

Moments of Revelation

The bones of this article were written for my now defunct blog over ten years ago (January 2008.) A version of it was published by an online magazine called [The Brink](#) some time back as well. I keep coming back to it though. When I wrote it, I was only 30 years old. I had been married for less than ten years. I had two boys. I was less than two years into my job as a Disability Claims Examiner for the State of Tennessee.

Things have changed in the intervening ten years. I am 18 years into marriage with an amazing woman. I have three boys now – ages fifteen, fourteen, and nine. I'm a man. I'm 40! I have been at my Disability job for over 12 years. And I keep coming back to those things I wrote a decade ago. It is a simple story and one that has repeated itself in my life more times than I can recall.

I was driving home from work one afternoon. The traffic was bad – as usual – though in retrospect, it was nothing compared to our current traffic problems in Nashville. The heater in my car was nearly dead, and needless to say, it was cold. Not surprisingly, I had a headache as well. I wouldn't describe my mood as good. It wasn't a horrible day – I wasn't angry or bitter or anything like that. In as simple terms as I can put it, I just wasn't "feeling" that Tuesday afternoon. Does that make sense? There are days where it is better for everyone to just turn the page and get to the next one. That was my reality that cold, January afternoon. I was ready to move on to Wednesday.

That all changed, though, while I was driving home. When I first wrote this article (or blog post), I had a catchy name for what happened to me. At least, I thought it was catchy, but as it didn't actually catch on, it was probably not nearly as catchy as I hoped. I had a "Moment of Revelation." I was 30

and full of vim and vigor so you have to grant me some grace in thinking that “Moment of Revelation” was going to revolutionize the world.

What exactly was my “Moment of Revelation?” God didn’t audibly speak to me. I didn’t get a vision from heaven. What did happen was that I caught a glimpse of something beyond me and my immediate circumstances. Scripture tells us that God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; I am sure there are many different ways that verse can be interpreted or explained, but I am not going to exegete the passage. I know what that verse says to me; God has made everything beautiful in its time and he created humanity with an innate ability to appreciate truth and beauty. He did this so that we could and would recognize the Originator of that Truth and Beauty.

That gets me back to my “Moment of Revelation.” I wasn’t thinking about anything in particular while I was driving, so I wasn’t exactly searching for anything beautiful, but beauty found me anyway. I had the radio on one of those “We play whatever we want” stations. (Jack FM if you want me to be specific.) The volume was low because the song that had been playing was terrible. Due to the low volume, I missed the first couple of notes of the next song, U2’s glorious *With or Without You*. Once I realized what song was on, I turned up the volume to a comfortably deafening level. (“Comfortably deafening” might seem contradictory, but if you are a big music fan, I think you know exactly what I mean.) I don’t have the ability to describe the rush of emotions that hit me. I forgot I was cold. I forgot my headache. I forgot the crappy day I had at work. I forgot about the bumper-to-bumper traffic. I simply allowed the song to “minister” to me. I know that sounds preposterous and touchy-feely, but it happened.

My entire outlook for the day changed. That one song at that specific time was exactly what I needed. Before anyone chimes in about the song itself, I’ll make a few things clear: I

didn't/don't base my theology on this song, even though it probably captures the typical Christian experience better than just about any song on Christian radio any given year. I don't have to agree with everything an artist is expressing. I just need to be ready to catch a quick glimpse of the eternity that the artist may or may not have even intended.

I experienced this the first time I saw Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf the Grey hug on the big screen in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I was hit over the head with it when Stephen Lawhead, in his magnificent *Pendragon Cycle*, wrote about Merlin holding a wounded Arthur in his arms as their small boat sails to Avalon. Every time I hear *The River Will Flow* by Whiteheart, my soul smiles. I think God smiles too. These "Moments of Revelation" are everywhere; we just have to be ready to receive them. Mind you, they are not just in the arts. It could be a sunset. Laughing with a friend. Spending time with your family. I could go on for pages about the ways my kids help me experience it. My point is that we need to cultivate an appreciation for these moments that God gives us. There is a fundamental reason we have this ability; it points our eyes to our Creator. If we truly appreciate the beauty and truth we find in our lives, it will only nurture our love and devotion to the Source of that beauty and truth.

I look for these moments often though probably not as often as I should. I have even written about a few of these moments already for REO. ([Here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).) If your day, or week, is not really doing it for you, keep your eyes open. Maybe God has a moment prepared for you. Don't miss it because you are too busy stuck in your present circumstances.

Can you relate? Do you have these moments? We would love for you to tell us about them in the comment section below.

“Say What?”: Song Lyrics We Completely Misunderstood.

Everyone’s done it. Whether as children or even as adults, we hear a song and our brain processes what we are hearing incorrectly. We substitute words or phrases in place of the actual lyrics and we proceed to sing nonsense. Sometimes, we get pretty close – (See Gowdy’s “Africa” by Toto blunder below) and sometimes we aren’t even in the same ballpark – “We built this city on sausage rolls” instead of “We build this city on rock and roll.” Seriously, that’s a real thing.

In that spirit, here are five song lyrics we totally botched.

***Money For Nothing* by Dire Straits (Gowdy Cannon)**

I knew so many factual things about this song when it was released. I knew it was released in 1985. I knew there was a longer version of the song that would be extremely Non-PC today. I could recognize the song after two seconds of the drum intro, or if I had to from about one second of the opening guitar riff. This song played over and over in my life when I was seven and eight years old, including on rides to school in the back seat of my brother Tracy’s T-top convertible.

But 7-year old Gowdy was badly, badly mistaken by the lyrics. I had no idea if it was “chicks for free” or “checks for free,” but that is a common misunderstanding of the song, at least if the Google search bar on my computer is right when I type in “Money for nothing and my...” But even more embarrassing was that I thought the song was saying “Money for workin’.” It

was around 1989—four years later—that my future sister-in-law corrected me. I pretended I got it wrong on purpose but that was a lie.

Also, I just found out that in the song “Africa” by Toto it’s “bless the rains” and not “miss the rains” but I forewent that one based on how I already displayed my ignorance about its lyrics in [another REO article on the 80s](#).

***Get on Your Knees and Fight Like a Man* by Petra (Phill Lytle)**

I don’t have a lot of excuses here. The lyric I “misheard” is literally the title of the song, and yet, to this day, I can’t hear it correctly. (In my defense, I was pretty young when this album came out – 10 or so.) The entire song is about the power of prayer, something that Petra sang about often, and the lyrics were a great subversion of the world’s idea of manliness and what Scripture says about it. I understood that even then, yet I still always heard (and sang along) to “Get on your knees, and cry like a man!” It made no sense to me, yet that is what I heard so that is what it was.

***We Three Kings* (Ben Plunkett)**

The first line of this song has always been a bit frustrating to me in that it is actually written to make it confusing. We three kings of *Orient Are*? It makes it even more frustrating that sometimes the song is actually called *We Three Kings of Orient Are*. (insert Tim “the tool man” Taylor question grunt). So I was a kid in church at Christmas time and I was always like, “Where is this magical land called *Orient Are*?”

Like many poetic type works, the blame is on the author awkwardly manipulating it for the sake of rhyming. I can’t

stand it when poets and songwriters do that. In this case, this little bit of manipulation madness was brought to you just so the author could rhyme “are” with “afar”. Just say “we are three kings of Orient” and end our misery. Come on! (Of course, that creates a little awkwardness in itself, but at least it’s a starting point for a revision).

***Brother* by NEEDTOBREATHE (Michael Lytle)**

A few years ago the band NEEDTOBREATHE scored a hit with the song *Brother*. It’s a great anthem on the theme of brotherly love. My family enjoyed the song, but one line in the chorus gave us some trouble. For those who are unfamiliar, the chorus says:

*Brother let me be your shelter
Never leave you all alone
I can be the one you call when you’re low
Brother let me be your fortress
When the night winds are driving on
Be the one to light the way, bring you home*

The second to last line was the one we couldn’t figure out. Various alternatives were suggested. My son was convinced it was “In the night with the diamond ore”. My personal favorite was “When you might need a Tylenol”. Eventually, we figured it out. Or maybe we just looked it up. Either way, we all can now sing “When the night winds are driving on” with confidence, and all is right with the world again.

***Bringing in the Sheaves* (Ben Plunkett)**

It never crossed my young mind to wonder why they were singing “Bringing in the Cheese” on “The Little House On the Prairie” nor did it phase me when we sang it at church. Never mind that

the rest of the song offers the biblical metaphor of harvesting. Actually, at that point in my life, it would not have mattered what food product they were bringing in, sheaves, cheese, beef steak, pizza. it was all the same to me. While sheaves alone really does fit best with the visual and biblical context of the rest of the song, I was a kid, I didn't give a hoot for context—so get off my back! Now I want some pizza. Bring in the cheese!

Now it's your turn. Tell us what song lyrics you have butchered – use the comment section below. And if you enjoy this article, please consider liking and sharing it on Facebook or Twitter. We appreciate the support!

Five Songs From the '80s I Love that Destroy My Street Cred

Forgive me father, for I have sinned.

Not really, but in the eyes of some, what I am about to confess will be considered heinous and unforgivable. I believe I have [good musical tastes](#). I listen to a wide [variety of styles](#) and [genres](#). I love everything from classic rock and roll to electronica to the great time-tested hymns. Yet my

unblemished record of staunch musical discernment is about to come crashing down on my head. Here are five songs from the 1980s that will shatter any respectability I might have created for myself as a knowledgeable music critic.

Buckle up kids, this might get bumpy.

***Africa* by Toto**

Let's get this party started off right! This song has me right where it wants me from the opening notes of that beautiful 80s keyboard. The light percussion sprinkled in seals the deal. And the harmonies. Oh the harmonies! *Toto* just goes for it at the end of the song, bringing it all home with passion – every instrument and vocal perfectly blending into a melodious masterpiece.

I realize that it has suddenly become “cool” to like this song. As far as I am concerned, if you just recently started “loving” this song, after years of ignoring or hating it, then you can just take that “love” and head on home. I've been “blessing the rains” since my elementary school days. Get that ironic love out of my face!

***Do You Believe in Love* by Huey Lewis and the News**

Let's get a few things out of the way right off the bat: *Huey Lewis and the News* are not singing about love in this song, though I don't think they realize it. Second, the music video for this song is the perfect mix of 80s creepy naïveté. Nothing says “love” like a band full of dudes lying in bed with you while singing the chorus of this song!

But that's neither here nor there. The song is just great 80s pop rock. It's a little quirky. It's fun. It has enough punch

to reasonably be classified as rock but settles nicely in the pop world as well. If there ever was a band that was born to be made fun of it, it was *Huey Lewis and the News* – there isn't a shred of coolness to their music or style – but that sort of makes their music even better. They played music they liked and I like their music for just that reason. Plus, they are Michael Scott's favorite band even though he thinks he is listening to Bruce Springsteen.

I'm not going to link the video due to the creepy factor mentioned earlier. It's not offensive for today's standards but we are running a family-friendly site after all. Here is an alternative in case you are not familiar with the song.

***The Touch* by Stan Bush (From *The Transformers: The Movie* Soundtrack)**

I love *The Transformers: The Movie*. Not the Shia LaCrazy, Michael Bay version that has spawned one million awful sequels. No, I love the original 1986 animated film. It was everything I wanted in a movie when I was 9 years old. It had awesome action. Great one-liners. (The movie is basically a string of one-liners.) And an 80s soundtrack that rocked my world.

The Touch was the theme song of the movie. Sung with ear-splitting intensity by Stan Bush, it had all the necessary ingredients for me to consider it a great song: Epic guitars. A nice layer of keyboard. Big vocals. Pounding drums.

"You got the touch. You got the power. Yeah!" I think that says it all.

In Time by Robbie Robb (From the *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* Soundtrack)

I've written about this one [before](#). Here is a small excerpt from that much more important article:

For a kid that loved 80s rock like it was a part of his soul and responded to power ballads like an addict to his drug of choice, that song, at that moment in the film, felt like poetry, inspiration, and theology...In the film's vernacular, it was heaven.

This is the kind of song that will always work for me. There is a definite "Richard Marx" vibe happening in this song, though I contend it's better than anything in his catalog. It has all the hallmarks of a great 80s power ballad with the appropriate levels of sincerity and emotion. I love every freaking second of it!

Take on Me by A-ha

Best. Music. Video. Ever.

I almost don't want to write anything else about this song. It doesn't need my help at all. This song could not have been created at any other time or mind-space than in the crazy 80s. It screams 80s in every way imaginable.

Also, is there a better falsetto in the history of popular music? No. No there isn't.

That's my list, or at least, the part of my list I am willing to share. There are many, many more songs I could have included. One could even say there are a plethora of songs if one used such words. To be honest, though, I didn't really write this article and list these songs so that others would

get a peek inside my head. No, dear reader, I wrote this hoping to start a dialogue. I wanted to create a safe space where everyone can share what songs they love that would get them kicked out of the cool kids club. There will be no judgment here. No condemnation. Your opinions will be welcomed with open heart and mind.

Stopped Me in My Tracks

I was in third grade and I was sitting at our local Pizza Hut with my family. We didn't eat out much, being poor missionary types, so it made occasions like this extra special. I remember the moment as clearly as I remember what happened to me a few minutes ago. A song I had never heard started playing on the jukebox. I was completely captivated – totally at the mercy of the music ringing out from the old speakers, which on that day, sounded like a million dollars. I was frozen in that space and time, hearing a song that felt like a splash of ice water in my face while at the same time like the warmest hug I had ever been given. I looked across the table and saw that my older brother was experiencing the same thing. We locked eyes and we both knew. We knew.

The song ended, we ate the rest of our meal, and we rushed out of the restaurant while my parents paid. As soon as we got outside, we both started gushing about the song we had heard. Who sang it? What band was it? What was the name of the song? We had a million questions and no Google or internet search to figure it out. Eventually, we did find out. It was Bon Jovi's "Livin' On a Prayer." I know. After all that build up, I just

admitted to falling head over heels to one of the quintessential 80s, hair-band anthems. I regret nothing. I still love this song. At that time, my music world was made up of a few Christian rock cassette tapes, and whatever my parents listened to. And for the most part, it was music that I enjoyed. Singers like Steve Green and Sandi Patty. "Livin' On a Prayer" was different. It was big, bold, and seemed ready-made for my nine-year-old sensibilities. [It was my "heart music", as my father would put it](#) and it connected to me in a way that no other music could.

That is one story, in a lifetime full of similar stories, on the profound effect music has had on me. My life has been shaped by songs. From my earliest memories, I have responded to music. I have fuzzy memories of dancing in my backyard when I was very young, four or five at most, listening to "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" being blasted by my neighbors. I had no idea what rock and roll was, but if what I was hearing was rock and roll, I too loved it. Music has always spoken to me in ways that nothing else can. Over the next handful of paragraphs, I hope to spotlight a few more stories on specific moments when music cut through the noise of my life and fulfilled its divinely created purpose. Hopefully, these stories will tell a bigger story that goes beyond my specific memories and speak to the greater truth about the power of music in all of our lives.

God's plan of redemption like I had never heard before.

I said this in my review of [Andrew Peterson's Behold the Lamb of God concert](#) from 2016:

"I love the second half, hearing the biblical narrative of grace interwoven in the Old and New Testaments. But from the

moment “Labor of Love” is played, until the final “amen” is sung by the audience, I am a mess. I lack the words and the skill to say why exactly. My best guess is that the words and music and truth speak so clearly in those final songs. They speak directly to my heart, mind, and soul.”

I stand by that. Music moves me. Always has. That is kind of the whole point of this article. I am touched by music in a way that very little else can manage. It effortlessly connects my emotions and my spirit. So when Andrew Peterson and his merry band of musicians reached the climax of the concert, it nailed me to the floor. I’m not sure if I even breathed for much of it, I was so overwhelmed. With loving care and creativity, Peterson crafted an album that journeys through the pages of Scripture to recount the unbelievable and impossible story of our redemption. The final few songs are everything. I had heard the album numerous times. I had even seen the concert once before. But this time...this time it stopped me in my tracks. When the creator of the world decides to peel back the curtain just a bit, using those things that speak most clearly to us, we need to take notice. That December night, I did pay attention. I cried and sang with the band, *Hallelujah, Christ is born!*”

***The New World* and breaking down walls.**

As I sat in my darkened living room, I had difficulty processing the film I had just experienced. *The New World* was unlike any film I had ever seen. It was poetic – barely concerned with traditional storytelling devices. Most of the dialogue is delivered by narration – meditative, prayer-like voiceovers to reveal the deepest spiritual longings of the characters. It is an unconventional film and has proven to be very divisive to most of my friends. Some love it as I do

while others, whose opinions I highly value, dislike it. Yet, there is something about the film that I respond to on an almost subconscious level. I am convinced that much of that is due to the music of the film.

Towards the end of the film, Pocahontas is faced with the decision of her life. Her first love, John Smith, has come to pay her a visit, desperate to be loved by her again. At this point in the film, she is married to John Rolfe, a landowner and godly man. She fell in love with Smith when she was quite young. It was a romance that fundamentally changed who she was. It also broke her when Smith left her to seek out other new worlds. He was a raging tempest that caught her in its winds and waves for a time but left her lost and floundering when it was gone. He loved her, in his own way, but not enough to quell the storm that continually churned in his own spirit. At her lowest point, John Rolfe found her, gave her a new life, and a new opportunity for love. That love was not fully reciprocated until she met with Smith one last time.

There is a moment in this film that wrecks me every time I see it. John Rolfe is terrified he will lose his love. The film takes special care to show him on his knees praying, hoping she will make the right decision. Without spoiling the ending, her actions, coupled with the beauty of the James Horner score, moved me to tears that first viewing. They have moved me to tears each subsequent viewing. Great music can do that. It breaks down our defenses. It leaves our souls bare to experience truth and beauty in a way that almost nothing else can.

Yearning for home.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in the office of my pastor, Allen Pointer, after Wednesday night service. We were both waiting for the youth group to return from their activity. It is one of my favorite times of the week, sitting there, talking to a man I respect so much. We talk about the church, the Tennessee Titans, the Nashville Predators, and everything else under the sun. That night, we spent most of our time talking music: *Keith Green. Second Chapter of Acts. Petra.* He had preached a sermon a few months before about home. He referenced two songs that had focused his thoughts while preparing to preach. I had not heard one of the songs so he played me a Youtube video of it. We sat there and listened. When the song ended, I was speechless. Even though he had heard the song any number of times, when he looked at me, his eyes were filled with tears. It wasn't a "Christian" song. It was "From Now On", one of the main songs from the recent film, "The Greatest Showman." It's a song about finding a purpose for our lives. Finding something noble and true to commit to. And when that happens, we find our way home. There is a spiritual longing saturating this song that hits me hard every time I hear it and it struck me that night like a slap to the face. You can see it all over the faces in the video as well. I do not know the spiritual state of anyone in the video but as the song swells and the refrain about coming home begins, every person in the room is longing for something much bigger than them. They are desperately reaching for home. They are crying out to a God they might not even believe exists. That is the power of music.

Allen and I had a worship experience that night watching Hugh Jackman sing. It was a moment I will never forget.

Rejoicing with all of creation at the resurrection of our Lord.

*Did the grass sing?
Did the earth rejoice to feel You again?
Over and over like a trumpet underground
Did the earth seem to pound, "He is risen!"
Over and over in a never-ending round
"He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah!"*

I can honestly say that I have no specific memory of hearing this Easter classic for the first time. It feels like it has always been a part of my life. Sandi Patty's *Morning Like This* album was a favorite in the Lytle household. My parents liked it. The children enjoyed it. If I was putting together a greatest Christian albums list, I am pretty sure this would make it. I have so many recollections of hearing this album – whether in the car, in our home, or hearing my mother sing a few of the songs in churches. For my money, the standout song is the title track – “Was it a Morning Like This?” And even though I have always loved this album, and this song specifically, it wasn't until I was in college, when I revisited it, that I truly found myself in awe. The combination of the music – the orchestral string and percussion arrangement, Patty's one-of-a-kind voice – and the poetic beauty of the lyrics creates an Easter celebration few songs can match. I remember vividly when the power of the song finally seared its truth into my heart. The very rocks would have rejoiced at our Lord's resurrection. It was truly the day of days. The day that death was defeated. The day that redemption became a reality. The day the King of Glory conquered sin and the grave for all of eternity. “He is risen, hallelujah!”

Do we have ears to hear?

Perhaps, this all sounds like a bunch of touchy-feely garbage. If so, I'm sorry to have wasted your time. Hopefully, for even those that do not respond to music as strongly as I do, this has still been a pleasant read. But for those that do respond to music like I do, isn't music awesome? I am fully convinced that our ability to create and enjoy music is something built into us as part of our *Imago Dei*. Scripture is full of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." We are exhorted and commanded to sing praises to our God. The love of music is woven into the very fabric of our souls. So I keep listening. I keep searching for music that will teach me. Music that will challenge me. Music that will usher me into the throne room to worship. I keep my ears open for the next song that will strike me like a bolt a lightning. I keep hoping to be stopped in my tracks.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Five

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Five of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s

and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

Part Five:

***Where Do We Go From Here?* by Phill Lytle**

The mid/late 2000s through present

What has been the point of this series? Why have we spent the past month writing over 4,000 words and creating playlists with hundreds of songs?

To remember.

It really is that simple. As our scope has been laser-focused on the rock music genre, we realize that this leaves many artists unexplored. Many great artists that risk being forgotten just as much as the bands we have covered. There is a whole other series that needs to be written about those wonderful bands, singers, and performers in Christian music history that didn't quite fit into what we were doing. Perhaps one day, we will tackle that topic. For now, we appreciate all the comments, questions, and suggestions we have received as we have released each new installment in this series. Our hope is that we, at the bare minimum, started a conversation. For reasons we will never understand, the Christian music world is seemingly the only one that actively forgets its history. That needs to stop. Based on the massive reaction we received from this series, it is clear there are many others who feel the

same way.

That leads us to our next steps. Where do we go from here? Instead of writing another 1,000 words about the Christian bands and artists that are currently making what we consider to be the best music, we would rather let their music speak for itself. We would also like to invite you to join us by telling us about your favorite artists that don't quite fit the CCM mold. We all know the *Hillsongs*, the *Casting Crowns*, the *Toby Macs* of the world. We want to move right outside of that space and show you a world of music created by artists, poets, and visionaries that will challenge and inspire. Artists like *Andrew Peterson*, *John Mark McMillan*, *Josh Garrels*, and many more. These artists carry the banner first picked up by *Keith Green*, *Petra*, *The 77's*, and *The Call*. They carry on the legacy of excellence, artistry, and creativity. Let us do our best to not overlook this amazing music simply because it does not get played on the local FM station.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Four

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Four of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading please feel free to comment below.

Part Four:

***The Road Less Traveled* by Michael Lytle**

The late 90's to the early 2000's

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a pivotal time in Christian rock and roll music. While it may not have been obvious or even a conscious choice there was a battle going on for where Christian music would go in the future. On one hand, some of the more creative and critically acclaimed artists like *Jars of Clay*, *Sixpence None the Richer*, and *Switchfoot* were also the artists that were selling the most records. This was not necessarily true in the 1980s where critical acclaim and commercial success did not always seem to go hand in hand. The rise of independent record labels like Tooth and Nail/BEC and Five Minute Walk/Sarabellum propelled forward artists like *Dimestore Prophets*, *Dryve*, *Starflyer 59*, and *Plankeye* who were blazing their own trails and not simply following what was popular in secular music. These labels also were reaching a younger audience which the big names of the 80s were starting to struggle with.

At the same time, the rise of modern pop/worship music was starting to gain momentum. If *Petra* and their 1989 album *Petra Praise: The Rock Cries Out* was the John Wycliffe of this new praise and worship music then *Delirious?* was its Martin Luther. (Under this analogy *Hillsong* would be Zwingli.) The boys from across the pond created the blueprint that is still being followed, for better or worse, to this day.

While we here at REO are certainly very much in favor of singing praises to and worshiping our creator, the focus from record labels and radio stations on “worship” music was not all positive. Lyrics that dealt with personal struggles, social issues, family dynamics, and life in general, were quickly jettisoned in favor of songs that addressed God directly. Again, singing songs to God is not a bad thing, but we lost something along the way when other types of songs were discarded. Today we rarely, if ever, hear songs like *All Star United's* satirical *La La Land*, which took aim at the health, wealth, prosperity gospel movement. It is more difficult to find voices like Steve Hindalong of *The Choir* acknowledging the strain a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Nashville had put in his marriage in *Never More True*. We moved away from bands like *Plankeye* writing about their band breaking up and the uncertainty it created in *Goodbye*. Radio forgot artists like *The Waiting*, who drew inspiration from the opening paragraph of Melville's *Moby-Dick* to write about the Old Testament wanderings of God's chosen people in the song *Israel*.

If you go to a Christian bookstore or listen to Christian radio today it is easy to see who won the battle. Modern worship music dominates the landscape while the more creative artists are once again going underground and using alternative methods to get their message to the public. We will continue this discussion in part five of our series.

The goal of the following playlist is to highlight some of the artists that we feel raised the bar of creativity and

originality for Christian rock and roll music during the late 1990s and early 2000s. We realize that many of these artists would have cringed at being labeled a “Christian band”. They would have preferred to be called a rock band that happened to be made up of people who were Christians. It may be hard to believe now, but this distinction really was a big deal to some during the time period covered in this article and playlist. While it might make for an interesting article at some point in time this is not that article. We tried to primarily highlight artists who either never got their due even at that time or who may have been popular then, but have fallen off the radar since. All songs on this playlist were released between 1994 and 2005. As always, there are other songs we would have included if they were available on Spotify. We have now put together four playlists for this series of articles. We expected the playlists that featured more recent music would be easier to put together than those featuring music from several decades ago. This was not really the case. Many great artists from the 1990s and early 2000s are not on Spotify. Some of our favorites that are missing include *Dimestone Prophets*, *The Listening*, *Reflescent Tide*, and *Room Full of Walters*.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Three

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Three of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

Part Three:

The Underground Groundbreakers by Phill Lytle

The early 80's through the early 90's

There were no platinum records. There were no arenas filled to capacity. And unless your local Christian station was unusually "out of the box", you rarely heard this music played on the radio. Yet to many, if you were to pinpoint an era of music that justifies the existence of Christian rock, this would be it. Throughout the 80's and into the early 90's, a group of singers, poets, storytellers, and artists reshaped how we experienced "Christian" music. They turned it on its head and opened up a new world to believers, music lovers, and spiritual seekers. It was the time of the underground groundbreakers.

In part two we examined the bands that had major success and popularity during the 80's and early 90's. Bands like *Petra*, *Whiteheart*, and *DeGarmo and Key*. While those bands were

playing in front of arenas full of youth groups, churches, and believers, there was another movement happening just outside of the Christian mainstream. Out there, bands like *The Call*, *Daniel Amos*, *The Prayer Chain*, and many others were singing about broken relationships, marriage problems, politics, and doubts. Out there, their songs were in turn angry and frustrated, joyous and hopeful, pointed and prophetic. The music was enigmatic – less definable. It was passionate, messy, and full-to-bursting with life. They avoided the pop rock sounds of their more accepted contemporaries, choosing instead to blaze their trails with styles and sounds all their own.

This era of music produced some of the most critically acclaimed music in the history of Christian rock. Many of the albums that released during this time frame are still considered some of the best Christian releases of all time. *Circle Slide* by *The Choir*. *Sticks and Stones* by *the 77's*. *Reconciled* by *The Call*. These and more pushed boundaries and expanded what was believed possible for “Christian” music at that time.

Their music was never easy. Whether it was Steve Taylor singing satirically about a deranged ice-cream delivery man blowing up an abortion clinic to preserve his livelihood, or *The Choir* wrestling with the grief of a miscarriage, these bands made their fans grapple with big ideas and complicated emotional reactions. In some ways, they courted controversy, not to get the spotlight as much as to shock their listeners out of their comfort and stagnation.

At every turn, it seemed like these bands could not catch their big break. In a perfect world, many of them would be household names – their music was that good. That is not to suggest that these bands did not have any influence on future generations of musicians and creators. Members of these bands went on to form successful record companies that gave Christian music one of its biggest bands in *Jars of Clay*. They

went on to produce albums for much more successful bands like *Sixpence None the Richer* and *The Newsboys*. They eventually wrote and created songs that are sung in worship services all over the world like *God of Wonders*. No doubt, their musical legacy inspired many bands that are being played on the radio today. While few of them ever achieved the kind of success and recognition they deserved at the time, our musical heritage would be much poorer without their contributions.

As stated before, the playlist below is merely a selection of some of the best music in this era. It is meant to capture the sound and the spirit of this pivotal time in Christian music. Please, take some time to listen and appreciate the music that laid the groundwork and played such a monumental role in our history.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Two

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular

songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Sadly, it might prove difficult to find music that is challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations seem to avoid anything challenging? Why do they often gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. In [Part One](#) we covered music from the 1960s and 1970s. This article will focus on popular Christian rock of the 1980s and early 1990s. We are including a Spotify playlist that features songs from 1982-1993. This playlist is by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include.

We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. We give you Part Two of *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

Part Two:

***Youth Pastor Approved* by Phill Lytle**

The 1980s through the early 1990s

The hair was long and flowing. The clothes were bright and garish, with neon, pastels, and spandex making frequent appearances. The music was big and bold – loud drums, big vocals, epic guitars, and keyboard and synth liberally sprinkled in for good measure. The early days of trailblazing and rebellion were gone. The banner-bearers of creativity and boundary-pushing were operating under the radar. The music that captured and defined the zeitgeist of the Christian rock scene in the 80s was unapologetically religious and unambiguously mainstream. It was safe rock and roll yet with enough edge and bite that it retained an element of danger and the allure of non-conformity. For the cool youth pastor, it was a dream come true.

As seen in [Part One](#), the 60s and 70s had the passionate trailblazers Larry Norman and Keith Green. In Part Three, we will talk about the underground Christian music scene with counter-cultural geniuses like The Call, The Choir, and the 77s. While those bands and many others like them were carving their paths by different means, the focal point of Christian Rock was happening out in the open for all the world to see. Bands like Petra and Stryper routinely sold out arenas that had previously been considered out of reach. Bands were selling hundreds of thousands and in some cases, even millions of records, getting serious radio airplay on traditional

Christian radio stations and were no longer looked at as pariahs by the church as a whole.

And their music made clear that the union of rock and roll and Christian ministry was the formula that worked. Most of the popular bands of this generation were overtly religious, eschewing subtlety in favor of on-the-nose messaging. This is not a criticism per se, simply an observation about the fundamental truth of the bands that reached the highest popularity during this era. They proclaimed Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith with no fear, no hesitation, and no reservations. To some, it did not represent real life in all its ugliness and complications. But to many, this music was a lightning rod for their faith – a boisterous and encouraging reinforcement for their spiritual journey.

This era produced some of the longest-lived artists and bands in Christian music history. Degarmo and Key. Mylon and Broken Heart. White Heart. It was a time that saw Christian bands like Idle Cure and Allies continue down the path forged by the godfathers of the genre. These and many more were rock and roll enough for young people to flock to in droves, while still maintaining a sense of spiritual steadfastness that made them feel safer than anything the world had to offer.

To be clear, the bands that thrived in this era did not do so with complete acceptance by the church. There were still many that attacked and criticized the bands for their hair, their attire, and their music. They were lambasted from the pulpit by more than one nationally televised preacher.[1. Jimmy Swaggart even wrote a [book](#) about it. We are linking it for educational purposes only.] While their path was easier than the generation prior, they still did much to smooth the road for the following generations of Christian musicians. They took the slings and arrows of an unwieldy and unaccepting group of believers, and they kept on moving, creating, and performing. We do well to remember the contributions during this era. Our Church and musical heritage demand as much.

Enjoy this playlist that will serve as a quick snapshot of the sounds and the styles of the most popular Christian bands of this era. In particular, pay special attention to the musicianship and artistry at play in many of these songs – something that seems to be missing from much of the current Christian music scene. Finally, we hope you will allow one minor indulgence. We have included a couple of songs by Rich Mullins on this playlist even though we realize he does not exactly fit the profile of the bands and artists we covered in the article. We just strongly believe that his music deserves to be remembered and this playlist was the best fit.

This is Part Two of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part One

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Just don't look for anything challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations avoid anything challenging? Why do they gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great

Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. We are including a Spotify playlist with each article featuring some of the music from each era. These playlists are by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include. We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. Without further ado, we present part one of The Forgotten History of Christian Rock.

Part One:

***Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* by David Lytle**

The 1960s through late 1970s

Rock 'n' Roll was rebellion—rebellion from social conformity, rebellion from moral standards, rebellion from the church. Sure artists like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Chuck Berry infused blues with the sounds of both black and southern gospel, but the outcome was far from the music of the sanctuary. It was the music of the night and the nightclub. As the rebels of the 1950s gave way to the hippies of the 1960s, this rebellion became increasingly clear.

Rock 'n' Roll was sinful. Both the church and the artist agreed. It was rhythmic, sexual, and broke every tradition. Teens gyrated and shouted, while fundamentalist preachers fumed. When John Lennon contrasted the popularity of the Beatles with that of Jesus he did more than make an observation—he drew battle lines. It's no surprise that this same man later found it so easy to imagine a world where there

is no heaven. It was a world Christians found unimaginable.

More importantly, Rock 'n' Roll was the soul of a generation. What a generation it was! Their parents had grown up during the Great Depression and sacrificed mental and physical health to defeat the war machines of Germany and Japan. They were coming of age in the suburbs that sprouted in the soil of this post-war economic boom. The older the baby boomers got the more it became clear that they were not their parents. Their music, more than anything, was what made them different.

In this context, a handful of young people experimented with the idea of Rock 'n' Roll that was about Jesus. This first generation of Christian rockers faced a serious dilemma—the dilemma of existence. How could rock music even be Christian? How could a Christian play rock? For most churches, it was easy to dismiss rock as sinful, but there was a minority who understood that Rock n' Roll was the heart language of the new generation. They understood that rebellion from some of their parents' values (namely materialism and racial segregation) could be virtuous. They understood that Jesus transcended cultural expression. They were the Jesus Movement.

Some have tried to locate the origin of the movement to one church, like Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA, or one artist, like Larry Norman. Yet, the origins of Jesus Rock, like the origins of Rock 'n' Roll, are much more difficult to pin down. All over the Country musicians were melding the message of Jesus with the music of the times. Although a minority, churches in various parts of the country encouraged Christians to redeem Rock 'n' Roll. Likewise, many artists would forsake a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and drugs for a radical relationship with Jesus Christ. They were known as Jesus Freaks. Their movement: the Jesus Movement. Their music: Jesus Music. Elton John even sang about them. They were Christian Hippies. Their message was about salvation, but their music would still rock.

Well, it would sort of rock. The fact remains that much of the Christian Rock music of the 1960s was never recorded. Recording costs were prohibitive and quality was low. Low quality was especially a problem for the heavier music of the late 60s. No matter, folk music was where it was at anyway. This was the era of Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and David Crosby. Much of the memorable Christian Rock from this era reflects these influences. Love Song, Sweet Comfort Band, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Randy Stonehill, and Larry Norman are just a few examples.

Speaking of Larry Norman. Norman is to Christian Rock what Elvis Presley is to Rock n' Roll. He wasn't the first but it is impossible to tell the story without him. He, more than anyone, is associated with the origins of Christian rock. His "Why should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" attempted to reconcile the dilemma of Christianity and Rock. His "Sweet Song of Salvation" became the anthem of the Jesus Movement and his "Great American Novel" is a scathing challenge to American values in the age of the space race in the tradition of Bob Dylan.

By the mid-1970s folk-based Christian music was well established and even accepted in some circles. Rock n' Roll, however, had gotten edgier. It was time for Christian Rock to really rock. It was time for Petra and the Resurrection Band. These bands attempted to preach the gospel with the blues-rock of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. Both had remarkably long careers and while their styles changed with the times, they consistently made their music about the gospel of Jesus. Petra would go on to make their name synonymous with Christian Rock throughout the 80s and 90s. They would also continue to rock.

The first generation of Christian Rockers faced opposition from all angles. They were scorned by the mainstream because of their commitment to Jesus and their denunciation of drugs and illicit sex. They were rebuked by much of the Church for

even trying to redeem the music of the world. Still, they kept on message. They focused mostly on salvation and the change brought by Jesus. As can be seen in the playlist, there also seems to be a significant interest in eschatology, which was apparently brought about by the fear of the atomic bomb.

The desire to redeem Rock n' Roll made it necessary to create a musical subgenre in which the lyrics set Christian Rock apart from "secular." While this created a false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that Christian artists still face today, their singular focus on Jesus made their movement a success. Thousands came to a saving faith through the Jesus Movement. Today the instruments and rhythms of Rock can be heard in the majority of churches across the country.

This is most certainly an epoch on the history of the Christian church worth noting. For those Christians who enjoy rock music, this is your story. We hope you enjoy this less-than-exhaustive playlist. Sadly, due to the age of these recordings, and other issues, many great songs and artists are not available on Spotify. We did the best we could with what we had available. Please, seek out these trailblazing artists and bands we highlighted above. We also hope you leave your comments and share this series of articles. Let's not forget our past.

This is Part One of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

Five Reasons “Away in a Manger” is the Worst Christmas Song Ever

I love Christmas music. I believe my unblemished record of staunch Christmas musicophilia on *Rambling Ever On* [says it all](#). Yet, not all Christmas music is created equal. For every transcendent *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, there is a painfully awful *Last Christmas*. For every majestic *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, there is the horrifyingly terrible *Christmas Shoes*. So, while I love Christmas music and celebrate it every year, I don't embrace every Christmas song out there. Case in point: *Away in a Manger*. As bad as the previously mentioned songs are, they aren't nearly as terrible as the manger song, due to its insidious nature. It poses as a beautiful, sacred song. It gets played on Christian radio. It gets sung to small children. It even has the audacity to get sung in church! I reject it. Yet its soul is as black as night. I reject all of it. Here are my five main reasons.

It is biologically fraudulent

Let's get the most obvious one out of the way. Jesus was fully God and fully man. Which means He was fully baby. If Jesus had been born and then placed in a manger, and did not cry at any point, as the song states, something would have been terribly wrong with Him. Babies cry. It's a good thing they cry. Doctors make sure they cry as soon as they are born to test their lungs. Babies cry when they are hungry and thirsty. They cry when they need to be held. If Jesus did not cry then He was developmentally stunted. And we know that is not true. Which leads me to point number two.

It is emotionally manipulative

At its core, *Away in a Manger* is a lullaby. It seems to have been written for the express purpose of convincing children to go to sleep. So the wording used in the song is deliberately manipulative to that end. The thinking behind must have gone something like this – “Good little children want to be like the “little Lord Jesus”, right? Well, He didn't cry so they shouldn't either. And if they do cry, then they are not like Jesus at all.” That is almost unconscionable.

It is poorly written

I get really irritated with songs that change perspective. *Away in a Manger* is a big offender in this regard. It starts off third person for the first three stanzas but suddenly goes into first person on the three final and climactic stanzas. Why? Because the writer ran out of more drippy examples of insipid, idealized first-century life? Or because the writer wanted to really pour on the guilt trip for the listening children that were struggling to go to sleep like good little boys and girls? Or was it because the songwriter wanted to

include some lame declaration of love to the “Lord Jesus.” I say lame, not because loving Jesus is lame, but because tacking it on at the end like that is sloppy, ham-fisted, and obsequious, not to Jesus, but to the listeners in an attempt to convince them that this is truly a good, Christian song.

And the line, “no crying He makes” is just bad poetry on every level. Did Yoda get co-writing credit on this or something?

It is patronizingly ordinary

The incarnation of Christ is one of the most miraculous and amazing things to ever happen. It is good to sing songs about it. It is good to be brought to worship thinking about it. What *Away in a Manger* does is take that magnificent event and turn it into a sickly-sweet, mushy, touchy-feely mess. Shepherds, angels, and kings worshipped this child, and the best this song can do is celebrate his sleeping, his sweet little head, and that he didn't cry? O come let us adore Him indeed!

It is theologically bankrupt

I don't expect deep theological truths from every song. One of my all-time favorite Christmas songs, *O Holy Night* is not the most theologically impressive song out there. But it is poetic and beautiful and contains enough truth to make it worthwhile. *Away in a Manger* is none of those things and is most definitely not worthwhile. Beyond the silly stuff about Jesus not crying – which contradicts the rest of the Scriptural account of His earthly life – the final stanza is a hodgepodge of pseudo-religious sounding phrases mixed with shockingly modern day spiritual sentimentality. Let's unpack it, shall we?

First, Jesus is not “looking down from the sky” and if He were why would he look down from the sky “and stay by our cradles til morning is nigh”? I guess you could argue that the writer is trying to say that Jesus is everywhere, but if that is so, why start with the idea that Jesus is looking down from the sky?

Second, the penultimate stanza has the singer asking Jesus to be near them, or us. We don't have to beg Jesus to stay near us. He has promised to be with us in his Word. Many times, actually.

Third, when you further examine that stanza, you come upon an even worse question – “love me, I pray.” Once again, not necessary as it has already been promised. And to make this even more ridiculous, this song is about Jesus as a baby – His incarnation. What more proof did this writer need of Jesus' love than this act of complete sacrifice? “Look, I realize that you just gave up Heaven and your power, and you came to earth as a human baby, with all the awful stuff that entails, but do you think you can do something else to prove to me that you love me?”

Finally, the last stanza closes things out in spectacularly wrongheaded fashion. It starts off okay with a request for blessing for all the children that are in Jesus' care. I can get on board with that. It ends with a request for Jesus to take us all to Heaven to live with Him there. It doesn't work like that. Jesus doesn't just take everyone to heaven. That's where repentance and salvation come into play, but let's not get hung up on the very foundation of the Gospel or anything!

This Christmas, listen to as much music as you can. It is a profitable and worthy endeavor. Yet, for the sake of your soul, and the souls of those around you, avoid garbage songs like *Away in a Manger*. While there are probably more

aesthetically offensive Christmas songs out there – I'm looking at you *Christmas Shoes* – there is no song that is as deviously evil as *Away in a Manger*. It cloaks itself in religious language and holy imagery, in a vain attempt to hide the utter darkness of its twisted and corrupt heart. Flee from it my friends. Flee for your lives.