all. Hebrews 10: 3-17 is interesting scripture. Some Bible scholars say this passage allows us to hear the Savior's soliloquy at the time of His incarnation. "For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and



goats to take away sins. That is why, when Christ came into the world, He said to God, You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But You have given Me a BODY to offer. You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. Then I

said, look, I have come to do Your will, O God- as is written about Me in the Scriptures." God's will was to make a new covenant with man based on His work. The first covenant was a dim preview of what was to come. With the old covenant, sins were merely covered, not removed. Christ's birth marks God's redemptive plan spinning into action and should strike a response varying from jubilant rejoicing to silent awe. The Christmas story of God's unfathomable love and boundless grace is more than amazing and should never get old.

For many years, people all over the world have celebrated the birth of Christ. Celebrations including decorating with special symbols, the giving and receiving gifts and other festive traditions have been carried out for many years. Unfortunately for some people, the wonder of the true meaning of Christmas has been buried under customs that have grown meaningless. The First Family of Gospel Music, Bill and Gloria Gaither, have held tightly to their love for the Christmas Story in spite of changing times, busyness and repetition.

For decades, Bill and Gloria Gaither have been a source of inspiration with their music, lyrics, books, poems and other writings. Gloria has stirred

hearts with her unique style of communicating truth with conviction, by using words of grace and eloquence. The Gaithers have now turned their attention to the wonder



of the Christmas Season and are encouraging others to make Christmas a holiday that is deeply meaningful. With the help of Homecoming artists, Bill and Gloria have collected a treasure chest of ideas, stories, traditions, recipes, photos and songs to capture the wonder of Christmas. "Wonder" is defined in the book as the holy hush we feel when we contemplate the season of Christ's birth.

With much anticipation, A Homecoming Christmas- Sensing the Wonders of The Season, was released in the fall of this year. The book is divided into sections so that readers experience Christmas through the five senses- smell, touch, see, hear and taste. The Gaithers point out that the Christmas story can be told through the senses and each time it's told and re-told, God is

glorified.

In a recent interview with Scoops Magazine, Gloria shared the idea behind the book. "I don't think there is any theological concept that is huger or more difficult to wrap our minds around or more awesome (and I mean that in the true sense of that word) than the incarnation. The God that created the unlimited cosmoses beyond cosmoses (as we are discovering even more cosmoses) created this little dot of earth of which life could survive and then brought to it human beings. He then cared enough about His creation to come Himself and become one of us with our huge limitations so that we could understand that He was a loving, gracious, forgiving, healing God." Gloria continues, "We have a lot of mistaken concepts of God. We know He's out there and we know He's huge, but we tend to think He's angry or He's judgmental. The wonder is that Jesus said, 'If you want to understand what God is like, look at me, I am here to show you what my Father is like.'"

"Every year for centuries we have been trying to wrap our minds around it{the incarnation} first of all, and then we've tried to tell it to another generation of children, Gloria explains. "We try to keep that alive so that the things we do in order

to communicate the story don't become meaningless traditions. If they become meaningless, it's our fault or if they are erroneous, they should die," she said with conviction.

Gloria has a great understanding of how people learn and remember. She explains the concept of dividing the book into sections of the senses: "We have just five avenues to our conscious minds to work with and that is our five senses to sense what God is like. Maybe... just maybe... if we use all of those five we can then help our children and help ourselves every time the story is retold to transcend what we can see and feel and touch and hear and smell to something beyond what the senses can comprehend."

"The idea of the book was to show or to tell how we have used those senses to try to explain this amazingly transcendent and awesome concept," she adds. "I thought it would be great to divide the sections into the senses and have people tell their experience of Christmas through their senses."

Gloria placed beautiful pictures of her grandson throughout the book. "I wanted a child in the book that is just in the edge of understanding, she explained. "We wanted

the same little face in each section to show his ears, his nose, his taste, to show how this child and all of our children are introduced to the wonder and the immensity of Christmas through things they can actually understand."

The book is filled with heart-warming stories and traditions from many Homecoming friends. To pull an effort such as this off, Gloria says she had a lot of help from many people. "First of all, this is a collaboration because



the Homecoming artists were just fabulous to give us input and respond to questions giving us secrets of their family's backgrounds, recipes and memories and things that had to do with the five senses," Gloria explains.

Just as everything started coming together, Gloria had to have surgery. Emily Sutherland, a writer that works with Bill and Gloria on their website and in the office, lent a special helping hand during the project. "When the pieces started coming in

a couple of weeks away from putting it together and getting everything organized as we had envisioned," Gloria shared, "I was going into the hospital to have a knee replacement. So- Emily stepped in and put the pieces together in the right places and made all the phone calls at the end to make sure all the corrections were correct."

It is vitally important to not get carried away into the hustle and bustle of the season so much so that the real meaning of Christmas is lost. Many people set out decorations without truly understanding the meaning of Christmas symbols and even the significance of the Christmas colors. "It {significance of Christmas} can almost get lost in the doing of stuff and if the stuff doesn't mean anything-the stuff that we have got accustomed to... and I mean the stuff in the sense of objects and baked goods and foil and trees... If those things don't mean anything we should either discontinue it or find out what it means," Gloria explains. "For Christian homes, it is almost unforgivable for us to not take the time to hold each ornament or hold something with our children or even with just ourselves and reflect on the meaning."

The Gaither children are grown and now have

children of their own, therefore this year, Gloria found herself decorating her Christmas tree by herself- but she found it to be a sacred thing. As she decorated with Nativities, she was reminded of how the little hands that used to help her are now helping their children do the same.

Gloria shared how she intentionally jogs the memory of other grandchildren so that they still connect with Christmas memories. "I have one grandson in George Washington University for the first time this year," she said. "I find myself texting him saying 'I just put up the nativity that you used to help me with.' I don't want him to forget, in his context, all the years of holding the baby Jesus, handling Mary, putting Joseph in place, telling the story of that trip to Bethlehem and how the angel guarded them and how the wise men brought the provision so that when Herod decided to kill all the babies, they had the funds to go to another country for two years even though they were impoverished. I want him to remember how God's provision is for us too." Gloria explained, "He's been told that story, so when I text him in the middle of a secular university in Washington, DC he can still connect. I wanted him to make him home-sick not to just leave

his campus, I wanted to make him homesick for Jesus always in his heart," she added.

Tucked inside A HOMECOMING CHRISTMAS are song stories, Christmas memories, recipes and traditions, but it doesn't stop there. The icing on the Christmas cake is the beautiful writings of noted, best-selling author and theologian, Dr. Calvin Miller. Miller who has nearly four million books in print, who served as a pastor for more than 30 years, who penned The Singer Trilogy added a poignant and eloquent touch.

Gloria shares her thoughts about Dr. Miller: "He is one of my favorite writers in the Christian Community. I fell in love with his writing when I was a 60's college student myself. He had first written the "Singer Trilogy" which I think is one of the all-time great pieces of Christian literature. I think it will go down with Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Re-Gained, but I called Calvin and asked him from his point of view not only as a male, but as theologian (a theologian who can put things in our words because he's very understandable) if he would from his point of view tell the Christmas story through the senses."

"His pieces are all shaded so you can read them chronologically if you

want to go through the book and read them one after the other," Gloria explained. "They are wonderful and I would like to encourage pastors, worship leaders and people that plan Christmas programs to use some of his pieces because they are so beautiful to just read and share with people with a Christmas carol or whatever. He did just a beautiful job."

Dr. Miller addresses the dilemma some face regarding secular celebrations. On page 6, Miller says, "There is the general feeling that we need to keep Santa and Jesus in separate pockets all through Christmas." He reminds us in his continuation on page 11 of James 1:17, "Every good and every perfect gift is from the Father above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows." Miller says, "We have but to ask ourselves, not 'Is this gift sacred or secular?' but 'Is this a good gift?' And if it holds goodness, it is worthy of our Christmas celebration. Christ will not be embarrassed if we mention snow and peppermint as we celebrate His coming into human flesh."

When asked, Gloria offered her perspective of celebrating Christmas in regards to Santa Claus. "There really

was a person... a very wonderful priest by the name of Saint Nicholas. His name wasn't famous at that point; nobody knew he was going to be such a good man. In his spirit of generosity, he was celebrating the birth of Christ by giving to people that would not have had any kind of special Christmas. I think by that we can also say is one of the things Santa Claus teaches us the importance of giving. The story about the elves and the North Pole and all that, that came from a poem- Twas the Night Before Christmas, but that is a fantasy story that's fun to talk about, there is nothing wrong with that as long as we know that is a beautiful story that someone wrote, but there really was a man that went around in his village in Europe and made sure that kids weren't without on Christmas. We can learn from that and do what the wise men did too and give our most precious things."

There is no doubt about it, to celebrate the birth of Christ in a meaningful way requires effort, intentional planning and at times can be exhausting, but it's worth it! Emily Sutherland offers encouragement on page 160. "It is worth every ounce of energy we have to bring honor to this holy story with our very best offerings. As we attempt to communicate the greatest story ever told, it takes all

five of our human senses to begin to grasp even a piece of it. Yet even then, we need the touch of our Savior, who gave His last ounce of life for us. He longs to celebrate with us- to hear us sing and tell His Story. He delights in seeing the beauty that we create for His birthday. He takes joy in our personal incense offerings, whatever they may be, and sits at our feast as we share His abundance. And perhaps best of all, He delights to embrace us with His holy presence!" Well said, Emily!

Thank you to Bill and Gloria Gaither for sharing your insights and Christmas memories along with gathering memories from the Homecoming Family. Your efforts are greatly appreciated and will most definitely be rewarded by our Father. On behalf of SGNscoops Magazine, we wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas!

Bill & Gloria Gaither's "A Homecoming Christmas- Sensing the Wonders of the Season" can be ordered online at <http://gaither.com/> and can be found in many bookstores nationwide.



FINISH WELL

Grace Shocks & Multiplies

by
Rhonda Frye

Warning! The words you are about to read should leave you speechless. Philippians 2:6-7 says, "Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being." That is astonishing. Read the rest of verse 7 and 8. "When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." That is shocking. We know the purpose of Christmas. Christ came so that mercy could shut the door to hell

and grace could open the door to heaven for us!

Grace is at the heart of the Christmas story. I love John R.W. Stott's quote about grace: "Grace is love that cares, stoops and rescues." Grace didn't begin at Bethlehem, but yes, God loved us so much that He stooped to our level so that He could rescue us! Extravagant grace requires laying down rights and giving priority to others. Being that Jesus is the exact representation of God and Christians are the exact representation of Christ, we have to extend the same kind of grace to others. Grace goes the

extra mile, remember? Mercy withholds what is deserved and grace gives the exact opposite. An example: Mercy runs to forgive the Prodigal Son, Grace throws Him a party.

We love to be on the receiving end of grace, but doesn't it seem natural to be stingy with grace we've received? Our flesh screams, "That's not fair!" or "How dare you?" We all have the urge to settle the score, make people pay or take responsibility, but God says we are to deny that impulse to be right and extend grace. After all, we have RECEIVED much grace. There should be a cycle of grace being

poured in and grace being poured out.

I love what Charles Spurgeon in "Spurgeon's Most Popular Work-Morning and Evening Devotions" has to say about this cycle. "Father Ocean is a great receiver, but he is also a generous distributor. What the rivers bring him he returns to the earth in the form of clouds and rain. The man who takes all but makes no return is out of harmony with the universe.... Suppose the ocean gave up none of its watery treasure; it would bring ruin upon our race." I believe, if we do not give the gift of grace away,

grace hoarding will take its toll on the church and will hinder Kingdom Building.

Most of us struggle with grace-hoarding by withholding forgiveness although we know Jesus said we were to forgive our offenders 70 x's 7 times. That hardly leaves room for us to write off people when we're wronged, but forgiveness isn't easy.

I love this quote I ran across by Max Lucado. "Forgiveness is unlocking the door to set someone free and realizing you were the prisoner." And we've all heard someone say "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." Both of those quotes are so true, but yet if we're totally honest, we can't muster up forgiveness on our own, we have to ask for more grace to do so. When we seek the Lord to help us forgive, He gently reminds us of our own needs to be forgiven. Erwin W. Lutzer once said, "When the mask of self-righteousness has been torn from us and we stand stripped of all our accustomed defenses, we are candidates for God's generous grace." When we see ourselves standing in the need of grace, we can better overlook the faults of others.

It's so important to model grace extending in front of our children. They overhear so much and form opinions so early! In fact, the grace exchange

should be constantly in action in the home. Remember the Bible story of Joseph forgiving his brothers? If you read Joseph's full story, you'll notice he was a first-hand witness to his Uncle Esau's heartwarming forgiveness of his father, Jacob! No doubt that scene was lying in the back of his memory when the time came for him to grant forgiveness to his brothers.

We know we should forgive, we know we should be gracious, but before we beat ourselves up too much, we have to remember God's grace working in us is a process. That's a hard fact to swallow because we live in an instant world. We can communicate with someone around the world in a matter of seconds. Wouldn't it be nice if at the very moment we received Christ, grace was perfected in us? We have to remember that everyone is a work in process and grace will not be finalized until Christ Himself does it. "Grace comes into the soul, as the morning sun into the world; first a dawning, then a light; and at last the sun in his full and excellent brightness," Thomas Adams (1612-1653) once said.

Edward Payson (1783-1827) said it this way: "The growth of grace is like the polishing of metals. There is first an opaque surface; by and by you see a spark darting out, then a strong



light; till at length it sends back a perfect image of the sun that shines upon it."

Andy Stanley in an interview with Michael Hyatt perhaps said it best, "Grace is like a crock pot." That's hard to take in this microwave generation!

We steadily grow in grace as we spend time with Christ. Just like we can't eat all we can in one sitting to last us all week, we grow gradually in grace. If we steadily spend time with the Grace Giver, we will grow in leaps in bounds over a period of time. We have to remember that our brothers and sisters in Christ are in the same boat we are, but all in different places in their faith journey. Until Christ comes back, we are going to hurt and get hurt, step on toes and get our toes stepped on. Couldn't we turn the world upside down if we all understood how to give and receive grace?

In the meantime, remember how good it

feels to be let off the hook when you knew you were guilty. There is nothing in the world that feels as good as being forgiven. I'm so thankful God didn't extend His grace toward me based on His feelings or my guilt, but He granted me favor instead. Remember what grace is? Because He has given you and me the exact opposite of what we deserve, surely we can shock someone with the gift of grace this Christmas Season! The Christmas story reminds us how Christ laid down His rights and gave priority to others. By the power of the Spirit, we can do the same. There are many ways to shock people with grace but mending a broken relationship through the extension of grace is amazing. Remember grace-unmerited favor that we didn't deserve has been freely given to you and me in many ways! Let's shock and multiply! Merry Christmas!

Marshall Hall: Growing In Grace

By Lorraine Walker



Marshall Hall is well-known to Gaither Vocal Band fans for his unique voice, magazine-cover good looks and engaging personality. In 2009, he left the organization to pursue a more personal path of music pastor and solo artist. His newly released single, "There Is Nothing Greater Than Grace," seems to be a framework around the life he leads as husband, father, pastor and singer/songwriter. Hall is continually growing, learning and striving to live the call that has been placed on his life, an obvious spiritual call that is leading him further down the path of grace.

Fans might think that an artist with the name of Gaither on his resume and an audience that stretches worldwide would be very conscious of his status in the Christian music industry and perhaps even distant. This congenial, down-to-earth singer does not show any of the effects of gospel music stardom. Instead, Hall is the type of pastor that any church would love to have – relatable, humble and a servant leader who recognizes how far he has yet to travel.

Marshall Hall discusses his recording, *Brighter One*, his first after leaving the Gaither organization. "My style, I would say, is very Vocal Band Friendly but stretches a little more toward pop-country. So it's Vocal Band with legs," Hall laughs. "Not with a crazy edge though. If you like the Vocal Band style, you will like this recording." "The current single is entitled, 'There Is Nothing Greater Than Grace,'" Hall continues. "I wrote that song with one of my dear friends, Sam Izell, right before I left Nashville and moved to Phoenix with my family. Point of Grace picked the song up and it won the Dove Award for Country Recorded Song of the Year 2011. So now we are releasing it to the Southern Gospel audience. It's a great song about where people are, when they are at the end of their rope." The song echoes Hall's own desire to share the grace of God with his listeners. "It is one of those songs, along with 'When I Cry,' that really touches people when I do them in concert," says Hall. "You can ask pretty much anyone, 'Hey, are you hurting somewhere right now?' and the

response will be, 'Yes.' Or you can ask if they know someone who is hurting and they will answer yes."

Hall's heart for the hurting is very apparent when he talks about ministering to his audience. "Every now and again my wife comes with me and she is always amazed at how quickly the barriers are broken down when you sing songs like that, or when God uses the medium of music in that way. How quickly you can go from 'Hi, my name is Mary' to 'Hi, my name is Mary and I have terminal cancer.' Or, 'Hi, my name is Bob and my wife just left me.'"

"Music is a vehicle to get to the heart of issues," Hall states. "To me that is where a lot of the ministry takes place. You want to make sure you have a good evening and sing the best you can, and you think perhaps your throat doesn't feel good, or you hit a clunker or whatever. But when the rubber meets the road, it's the conversation after that strikes a chord for both parties."

The after-concert ministry is what makes the travel worthwhile for this artist. Anything can come up in conversation and often audience members will come to him looking for answers to their deepest questions. "I can't be prepared for all of them because I just haven't walked those kinds of roads," says Hall. "I'm forty and a lot of people that come up to talk to me are older than I am. Through the Gaither Vocal Band, God has given me a voice into the lives of folks who are older than me and it is a blessing. I just say, 'God, be in my mouth and be in my mind.' He seems to always show up. I don't have all of the Old and New Testament locked away in my brain. I do have bits and pieces of it. But God's word never seems to turn away any time, it comes back to mind when you need it."

Marshall Hall's heart for ministry is just part of the many giftings that led this artist to his new position in the Arizona desert. "Currently I am a Worship Arts Pastor at Mountain Park Community Church in Phoenix," says Hall. "God just kind of moved us in that direction. After

the Vocal Band, I didn't really know what direction we'd be going in. I had a lot of people telling me to cut a solo album, but I didn't really feel like that's where God was leading me. I knew that God had a call on my life and I knew that I could serve Him in a local church and I wanted to do that. God led us to Phoenix and it's funny that He led us to the desert! We have seen a lot of growth there and a lot of movement of God at our church."

"But there is definitely a call on my life to ministry, even in concerts," Hall continues. "I don't think there is much difference in a Sunday morning at my church and a solo concert. I love Jesus and you are going to hear about it! And basically, it's all ministry."

Whether it is behind a podium or a piano, balancing family life and two careers isn't an easy thing for anyone. At this point, Hall is still working through the details. "Currently it is easy to balance my solo ministry and my church duties," says Hall. "My church is very kind to let me go and fulfill my dates. As my schedule gets busier I will have some bridges to cross and decisions to make. But my church is just a sweet, sweet place and they want me out doing different things. They don't want me to get burnt out at the church. It's a great relationship."

Many pastors and church leaders become burnt out as they continue to give of themselves without finding quiet time to allow God to replenish their hearts. Hall has been through a learning process with his own personal devotional time. "I used to say that running was my private time," Hall says. "I run every day, first thing in the morning. I used to say that it was my private time. The more I continued to run, the more running got very mundane. I'd put on my headphones and just get lost in the music. It became less and less of a devotional time for me, until my wife just said, 'Before you go run, why don't you just get on your knees? Before you get into your running clothes, why don't you start your day right? Our daughters need it, your wife needs it and you need it.'"

Hall smiles and says, "So that's what I do now, that's what my private time looks like. Sometimes when I'm driving in my car, I shut off the radio and just say, 'Jesus, speak to me today. I feel dry and empty.' I know that the relationship with the Holy Spirit is not a feeling, but it is wonderful, those times that the Holy Spirit fills us up and touches



us so that we do actually feel Him, when your hair stands up on end and you feel that warmth on the inside."

"There has to be that knowledge of Him and the repetition of relationship," Hall continues. "To say to Him, 'I know You are there because I utilize You. I lean into You and I draw upon Your strength.' Sometimes it doesn't feel great. Sometimes I feel like I am grasping at straws, but at the end of the day, I know He showed up." God is truly 'showing up,' extending His grace and answering prayers in many aspects of Hall's life. His church is growing and he is proud of this family of believers. "Our church has gone from not having any kind of a missions focus to backing some people who are moving to India. India is mostly Hindu, but there is one small area that is all Muslim. These people are going to a city where there is only one person that they know of that is a missionary, and they are going to support that missionary. So we are pouring into their lives as they pour into others."

Hall continues, "Maybe I'm a little biased too because my wife is heading up a lot of the mission focus. I'm kind of relationship-driven and my wife is cause-driven. Her passion has really ignited a lot of things at our church."

Reflecting on the spiritual growth process that is still continuing in his life, Hall obviously credits his wife with urging him in the right direction. "I'll be the first one to tell you that I'm slow to change," Hall laughs. "I got married at 32 and before I got married, I never tithed at all. I did share a whole lot of my money. I was one of the few of my friends who were actually making it in music, so I would love to take everyone out to eat and love sharing with my friends. I think that's a blessing to folks, but it wasn't being obedient to what God asks us to do."

"Then I married my wife, who had gone through some different financial things than I had before we met," Hall explains, "She learned to tithe much earlier than I did, so I needed to learn that lesson. And then the missions lesson was kind of taught to me through my wife as well. God is really teaching me things through my wife. It all ends up to the good."

Marshall and Lori Hall have been married for eight years and have two girls, Presley, five, and Reese, who is three years of age. When asked what he would like to instill in the lives of his daughters, Hall's



father's heart is loud and clear in his words: "That their worth can be found in Christ." Hall says, "So many kids today seem to be looking for self-worth. They say, 'My dad didn't treat me well', or they didn't have a good relationship with another relative." Hall feels that fathers have a direct influence on a child's level of self-worth. He explains what he has learned from his own experience as a father.

"First, I think that fathers need to lean into Christ and utilize the Holy Spirit," Hall begins. "They need to realize that the Holy Spirit is within them and they can draw upon His power." upon His power."

"Secondly, fathers need to instill that knowledge into their children. They need to tell them that 'Daddy can't do everything.'" Hall smiles and says, "My girls like to hold onto my hands and walk up my legs, and they call it, 'Climbing Mount Daddy.' But of course they need to realize that I'm not a mountain, I'm just a man and I draw upon the strength of Christ."

"Whenever anything good happens, and my girls say, 'Daddy I love you so much,' it's because Christ is in me," states Hall. "Christ was able to overcome my selfish desires, my wanting to spend time by myself, and He has taught me to want to spend time with my children. I love to be with my girls and do stuff that they love to do. If they know that Daddy loves them and that he loves them because Christ loves them, then they understand that Christ loves them personally. That's where their worth needs to come from."

It isn't just children that need to find their self-worth in the love of Christ. Hall says he sees this regularly in the eyes of those that come to his concerts. "There's a loneliness that seems to pervade most people's lives. I definitely see a lot of sorrow and a lot of lost looks in faces. They need to be found."



"When Christ is lifted up and He draws folks to Himself, He finds them," explains Hall. "He finds us and we feel found. There is a completeness and a realization of, 'Oh my gosh, this was it. This was IT!'"

"I'm so proud of people that just unashamedly and unabashedly, say, 'You need Jesus.'" Hall shakes his head and soberly continues, "I aspire to that. If I honestly share my faith, I don't really know how overboard I am. Maybe that's a bad word." Hall pauses. "Maybe because I feel like I might come across as being overboard, I don't go there. I think there is a little bit of fear in me about that, and I pray that God will get rid of that fear."

Marshall Hall reflects a little bit of all of his audience in his desire to grow as a man, husband, father, pastor and a Christian unashamedly sharing his faith to all. He doesn't often use the word 'grace,' but it is abundant in all that he says. He understands the grace that is working within Him and desires to share that with his flock and his audience. As his words say, "What do you say to someone who feels like they've lost it all?...before you think that you're too lost to save, remember there is nothing greater than grace." (There Is Nothing Greater Than Grace, Marshall Hall/Sam Izell.)

TALK TO ME

with Jonathan Edwards



Audio Interview of Karen Peck



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"Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, He reaches out in kindness and says, 'I can clean that if you want.' And from the basin of his grace, he scoops a palm full of mercy and washes our sin."

Max Lucado

A MATHIS MOMENT

Do I REALLY Want God's Will For My life?!

by John Mathis Jr.

Call it getting older, or getting smarter or maybe just life experience finally kicking in, but the question I ask myself a lot lately is: "Do I REALLY want God's Will for my life?" I know we were raised in our church culture to SAY we want God's will for our lives, but when I check my subconscious thoughts on this I must confess that many times in my life I was a bit concerned that all the hopes, goals and dreams I had would not match up to what God was thinking.

Guess what?! I look back at my 43 years and there have been a lot of things that "I Did It My Way," as

Elvis would sing. I've had many things in life that I set out to do, things that I thought would be so fulfilling and satisfying and when I achieved them, they didn't come close to giving me that deep-down sense of satisfaction that I thought I was going to have. Some of these things were dreams come true for me. Does this mean they were bad or wrong? Not at all! It simply showed me that true peace and contentment are NEVER fulfilled in our dreams coming true.

Then on the other hand, I've had times in my life where I have answered what I believed to be a

direction or step from God and even though on the outside looking in, they appeared to be the most base things. Those times are what I remember topping all other achievements in regard to that true, sincere feeling of peace, joy and contentment.

Perplexing isn't it?! How can not pursuing what you feel at the moment and want instantly not bring you the satisfaction you thought it would? Actually, it's not at all perplexing when you really stop and think about the big picture. We're talking about the Creator of the Universe and the very One who gave us life. He knows us BETTER than we know ourselves. He truly is a Father and knows how best to direct and care for us. He wants what is best for us, even when it seems to contradict what we feel or think is best for ourselves.

As I've gotten older and my kids have become adults themselves, my relationship with my kids so remind me of how my relationship with my Father in Heaven must be very similar. I care for them and love them so very much. I've been where they are at; I've lived life, and have more experiences. I just want to save them a few of the extra steps I've had

to make to overcome decisions I've made that didn't later turn out for the best. And I have to laugh, because there are times they make their own decisions and find out that dad wasn't telling them some good information. I also have to laugh because I look back and can hear my father giving me the same advice that I didn't always consider.

I think it comes down to our human nature, to our very flesh. We are just like children with God. Many times, I'm not even at teenager status; I'm more on the elementary age level with Him. I simply "want it" and I want it NOW! I want this career, I want to live in this town, I want these certain set of things and I've already reasoned out the how and why those things are the best for the moment. However; I've reasoned them out according to the desires of my flesh and not according to a deeper guide, The Spirit.

Recently, I read yet another passage that I've read thousands of times. This is another example of why I need to keep reading and studying God's Word because as many times as I've read it, new lessons continue to jump out at me from passages I've studied many times over! In John 4:34, "Jesus said to them,



Rhonda Frye

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'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" This is the account of where Jesus met and spoke with the woman at the well. The disciples had scattered to go find food for Jesus because he was hungry. The Son of God, in the flesh, had a physical need to eat. Yet, when he encountered this woman at the well He saw the opportunity to change her life and offer her "living water." He wasn't even supposed to be addressing a woman in public due to His status of "rabbi" and she was a Samaritan woman at that! Jews did not associate

they were surprised, they were wondering why He was even speaking to this woman. He was breaking the rules of man (the flesh) in speaking to her and He was also delaying his physical (the flesh) need to eat.

Why? It was more important for Jesus to feed His spiritual desire to do His Father's will than it was for Him to feed the desires he had in His flesh. He knew that the long-term goal of His Father's will was more important than the short-term need to eat or worry about political correctness.

this passage is that God's will just doesn't happen in our lives. I have to really desire it to happen! It has to be more important to me than physical food. And not just food, that it only represents those instant desires we have physically. We may want to be singers, musicians, hold a position in a church or become the VP of Microsoft. However, we must be willing to put off what or where we feel we should be and be completely open to where God wants us to be. In THAT place, the place God has for us, is where the ultimate satisfaction and contentment can be found.

And as the preacher would say on Sunday morning, let me close with these final words regarding God's will. Here are three steps I've found to discovering God's will:

First: Stay as far away from focusing on your own desires, will, opinions, etc. Removing what you think or feel opens up a lot of perspective on possibly what God has in store. He knows best, we're just best guessing!

Second: Follow the commandment of loving the Lord with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself. When we love Him more, we also love His Word and it becomes more valuable than our thoughts and perspectives.

Third: Seek His kingdom first and He promised all the rest will be added. Get up each day seeking to build His kingdom and yours will be built in the process.

So all the pressure is off! We don't have to know God's will today. We don't even have to know our purpose today! We don't have to worry if it will suit us or agree with us or if we'll even like it. All we have to do is get up each day and follow some simple steps and we will literally WALK right into what God has in store for us and we look back and smile at all the "coincidences" that led us to that place.

And YES, I REALLY do want God's will for my life!

John Mathis Jr.
www.themansionentertainment.com
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with Samaritans. When His disciples returned

Another lesson I learned from Jesus' example in

NEW MUSIC FOR DECEMBER

Every year, by mid-October I've pulled out the boxes of Christmas CD's and picked out as many as I can store in my CD carrier in the car, loaded up the CD changer in the family room and stacked as many as I can in the cabinet in the kitchen. Love, love, love that Christmas music...old and new! Two of my all-time favorites are instrumentals by Jeff Collins and Gerald Wolfe, and I have both in my kitchen and my car. CHRISTMAS SESSIONS by Jeff Collins and Gerald Wolfe's, MY KIND OF CHRISTMAS are two of the best-ever Christmas recordings, in my opinion!

I have several wonderful, new recordings to share with you, and I must say; I've already added these to my Christmas "stash!" Let me know of any new music you've discovered and I'll check it out! Email me at sandi@sngnscoops.com!



YULETIDE

Ann Downing

Vine Crossroads

Producer: Wayne Haun

YULETIDE is Ann Downing's first Christmas recording, and I must say, I think she waited much too long! Ann is a dedicated, fun-loving lady with a beautiful smile and this album cover reflects that. You will love the photo

array and her notes, sharing her love for Christmas music.

Kevin Ward and Laurie Winton (Ann's long-time associate) serve as Executive producers on the project, and Ann expresses her gratitude to Kevin and producer Wayne Haun, for helping her voice her version of some of the best and most loved carols and songs of the season. Two songs that we rarely hear on solo recordings, "The Spirit of Christmas" and "Unspeakable Joy" are a delightful addition to YULETIDE.

Ann's rendition of "Joy to the World" is exciting and a wonderful opening to more than thirty minutes of enchanting Christmas music. She adds "The First Noel" and "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear," two traditional carols we all enjoy singing. Ann's strong, throaty voice brings warmth and sincerity to "I'll Be Home For Christmas." Her heartfelt interpretation of the songs in "Santa's Medley" along with "It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" will put every listener in the mood for the holidays!

Christmas would not be complete without the traditional "Silent Night," and Ann does a smooth, sweet version of this age-old favorite. You may add YULETIDE to your collection by visiting Ann's website at www.anndowning.com.



TIMELESS: A Christmas Collection

The Crist Family

Horizon Records

Producers: Jeff Collins, Rich Crist

TIMELESS is a step into the magic of Christmas! From start to finish, you are wrapped in the sounds, the sights, the thrill, the joy and even the smells of Christmas. It just doesn't get any better than this!

Jeff Collins has a natural instinct when it comes to the expression, joy and excitement of Christmas music. He lends that instinct to the songs and arrangements recorded on TIMELESS. The addition of exceptional harmonies along with the enthusiasm and delight which the Crist Family brings to the vocals, complete this awe-inspiring recording.

These arrangements remind me of the Big Band-Swing era with smooth keyboards, vibrant brass, and outstanding orchestration. Add unique, faultless five and six part harmonies to the mix and you have an incredible music treasure. The Crist Family's sound on TIMELESS is reminiscent of the Anita Kerr Singers of the '50s and '60s. Ms. Anita

Kerr offered congratulations and compliments to the Crist Family and to Jeff on a great recording.

The Crist Family opens this collection with "Snow," written and arranged by Jeff. While the remaining songs on the recording are familiar, there are several that we do not hear as often. It's always refreshing to hear a unique arrangement with full orchestration. Other amazing songs on the playlist are "Christmas Time Is Here," "Jesu Parvule," "What Child Is This," and "Winter Wonderland Medley." "I'll Be Home For Christmas" is a must-have for Christmas enjoyment and this version is magnificent.

Contact www.christfamilymusic.com for your copy.



WE NEED A LITTLE CHRISTMAS
Triumphant Quartet
Independent
Producers: Jeff Stice, Vocals: Co-producer Scott Inman

Triumphant Quartet offers us Christmas music, quartet style on ten familiar songs and a fun medley. As producer and arranger, Jeff Stice has added some wonderful music tracks to inspire us with this music. Huge brass accompaniment and solid orchestration, as well as soft sweet violin, piano and harp compliment the straightforward quartet harmonies and present some of the

best versions you'll hear on some of your favorite Christmas songs.

Two songs that we don't often hear; "Hope Has Hands" and "Mary's Christmas" are simple, yet emphatic in the messages. Eric Bennett does an exceptional job on "Christmas Shoes." Paul Heil introduces the Triumphant Choir; the members of the quartet and their families, when they sing "We Need A Little Christmas" declaring that we need Christmas NOW!!

I don't know which you'll enjoy most; "I Think I Seen Ol' Santa" or the "Medley of Fun." Either way, with your own copy of WE NEED A LITTLE CHRISTMAS you be able to enjoy all the fun! Phone the Triumphant office 865-621-0492.



CHRISTMAS WITH THE CHAPELAIRES
The Chapelaires
Independent
Producer: Tim Schwindt

The Chapelaires are a wonderful mixed quartet from Canada and this Christmas recording is a reminder of all that Christmas truly is. The Gaither's "Christmas In The Country" sets the pace for an hour of wonderful music. The harmony and blend these folks share is smooth and sweet, yet strong and absolute.

The twelve songs the Chapelaires chose are not only filled with the

true meaning of Christmas; they are joyful, inviting and very well-done. The music tracks provide a perfect foundation for the vocals. Full orchestration is delightful, with a brilliant harpist and flutist complimenting each song. Arrangements feature each vocalist on a song, allowing us to enjoy the individual talent as well as their combined talent.

The goal of the Chapelaires and this recording is to have us slow down during this special holiday and rejoice in the music that celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ. They definitely succeed.

Picks are "Christmas In The Country," "Christ Is Born," "The First Noel," and especially "Give The Gift." The latter is an awesome reminder of God's Sacrifice for our redemption! I do recommend that you have a copy of CHRISTMAS WITH THE CHAPELAIRES. Contact them at www.chapelaires.com.



A SKAGGS FAMILY CHRISTMAS, VOLUME TWO
The Skaggs Family, The Whites
Skaggs Family Records
Producers: Billy Paul Jones, Charlotte Scott

The Skaggs Family and The Whites are two names that denote extreme talent...musically, vocally, personality and presentation. In

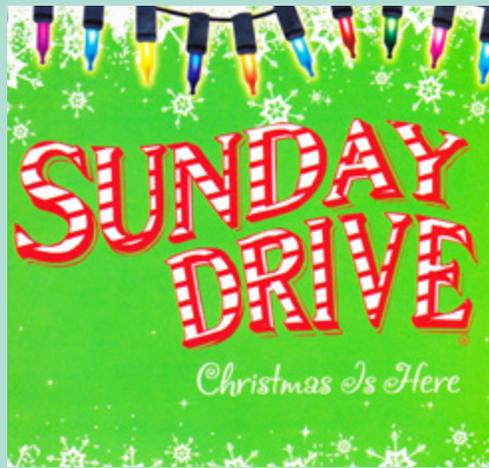
In 2005 The Skaggs Family began their Skaggs Family Christmas Shows and produced a CD shortly after, at the urging of fans and friends. That CD became The Skaggs Family Christmas, Volume 1. Volume 2 is now available as a CD, with the added bonus of a DVD of their Christmas show filmed at the Ryman Auditorium. This is a great evening of Christian entertainment for you and your family for this holiday season.

The CD has ten choice Christmas songs, all chosen particularly to feature the style, talent and creativity of this family. The artists give credit to the writer, as well as listing the vocalists and musicians on each song. That is a major plus! The Skaggs Family has selected several older songs that will be new to some fans, since these songs are not often sung or recorded at Christmas. The group also features "Children Go," an old standard featured on their bluegrass shows. This CD would be a complete show presentation of their Christmas tours.

The bonus DVD has a total of twenty-five excellent tunes, all with full orchestration under the leadership of Conductor Jim Gray, and concertmaster Conni Elisor. The entire evening of music is enchanting and first class, with lots of fun, smiles, and the joy of Christmas.

The talent shared on this program is beyond measure, so on a recent Saturday evening, with fresh popcorn from the microwave, a cold Coke Zero and a fire in the fireplace, our family enjoyed The Skaggs Family Christmas. We highly recommend this captivating package.

Available from www.skaggsfamilyrecords.com



CHRISTMAS IS HERE
Sunday Drive
Crossroads Music
Producer: Jeff Collins

Presenting their first Christmas recording, Sunday Drive selected four excellent songs to remind us to stop long enough to remember the true miracle of Christmas. Two of the songs are original, written by Jeff Treece and his wife, Misty, with words and arrangements that will catch your attention and make the resounding point that Christmas is all about God and the Miracle of His love.

Misty Treece sings the wonderful Mel Torme' standard, "The Christmas Song" and "There's No Place Like Home For The Holidays." She has a fantastic voice and reminds one of Karen Carpenter.

(There is a bonus complimentary performance track for each of the Treece's new songs; "Christmas Is Here" and "It's A God Thing.")

Contact Sunday Drive at www.sundaydrive.biz for your personal copy.



CHRISTMAS MUST BE TONIGHT
Three Bridges
Mansion Records
Producer: Rick Sandidge

Three Bridges and Rick Sandidge have produced a unique Christmas recording with a variety of musical arrangements and distinctive vocal combinations. I really enjoy it when an artists or producer does something new with the music, and CHRISTMAS MUST BE TONIGHT fits that requirement. You'll find a number of favorite Christmas carols and holiday songs, a compelling reason to add CHRISTMAS MUST BE TONIGHT to your music collection.

"Christmas Must Be Tonight," a song written in 1976 and was originally recorded and made popular by a secular group. It is given new life by Elliott, Shannon and Jeremie. It has such an inspiring message! The group has created great arrangements for "He Came Here For Me" and "Emmanuel" and I've hit rewind a few times on these. "Mary Did You Know," another all-time Christmas favorite written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene was added to the play list. Ian Owens, from Signature Sound, joins Three Bridges on "White Christmas" and "Mary Had A Baby," to provide the bass vocal. Talented musicians add incredible music tracks to strong arrangements and formidable vocals for an overall



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HAVE YOU HEARD

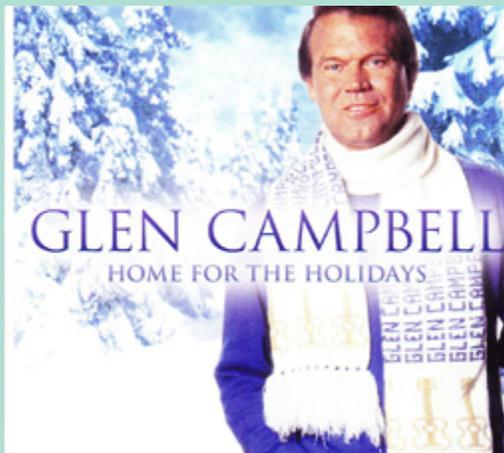
Jason Bare

Independent

Thanks to Bill Maddox of Maddox Management, we're sharing Jason Bare's new Christmas CD. Jason recorded five songs with the help of his fans and a popular public crowd-funded organization, Kickstarter. Jason is a popular worship leader, singer songwriter and has included his previously charting song, "For The First Time" on this new project.

The recording begins with "Have You Heard," with a beautiful children's choir helping with this one. Jason wrote "A Way In A Manger;" not the one we grew up with, but the essence of the song is that God 'made a way in a manger' whereby we could have eternal life.

Jason's delivery of "What Child Is This" is beautiful. You'll surely enjoy Jason's music and may have your copy by contacting Jason at www.jasonbare.com.



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Glen Campbell

New Haven Records

Producers: Glen Campbell, Ken Harding and Bergen White

The world was saddened this past summer when Glen Campbell announced he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. This Christmas album is a great reminder of the years we have enjoyed Glen's musical talent. Presented and made available by Ken Harding, HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS will be a keep-sake.

Glen's music reminds one of the traditional music from years past, and his smooth, soft vocals are refreshing and inspirational. Celebrated music with lavish orchestration delivers something everyone will enjoy.

Glen sings "The Christmas Song," "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear," "Little Drummer Boy," "What Child Is This," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," "Silent Night," "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," and "O Holy Night." He has two medleys of favorite carols that we all can sing along with. Vince Gill appears on "Away In A Manger" Medley, courtesy of MCA Records and the two gentlemen have wonderful harmony.

This much sought-after recording is available from www.newhavenrecords.com

Voices Won Celebrating Ten Years

Anniversary Singing Concert Review Part One

by Rhonda Frye



Southern Gospel fans of all ages were treated to a fantastic weekend of music on November 11 and 12, 2011 in Dalton, Georgia. Celebrating ten years in music ministry, Voices Won put together an incredible Anniversary Singing with special guests Karen Peck and New River, Triumphant Quartet, Mark Bishop, The Perrys and Greater Vision. The setting was in the sanctuary of Crosspointe Christian Centre and the event was emceed by Danny Jones of Singing News Magazine. Compassion International was also a guest. Fans from Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Michigan, Alabama and Kentucky assembled for the concerts.

On Friday night, Voices Won, Karen Peck & New River and Triumphant Quartet sang to a packed house. At first, the audience seemed rather quiet, but listened intently to Voices Won as they set the night into motion. Voices Won, consisting of brothers, Jaron, Shantell, and Staclynn Faulknor took the stage and sang straight into the hearts of the crowd. Many in the audience were family and friends who have supported Voices Won since their beginning ten years ago. With sweet family harmony, they sang several songs including, "Sweetest Sound," "Prayer Changes Me" and "God's Big Hand." The guys grinned, tapped their feet, and held out long notes- clearly having a great time during their whole set.



After a few numbers, Jaron thanked everyone for being there and said, "It's a joy to sing, but it's a special joy to sing with my family!" He then introduced everyone and went on to say: "God has helped us through our ups and downs and I'm thankful for each of those times. We just want to be true to our calling and keep Him first. We never want to hide behind the cross." With that said, the brothers traveled back a few years and sang an older song, "Calvary Was Calling."

Jaron grabbed his guitar and began a spontaneous acoustic set of audience requests. Jaron was nailing some high notes as they sang "Lighthouse." For fun, the guys sang "All the Gold in California" and commented that the Gatlin brothers influenced them in their early years. Someone called out "It Is Well" and Staclynn took the lead. The audience burst into applause between the last verse and chorus and hands lifted all over the building.

The guys in Voices Won are songwriters too! Following a presentation from Compassion International, US Air Force Veteran Shantell sang a ballad he had written called "I will Praise Him Forever." The music on the track recording was beautiful and featured live strings complimenting Shantell's voice and lyrics. The guys wrapped up their set by singing their popular hit, "Fishing Trip." The crowd sang and clapped right along!

Danny Jones introduced the next group as having six number one hit songs in a row and said there wasn't a hotter group in Southern Gospel anywhere than Karen Peck and New River. Karen Peck Gooch, Jeff Hawes and Susan Peck Jackson claimed the stage singing "Ephesians Chapter One" and the crowd received them enthusiastically. Next, they sang "I Want To Thank You."

Karen joked about how good it was to be in Georgia where people know how to talk and then seriously

acknowledged the veterans in the building. She asked the veterans to stand and then everyone stood as she sang the National Anthem. The crowd cheered heartily after the performance and no doubt, there were a lot of chills running up and down spines, it was beyond amazing. The trio then quickly changed the mood of the atmosphere with their high energy rendition of "I'll fly Away." Jeff Hawes was absolutely "on it" and then several in the crowd jumped back up to their feet as everyone clapped along.

Karen charmed the crowd like only Karen can as she introduced the group. She also mentioned their new Christmas album, GEORGIA MOUNTAIN CHRISTMAS and then sang a Christmas tune. The Christmas mood vanished as the music took a turn from the sound of Christmas bells to an island feel. Karen strolled through the audience singing "I Can See Clearly Now." She encouraged audience members to sing the lines of the song as she offered her microphone. It was such a sweet and light moment as the whole audience sang, "It's gonna be a bright, bright sun shiny day!" Karen encouraged everyone by saying, "It doesn't matter where you are. Your day is getting brighter with Jesus. Be encouraged in the Lord, your day is getting brighter."

Susan introduced the next song by sharing a testimony about how God may not always move our mountains, but will help us climb over them instead. Following Susan's testimony and song, Jeff took his turn to testify. "There have been many times in life God has sustained me with His grace," Jeff began. He went on to say how thankful he was that many of his friends and family were there and how grateful he was for God's mercy and grace. He then sang a touching number, "This Is What Mercy Does."

The crowd lifted hands and sang along with Karen Peck & New River's number one hit, "On The Banks of the Promised Land." Their harmony was beautiful as they repeated the chorus this time with the music stripped away. Karen kept the crowd captivated and moved on into another hit song. The crowd worshiped by lifting hands, shouting and singing along with the popular, "Four Days Late."

Karen Peck & New River concluded their set energetically with "Robe and Crown." Jeff Stice of Triumphant Quartet eased his way on stage and took the piano stool as Eric Bennett grabbed a microphone to sing bass. The only way for this writer to describe what happened next is to say... "They absolutely held nothing back, tore it up, brought the house down and the crowd went crazy!" It was awesome!

Danny Jones came back and introduced the "Favorite Quartet of the Year," according to Singing News Fan Awards, The Triumphant Quartet. The guys opened with big smiles, a ballad and moved into their number one hit song, "Saved By Grace." The crowd got their "evening aerobic workout" as one of the guys joked by clapping along. David Sutton then strolled the stage as he sang, "Streets of Gold." Scott Inman delivered "Love Came Calling" with conviction and the crowd cheered and a few shouts rang out. They definitely kicked their set off to a great start.

Eric Bennett thanked Voices Won for inviting Triumphant to their anniversary singing and went on to say how nice it was to be with a lot of people that they knew. He then introduced each of the members of the quartet and the crowd cheered one by one for their favorites!

It's no wonder Triumphant is a fan favorite- they burst with personality and have the ability to make the audience laugh and cry- sometimes the crying comes from the laughter itself. Sometimes they bring the tears because they are willing to share their personal heart-breaks. They are truly experts at using their talents, personalities and experiences to really connect with the audience. Pianist, Jeff Stice and David Sutton thrilled the audience with a harmonica/piano duet and then Eric Bennett created a very tender moment as he introduced a song he had written about his wife's two little nephews who lost their young lives during the South's devastating tornado out-breaks back in April.

Eric tenderly sang the story- song, "God Works All Things For Good" with only piano accompaniment. It was truly a touching song, one that many in the audience could relate to. Many people in the crowd were affected by the tornados- several ripping through and destroying

several nearby towns. After the song Eric commented, "I believe if they were here tonight and if your loved ones who have gone on were here tonight- I believe they would say heaven is worth it." The guys transitioned smoothly into "Wish You Were Here," a beautiful song about heaven. Many stood in response as Eric asked the audience to remember their family in prayer.

Mr. Personality himself, Clayton Inman brought humor back into the building with the bluegrass tune- "Old White Flag." Stice sat expressionless, while Inman hammed it up waving his white hankie along with others in the crowd waving theirs. The crowd roared in laughter as fun-loving Clayton seemed to be in rare form. The hoe-down number garnered Inman a standing ovation.

It was Stice's turn to entertain while the guys exited the stage. He played an outstanding arrangement of "Down From His Glory" and then Stice paid his tribute to Veterans in a special way. As he played the theme songs of each branch of the US Military, Veterans all over the building stood to represent their division of service and the audience applauded each one.

The other members of Triumphant Quartet came back to the stage to complete their set. They sang an incredible and moving patriotic song titled "Let's All Stand For America" written by David Sutton off their latest album, SONGS FROM THE HEART. The crowd stood to their feet in response and applauded.

Just before Triumphant left the stage, they couldn't seem to explain the products on their table without making people laugh. There is no doubt, Triumphant Quartet lifted spirits and touched hearts during their time on and off stage.

Following a brief intermission, Voices Won, Karen Peck and New River and Triumphant came back to the stage for a few more songs. Voices Won brought their mother, Regina Rodgers and their sister, Natasha Malchesky out, and WOW, what a performance! The guys and Natasha sang "One Scarred Hand," and Regina was joined by Karen Peck Gooch and her son, Staclynn to sing. They did an incredible job finishing out their set.

Karen ended their segment with a Christmas song, "Joy Has Come To The World" from their new Christmas album followed their most requested song, "Hold Me While I Cry." As soon as Karen Peck finished, Triumphant Quartet sang their hit song "Somebody Died For Me" with just piano.

Everyone came together for one final number before night was over. As a small choir, the groups sang a medley of crowd pleasers such as, "Just a Little Talk With Jesus," "Daddy Sang Bass," and "Heaven's Jubilee." The crowd rose to their feet clapping and singing along as



everyone on stage poured their hearts into it! It was truly a night of great music, entertainment and worship.

The Anniversary singing continued on Saturday night with Voices Won, Greater Vision, Mark Bishop and the Perrys. The concert review part 2 will be featured in January's edition of Scoops Magazine. Also, Voices Won 2012's Anniversary Singing is already in the planning stages. Be watching for announcements regarding the next year's featured guests!

For more information visit: <http://voiceswon.com/>

Photos by Eric Frye



Focus On The Young

A Conversation With Amber Nelon

By Victoria Shirey

This month I decided to write about a young lady that most everyone is familiar with, Amber Nelon Thompson. She is, in my opinion, one of the most talented young Southern Gospel artists in the industry right now.

Victoria: "How young were you when you started singing Southern Gospel music?"

Amber: "I can't remember not singing! My mama always said the first time I was ever on a stage was 10 days old! Then they started bringing me out for one song when I got a little older! I didn't record my first solo Children's album until I was 9 with Daywind Records! I became the soprano for the Nelons at 12 years old!"

Victoria: "Okay, I'm going to bring out an oldie. We're only a few months apart in age, but funny enough, I remember watching you on the old Homecoming Kids videos haha. What was it like being a part of something like that?"

Amber: "I absolutely loved being a Homecoming Kid. We're still called that ya know! Haha. Gloria Gaither still calls me her Homecoming Kid! I have to say that was the most unique experience for me at a young age. We got to go to all these different places and sing and dance and act. It was a blast. I felt like a little movie star!" Haha.



Victoria: "So, what's new with The Nelons right now?"

Amber: "We just finished a new recording produced by Bill Gaither himself, entitled 'Come On Home.' We are very excited about it and can't wait until it comes out. It's very laid back and acoustical, so it's different from anything we've ever done!"

Victoria: "Amber, growing up in a family that has been so musically involved in the Southern Gospel 'world,' how has that helped you grow and mature, not only musically but spiritually as well?"

Amber: "I think doing what we do helped me grow up quicker than I would have if I had been a normal every day child at home. I was around adults my whole life and only saw my friends if we sang with them. So my personality quickly grew to whoever might have been on the bus at that time haha. Spiritually wise, I'm thankful because even though I can't remember not

singing, I also can't remember God not being in my life. I have a godly family that always taught me about Jesus and taught me about Salvation as well.

Not to mention night after night I get to see people's lives changed by a song or something that spoke to them or God just loving on them. That's a unique experience that a lot of people don't always get to see. It's such an encouragement to see it happen and not just hear about it."

Victoria: "Recently you tried out for the hit show, American Idol. I think that's such an interesting story and shows such commitment to God and what you do. I know it's kind of a long story, but could you give us a shortened version of how all that happened?"

Amber: "I did try out for American Idol. I won the Dream Ticket at Disney World and didn't think much about it, but at the last second I

called my pastor and asked what he thought. He told me to go until God shuts the door! So that's what I did. I went to Austin, TX and was the first one out of 10,000 people to make it through. During my time in Austin, producers and executive producers that had already heard me sing had started me on photo shoots and commercials for the show banking on me making it through. They told me, 'You're gonna make more money than you could ever possibly imagine' and, 'You're the next Carrie Underwood'- Stuff like that haha. I finally got to the Hollywood judges and usually an interview takes 10 minutes....usually....I was in there for 50 minutes! I sang everything I knew. I would sing a song and answer a question and sing a song and answer a question. I told them how I was a Christian and loved Christian music and how my family had sang for years! Jennifer finally asked 'Amber, you do know this is not a Christian show?' To which I replied, 'Yes, but I'm in the world, just not of it!' So I sang again and after she said, 'Are you willing to sing secular music?' I responded, 'I'm willing to sing songs

that have a positive message, that don't compromise what I believe!" So I sang again. Finally after much poking and prodding on her part, she asked, 'Amber, are you willing to sing ONLY secular music, NO GOSPEL, and do the things we need you to do, like dress more provocatively?' That next 5 seconds seemed like a lifetime since the night before I had gotten alone by myself and asked God that if He did not want me to do this, then shut the door and make it evident to me to where there was no question! At that moment I realized I was standing in front of a closed door! So I responded, 'No I'm not willing to compromise my beliefs!' I walked away though, with a wonderful experience, a great memory, and an awesome testimony!" Victoria: "Now for a few fun questions. Do you have a secret hobby?" Amber: "Yes, I love basketball! In fact, I played all the way until I was a senior in High School. So, it's my favorite thing. I root for the Lakers and especially Kobe Bryant! I'm a huge fan, and yet I've never gotten

to go to one of his games! But Basketball for me is amazing!" Victoria: "What's your favorite place to eat on the road?" Amber: "Most definitely Chili's!!" Victoria: "Are there any "love interests" in your life right now?" Amber: "I do have a boyfriend named John. We have been dating for a year and a half this month." Victoria: "Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to the readers of SGN Scoops and tell us a little about you. Tell us how someone could get more information on where to come see you guys in concert." Amber: "You can always go to our website at www.thenelons.com! Thanks Victoria!"

The Nelons are a great family group, and I definitely recommend you going to hear them LIVE, if you haven't done so!

Ephesians 2:4-9

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.



Christmas With The Diplomats

by Sandi Duncan Clark

For the Diplomats, Jimmy, Rita and Corey Pearson, Joe Brown, Michael Lott and Jeremy Chupp, traveling across the country sharing the Gospel with their music ministry is a way of life...and family. Each member of the Diplomats is thankful for the opportunity to tell others

of their love for Christ, and to share this as a secondary family. "Traveling with three young men is a blessing, because each one; our son, Corey, who sings lead, Jeremy, who is our drummer, and Michael who plays piano, keep the rest of us on our toes," Jimmy laughed. "The

convenience is that the young guys can do all the work! You have to teach them your ways then they are fine," Jimmy commented, tongue in cheek.

He tagged his explanation with, "All three of these guys are dedicated to God and to the group, and we are blessed to have them with the Diplomats." Jimmy Pearson celebrates 50 years in Gospel Music this December. "I started as a young man and sang with a couple of local groups. Like so many people who sing Gospel

music, I grew up with Southern Gospel," Jimmy tells us. "I became the owner of the Diplomats in 1974 and for Rita and me, serving the Lord like this is a joy."

Rita Pearson is Bus Mother for the group. "Rita is a prayer warrior," Jimmy stated. "She keeps all of us straight and has a wonderful testimony of healing from cancer. God has given her a real work to do."

Joe Brown sings bass for the group and has filled this job for six years. Joe and his wife Debbie have been married for thirty

five years and have three beautiful daughters. "Our daughters have given us five wonderful grandchildren and we are so blessed."

Drummer Jeremy Chupp came to the Diplomats from Alabama. He traveled with Gold City for a while, working their sound. Doug Riley was one of Jeremy's heroes before his untimely

Christmas tour. Jimmy declared, "This is our favorite time of the year. We host several Christmas Concerts with some of our favorite artists, and it's turned into a great time," Jimmy said. "We do our regular program then we all sing some of our favorite Christmas songs and carols."

The Christmas Tour puts

was a wonderful cook and cooked our Christmas dinner until she couldn't physically handle it. She is our strongest supporter and loves hearing us sing." The Pearsons move the family gathering to Corey and Heather's home for Christmas day. "We always decorate early and get in the Christmas spirit before Thanksgiving." Corey

families...and their five grandchildren to enjoy the evening together. "Christmas always brings a flood of memories," Joe said. "One of my favorite memories is the Browns would go to my Grandfather's house to eat and Grandma would cook for the whole family. We would gather around the piano and sing until we



death, and Jeremy learned a lot from him. Living in Newborn, Georgia now, he occasionally plays drums in the studio owned by Corey Pearson.

Michael Lott began his career playing piano at a very young age, and was playing piano for his great uncle's group when Michael was six years old. He saw the Diplomats in concert during that time and knew this was what he wanted to do. After touring with the Bradys for over a year, Jimmy asked him to join the Diplomats...his dream came true!

We caught up with the Diplomats as they were preparing for their annual

each of these busy people in the mood for the Holidays and spending Christmas with family and friends. Jimmy and Rita's favorite thing about Christmas is spending time with their children and grandchildren. Everyone comes to their home on Christmas Eve for dinner. "Our daughter, Rhonda and her family come home and Corey and his family live near us. We usually have Italian or Mexican for dinner and enjoy time with the children," Rita said. "I always make their favorite home-made coconut cake that my Mother made. Mother would even buy fresh coconut and use the coconut milk and grate the actual coconut. Mother

shared, "Ever since Audree, our four year old daughter was born we have had a birthday cake for Jesus and she sings Happy Birthday to Him."

With a traditional meal for Thanksgiving, the Pearsons lean more to other favorite foods for Christmas dinner. "We've been known to have enchiladas and chicken parmesan. We also make a mean Stouffer's Lasagna," Corey laughed. Food seems to be a common denominator for everybody during the holidays and the same is true with Joe Brown and his wife, Debbie. Their family gathers at Joe and Debbie's home on Christmas Eve. Their three daughters bring their

were so tired and happy. Then we would head home."

For Jeremy Chupp, Grandma's home is the gathering place for Christmas Eve. "We have a good home cooked dinner and share our presents for each other," Jeremy revealed. "Of course we always have my favorite foods! My Aunt makes yummy candied yams and my Mom makes home-made macaroni and cheese. I guess I'm spoiled!" Christmas is one of Michael Lott's favorite holidays. His family gathers at his Grandma Gatlin's home for Christmas. "It's so good to be with our family," Michael said. "Of

course we have dinner and eat way too much!" Michael is also engaged to be married and tells us, "My fiancé, Ashley Green and I are planning a June 9th wedding. I love spending time with her family as well."

Christmas is all about God giving His Son to come to earth, to die for a lost world. Favorite songs, favorite foods, family, friends, church cantatas, plays, candle lighting services, angel choirs, all

the music, live nativities, colored lights, beautiful trees, Christmas cards and everything wonderful that screams Christmas brings love, joy and happiness to each of us. Many people think of this as a season to party. They fail to honor the God of creation and never take time to remember the true meaning of Christmas. The Diplomats share their Gospel message every time they fill their 200 plus concert dates

each year. They also share the holidays with us in their Christmas Tour during November and December. Then during their Christmas break, they share Christmas with their families. Sharing the love of God and family is what Christmas represents and Jimmy, Rita, Joe, Corey, Jeremy and Michael have their priorities straight. They wish you the very best Christmas season ever and invite you to come visit with them whenever

they are in your area.



"The riches of His free grace cause me to daily triumph over all the temptations of the wicked one, who is very vigilant, and seeks all occasions to disturb me."

George Whitefield

Yes, You Can Stay Fit During Christmas

by Laurette Willis

“I am the bread of life” John 6:48



Those words really put holiday overindulgence into perspective don't they? Perhaps the overindulgence we could enter into this Christmas is filling up on the “bread of life” instead of the bread of this world—after all, Jesus was placed in a manger (a feeding trough!) as a baby.

When we think of the bread of this world, do you think of physical bread? It can be that as well as what I call the “soul junk food” of this world. I'm referring to the PG-13, R-rated (and worse) so-called “entertainment” of this world (TV, movies, music, etc.).

Okay, now I'm meddling, right? It's just that I've found that if I'm filling up on the world's junk food through my eyes and ears, I also seem to want to satisfy my mouth with the world's processed junk foods for my body.

When I'm taking in less life through the Word into my spirit, my discernment and choices in other areas of my life aren't as clear or focused.

Pick a Scripture Snack Each Day

Fill up on real soul food! Pick one “Scripture snack” to chew on each day. Today my “snack” from the Word was the verse at the beginning of this article where Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

Throughout the day I went back to that Word and asked the Lord

to give me new revelation on it. I noticed my focus became clearer, I made better choices in a number of areas and I felt satisfied on the inside (not “stuffed” and numb from overindulging my flesh as I had so many times before).

Finding Time to Exercise During the Holidays

Many gain weight during the Christmas season, but you don't have to do so! Exercise helps, but most of us have very little time to exercise at this busy time. The solution is to work exercise into what you are already doing.

Wear a Pedometer

One of the easiest ways to monitor physical activity is to wear a pedometer. Most experts recommend 10,000 steps throughout the day. You may discover you walk more (or less!) than you thought.

Here are some tips for getting your steps:

1. Take a walk with your family after dinner (can be a short one if it's cold!)
2. Take the stairs whenever you can.
3. Walk in place when on the phone.
4. For added resistance, wear small ankle weights.

Do Short Workouts throughout the Day

Studies show that short workouts throughout the day can be just as effective as longer workout

sessions. Fit two or three 10-minute sessions in each day. Make half of your sessions strength-training or resistance-based and the other half cardio-based (such as running in place).

Exercise during In-between Times.

Instead of just waiting in line at a store doing nothing, do calf raises—and meditate on a Scripture Snack. Stuck in traffic? Tighten abdominal muscles, and then take a deep breath and exhale with a “Hallelujah!”

Here are some more quick tips:

1. Do push-ups against the kitchen counter while waiting for water to boil
2. On hold on the phone? Do some leg raises, or bicep curls with a light weight.
3. Do 25-50 jumping jacks in the morning to “This is the day the Lord has made! I will rejoice and be glad in it!” And you'll find you will be glad in it!
4. Get on a rebounder (mini-trampoline) while watching television.
5. Do relaxing stretchPeMoves! before bedtime and meditate on the goodness of the Lord, preparing you for sound sleep.

continued on next page

More Practical Tips

In addition to ensuring your heart and mind are full of the Word, here are 5 tips to help you spearhead the movement in your family to a healthier Christmas and 2012:

1. Make a difference in someone's life. Focus on one or two people you are going to get to know better over the holiday. This can be a member of your own family, a friend, a neighbor, perhaps even someone at church who needs to be with a family at Christmas (why not yours?).

2. Don't skip meals. Even if you think

you may be eating more over the holidays, don't make the mistake of skipping meals so you can "stock up" later.

3. Drink plenty of water. Stay well-hydrated. It will also ensure you eat less. We often reach for a high-calorie snack when our body is really crying out for water.

Above all, stay focused on making sure your spirit is well-fed. You will sail through the holidays and into 2012 with your heart full, your mind clear and your body full of energy as a fit witness for Christ. He is able to

do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 4:20).

Let's believe Him for it – and share our victory with others this holiday season.

Christian Fitness Expert Laurette Willis is the Director of PraiseMoves Fitness Ministry (<http://PraiseMoves.com> and on Facebook <http://facebook.com/PraiseMovesFan>). Get your free fitness kit at <http://ChristianFitnessKit.com> ©2011

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE MUSIC

by Rob Estep / interview with RACHEL McCUTCHEON

Every once in a while a new songwriter arises promising to be the next great writer that will help continue Southern Gospel Music into the future. Take a minute read this interview with Ms. Rachel McCutcheon.



Rob: "Give us a little history about yourself, Rachel."

Rachel: I was born in Selmer, Tennessee, but Russellville, Arkansas, has been my home for the last twenty-three years. I am the oldest of ten children (yes, ten!) and most of my life was spent traveling from coast to coast singing and playing in my dad's revivals. My siblings and I sang and played instruments and it was my job to have the music rehearsed and ready for the services each night. There were enough of us to have any number of duets, trios and quartets, even a small choir! It was a lot of work, but it was a ton of

fun. We had to come off the road, as a family, due to Dad's failing health, but I loved that life and still miss it.

Rob: "What was the first song you wrote and how old were you?"

Rachel: "I was twelve years old when I wrote my first song (one that had fairly decent structure, rhyme and melody, anyway). It was titled 'Fear Not.'"

Rob: "If you could have one co-writer past or present who would it be?"

Rachel: "I treasure old hymns, and would love to have written with Fanny Crosby or Isaac Watts. I recently had the honor of writing with one of my favorite lyricists, Tony Wood."

Rob: "Where is that you pull your inspiration from?"

Rachel: "Inspiration for me comes from any number of sources... sermons, songs, great books, and life itself. I'm blessed to live in the country and enjoy going out for time alone with God and His Word... and a notebook and pen."

Rob: "What other things fill your time, when you're not writing killer songs?"

Rachel: "Well, I'm a seamstress and tailor and I also teach piano and voice. We don't get to sing as

much as we used to, but I still work musically with my family group. I also have a home studio that I spend quite a bit of time in. But songs are my passion and I try to maintain a lifestyle where writing is a priority."

Rob: "You wrote the latest single for Beyond the Ashes, 'Whenever We Pray,' tell us about the story behind this song."

Rachel: "There really is no story, except that I grew up in a family that strongly believed in prayer, and I've seen God answer prayer in so many amazing ways. 'Whenever We Pray' is an expression of that faith and I'm honored that Beyond The Ashes have adopted the song as their own."

Rob: "What one artist has had the biggest influence on you and your writing style?"

Rachel: "That's hard to narrow down, but I've always loved sounds and



styles like the Gaither Vocal Band, Martins, Gold City, the Isaacs, Nelons and Karen Peck & New River."

Rob: "If you had to pick one of your songs as a favorite, which one would it be?"

Rachel: "I really like a hymn Allie Lapointe and I composed, 'Jesus Christ, My Treasure.'"

Rob: "I know that the story of how you were "discovered," is quite an interesting story. Tell our readers what happened that evening!"

Rachel: "Oh wow! August 7, 2009, was a very exciting evening for me! A friend of mine, Olivia Wallbrown, was with me at a Ernie Haase and Signature Sound concert. Afterwards she approached Wayne Haun (regardless of me trying to stop her!) and asked him if he would meet a songwriter friend of hers

who had followed his career, loved his productions and was doing some producing of her own. I was beyond embarrassed at the time, but looking back I see God's hand in what Olivia did. Mr. Haun agreed and when the crowd thinned out, we met and he talked with me for several minutes about songwriting and producing. Olivia insisted he see one of my songs and gave him the lyrics to 'Whenever We Pray,' which my sisters and I sang a cappella for him. To my surprise, he wrote down his contact information, and asked me to send him more songs! He also encouraged me to go to Write About Jesus, a Christian songwriter's conference in St. Louis, where he would be teaching in a couple of months, which I did. While there, he introduced me to one of his business associates, Joel Lindsey, who showed an interest in my songs as well. In a few months they signed me as a staff writer for Sunset Gallery Music!

I am very blessed and honored to be working with these guys." We're keeping a watchful eye on Rachel, she has a lot of potential to do great things and to continue writing amazing songs! Thank you, Rachel for letting us get to know you better. I pray you all have a very Merry Christmas!



Visiting the "Museum of Flight"

By Stephanie Kelley

Those of you who have ever flown into Sea Tac Airport have been to Tukwila. It's a strange name for a thriving city that has a lot more to offer tourists than just a major international airport. If you ever have the chance to visit the area for more than just a layover, plan to visit the "Museum of Flight." Airplane buffs will go bonkers over the collection of more than 150 historic

air and spacecrafts and related artifacts. The museum has both permanent and temporary exhibits, so each visit offers something new. The impressive main gallery is a timeline of aviation history. The museum allows visitors to get an up close and personal view of the collection and even allow them to hop inside to get a view of the inside of some

of the planes. My favorite part of the visit was getting to board Air Force One. This was the first presidential jet plane, a Boeing 707-120, for those who know what that means. The plane we got to tour carried many famous people and world leaders including Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. Other famous passengers included Nikita Khrushchev and Henry Kissinger. I enjoyed seeing what was considered break-through technology of the era in the flying Oval Office.

My husband, who has piloted planes before, enjoyed being able to board the Concorde, the world's fastest jetliner. He was impressed with the speed that the jetliner could reach, the turn around time for a round trip flight from New York to Europe and the fact that the pointed nose tip could reach a temperature as high as 260° F from the friction of the air at the very high speeds it reached.

Another highlight was getting to go into the Space Station. For the kids, it was getting to pretend to be air traffic controllers

and getting to watch real planes take-off and land at next door, Boeing Field. While we were in Tukwila, we stayed at the Doubletree. The room was comfortable and featured a nice seating area that was separated by a door from the bedroom. Having children, I really appreciate having a space for them to watch TV or play while I get everything ready for going to bed. The decor was pleasant and had a full length mirror, which is one feature I look for in every hotel room I stay in. The breakfast was ample and delicious. The lobby restaurant offered a lot of options including the breakfast buffet which had a variety of foods that we all enjoyed. The staff was very friendly and probably didn't know how much I appreciated the warm chocolate chip cookies they gave to us upon arrival and departure. I encourage anyone who comes to the area to visit the Museum of Flight for an exciting and educational activity. While there, I would recommend staying at the Doubletree Inn, and be sure to enjoy the yummy chocolate chip cookies.



President Kennedy's pipe rack and President Johnson's hat rack aboard Air Force 1

HOMELAND'S SCOTT GODSEY SHARES HIS HOLIDAY THOUGHTS

By Sandi Duncan Clark

Not a day goes by that Scott Godsey, Vice President and General Manager of Homeland Entertainment, is not checking out the new technology that makes the music world go 'round. From computers, smart phones, music players, iPads, to internet advances and any opportunity to grow Homeland Entertainment, Scott's knowledge of these improvements is unfathomable. With that knowledge, Scott has invested his time and effort in making Homeland one of the industry's top innovative companies.

Talking with Scott about Christmas gave us opportunity to catch up with Scott's work. With all the new "techno gadgets" being introduced during the holidays, Christmas sometimes proves to be the ideal time to find new things on the market. Scott shared his knowledge regarding Christian music's availability on the internet.

"Before coming to Homeland Entertainment, I worked at Eddie Crook Company," Scott stated. "After realizing that downloaded music was the way future music would be sold/available, I began digging deeper into the technology of the music and what was available. I was

able to add much of their catalog to iTunes."

Scott was later able to secure the ECC catalog and add it entirely to iTunes. Since joining Homeland Entertainment, Scott has added has an Intern devoted to adding the entire Homeland music catalog to internet music sites. Scott explains, "I mentioned iTunes, but there are more than thirty different internet sites available to purchase music. iTunes runs on Apple operating systems while Amazon runs on Android."

Scott documented that in mid-November, "We have had over 1800 songs downloaded for the month. This is the way that music is going...first it was vinyl, then 8-tracks, cassettes, CDs and now music downloads for MP3 music players, and etc. I don't know many people who love and enjoy music, who don't have a digital player."

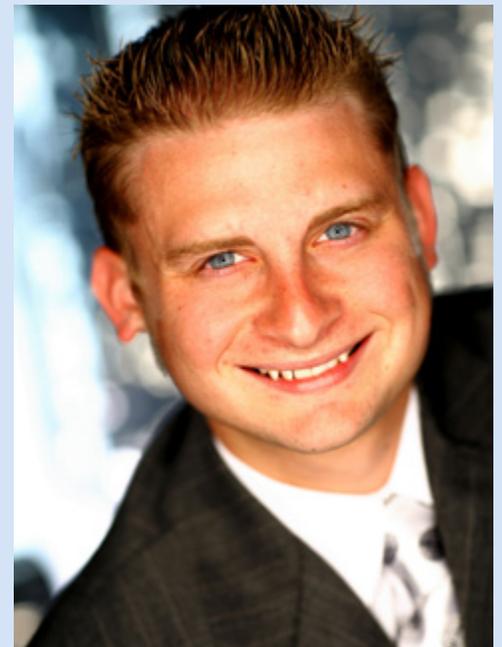
Scott laughed as he said, "And getting back to Christmas, a digital music player—MP3, iPod or whatever you want, makes a nice Christmas gift!" Scott does Homeland Entertainment proud with his knowledge of the digital technology available!

The Godseys will be celebrating Christmas in Indiana with their families. "And we'll be decorating our home here, before we go, since we have plans for entertaining before Christmas," Scott revealed. "We usually have two trees since I like a tree with white lights and she like the two-toned, multi-colored ones."

Scott and his wife, Ashleigh enjoy Christmas music while

they decorate. "We like Signature Sound's Christmas, Frank Sinatra, The Carpenters and Michael Bubl'e," Scott revealed. He shared a story regarding Signature Sound, "A couple of years ago I was really burned out with Southern Gospel music," he said. "I had just stopped listening. Then I saw that Signature Sound was doing their Christmas Show at Treveca University, so I just decided to attend."

He finished, "The program that Signature Sound presented was a class act; the music was classy, the show was the best Christmas program I had ever seen and it really opened my eyes to the fact that Gospel music is still alive and well. Ernie and the guys stepped up and presented a show that rivaled



any secular group in the business."

Of course Christmas with their families is always a blessing. "Food is always abundant...home-cooked food with everyone contributing their best, favorite dish," Scott. "I even contribute my favorite macaroni and cheese." We asked Scott to share his recipe

and he laughed when as he said, "You have to understand; this is my favorite dish and it might not appeal to everyone." He did agree and allowed us to print the recipe for our readers.

5 Cheese Macaroni

32 oz. of elbow macaroni – place in boiling water

2 Cups shredded Monterrey Jack Cheese

1 cup shredded jalapeno cheese

16 ounces sliced mild cheddar

16 ounces sliced Colby

2 cups milk

½ stick of butter

16 ounces drained lobster or crab meat is optional

Place in a large casserole dish. Make layers and distribute the ingredients evenly throughout each layer. Cover with aluminum foil.

Bake for 55 minutes at 350.

Scott recalled several memories of the holidays from years past. "The first twelve years of my life, we

would all go to my Grandparents house in Tarpoon Springs, Florida for Christmas. I remember that in 1991, the day before Christmas we had snow there. It was the first time ever!"

Scott shared that he and his Mother put up their Christmas tree on the Black Friday while Scott and Ashleigh are in Indiana. "We put up the tree and listen to the 'Perry Sisters Christmas' on the Friday after Thanksgiving. It's a tradition I never want to break!"

Scott and Ashleigh are very busy people. Along with Scott's work at Homeland Entertainment, Ashleigh is a case worker for a health company. Having time with each other and with family during the holidays allows both to slow down and relax for a few days. To celebrate the birth of Jesus and to celebrate family is a double blessing.

On the next workday after Christmas, we'll once again find Scott checking out all the new programming and technical improvements available to increase the distribution and refinement of Southern Gospel music.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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How will we use our gifts?

Chronicles of a Singing English Teacher

by Jeff Hawes

Christmas is my absolute favorite time of year, and I must admit one of the best parts is hoping that I will receive that one special gift. It all comes down to this one day and if I don't get that perfect gift, I'll have to wait another 365 days before the chance comes again.

Honestly, this year I have had a different understanding of gifts and especially what I hope to receive this year. Every year I always watch one of my favorite movies, *The Nativity Story*. It seems as though it took on a whole new meaning this year. I began to see the story unfold through the eyes of Mary.

Wow! What must have been going through her mind when the angel told her she would bring forth a son. She had been chosen to be the mother of God's only son. UNREAL! The scripture says that she was favored among all women. Her life was so pure that God chose to use her. Although she was poor, she was also very

humble and God could use her in ways she could never imagine possible. He gave her the greatest gift she would ever receive, and she gave the world the greatest King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The fact is: He could have chosen anyone, but he chose Mary, and she accepted.

I began to really think about the gifts God has given me, and the gifts He could give me if he finds my heart and life pure before him. One thing special about Mary is that she didn't keep her gift to herself. She could have had Jesus and kept him to herself--protecting him from the world, but yet she knew Jesus had to be shared with all mankind. How many times have I wanted to share my gifts with the world? Of course I'm not really making reference to my Sony Playstation. I'm talking about the gifts that God gives us to further his kingdom. The fact is: we all aren't given the same gifts. Some of us are called to be singers,



musicians, preachers, teachers, listeners, parents, encouragers....the list goes on and on. We must share our gifts every chance we are given.

During a recent weekend on the road, I battled some kind of throat soreness that left me not being able to reach certain notes and I was left with a sore throat every night on the bus. I later realized that I had pulled some muscle in my neck and that caused the soreness; however, I also realized just how important my gift was. What would my life be like without my voice? I know without a doubt that God would use me in other ways, but it really put my purpose into perspective. I believe it has put a new excitement and purpose in my part of each concert we do. God has given each of us different gifts and

abilities to reach different kinds of people.

Maybe God has given you a gift that you know you should be using to glorify His name. I pray that this season, you allow God to reveal his gifts to you and that we may be found pure in his eyes. May we be humble and ready to receive a gift that may at times seem overwhelming, but we must know that God has huge plans in store for our lives and perhaps will use us to change the world.



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