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Foreword

“It all begins with a song.” I don’t know who said that originally, but in Christian music it’s one of those truisms that we go back to again and again.

Song is an especially appropriate medium for the expression of Christian thought and praise to God. That has always been the case. The apostle Paul admonished the Colossians to “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16, NIV).

What was true two thousand years ago (and before) remains true today. However, this generation has taken a new approach to song in the spirit of Psalm 96:1 (NIV): “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.”

Contemporary Christian Music sprang from the youth revival called the “Jesus Movement” that took place in America in the early 1970s.

Alongside CCM, as the music style has become known,
came contemporary worship music. It was all about a new
generation making “a new song” in the musical language the
generation knew—that of popular culture.

Contemporary songs of praise made a deep impact on the
church in the late twentieth century that has continued into
the twenty-first century—an impact that is visible “in all the
earth.” I have been amazed as I have worshiped with believ-
ers in other parts of the world. We all know the same songs,
although we sing them in different languages and within our
own cultures.

These are new songs, and they have deep meaning to our
generation. Despite their popularity, the songs Steve Siler has
written about in this book are relatively new, and you may
not know many of them. That’s OK. In fact, they are partially
the reason he wrote this book. It is our hope that you’ll find
some treasures that are new to you. You’ll find a rich store-
house of inspiration here. Hopefully it will lead you to
discover anew the power of song.

The Gospel Music Association has a process in which we
honor songs and writers each year. Our members, most of
whom are involved in Christian/gospel music in some way,
vote each year for songs and songwriters that have made an
impact in the previous year. In the past thirty-four years
hundreds of songs have been nominated for Dove Awards.
Sixty of the most inspiring songs, mostly from the last twenty
years, have become the inspiration for this devotional book.

You’ll enjoy the insights that Steve has pulled from them,
but you’ll also enjoy the songs themselves. I invite you to
read the lyrics and ponder them. Through them, “may the
Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

John W. Styll
President, Gospel Music Association
Introduction

From as early as I can remember, music has struck a deep chord within me. Growing up in our home meant enjoying a veritable musical smorgasbord. Whether it was belting out “Have an Egg Roll Mr. Goldstone” with Ethel Merman or folding my arms, squatting, and kicking myself into hystericss with my dad while doing “The Russian Saber Dance,” music was always at the center of our entertainment. My mom, who had grown up singing in the church, soon introduced me to songs like “The Lord’s Prayer,” and I realized that music could be more than just entertainment.

The Beatles got my attention—like they did every other kid born in the mid-fifties; I was hooked in 1964 on “I Wanna Hold Your Hand.” Weeks later I had my own guitar, and by the age of ten I was writing songs—really bad songs, but songs nonetheless.

After accepting Christ during the summer of my sixteenth year, I wrote my first CCM song, although I didn’t know to call it that at the time. It was entitled “No Greater Love.”
When I was eighteen, I decided I wanted to be a songwriter. Now admit it, while a songwriter is the kind of person you love to talk to at a party, most of you are not longing for your daughter to bring one home. Be that as it may, songwriters are actually in pretty good biblical company. After all, David—called a man after God’s own heart—was a prolific songwriter, writing seventy-nine of the Psalms.

Now as a Christian songwriter some thirty years later, I have had the profound and humbling honor of seeing some of my songs touch human lives. What’s more, I have had the even more humbling and more profound experience of hearing the songs of many great and dedicated songwriters that touch my life with words that I have been unable to express myself.

I have learned that music has a way of softening hearts and reaching people with a message that they might not hear any other way. I have seen lyrics create community by helping people see that they are not alone on the road they are walking. I have seen lyrics resonate for someone searching for a new perspective on an old idea, breathing life and excitement into a moribund faith. I have seen lyrics help people to cry much needed tears or to express the overflow of their joy. In short, I have seen lyrics and music help people give expression to the most heartfelt inner part of themselves.

Each of the songs represented here has either won or been nominated for a Dove Award by the Gospel Music Association. While this does mean that fans and industry professionals alike have weighed in positively on the merits of these songs, this collection is by no means intended to offer up the sixty best Christian songs ever written. That is an entirely subjective exercise. Rather, it is the intent here to offer up sixty songs that open a window on themes and ideas worth exploring in more depth.

There are better and easier ways to make money in the world, even in the music business world, than to write Chris-
tian songs. Therefore, you can be sure that since the goal of the songwriters represented here is to honor God and reach people for his kingdom, the words of their songs have been written with prayerful consideration.

Also, by no means are the devotions within these pages offered as the only available reflection upon these lyrics. A well-written lyric has many layers and, depending on the personal life experience of the reader, will speak to each reader in different ways. I encourage you not only to reflect on the lyrics in the devotions you find here but also to see what God might have to say exclusively to you through the lyricist’s pen.

Occasionally in these pages you will hear me speak in the first person. These are instances where I think my experiences as a parent, in my work, or from my life’s faith journey help shed a particular light on the topic at hand.

It is my hope that you find the contents of this book inspirational and challenging. I hope it makes you think. I hope it makes you feel. But most of all I hope it brings you into the presence of our precious Lord Jesus.

Steve Siler
September 2003
Above All

Written by Lenny LeBlanc and Paul Baloche
Recorded by Michael W. Smith
2002 Dove Inspirational Song of the Year

Above all powers
Above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms
Above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There’s no way to measure what You’re worth

CHORUS
Crucified
Laid behind a stone
You lived to die
Rejected and alone
Like a rose trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me
Above all
ABOVE ALL
Not Your Normal King


The pages of history are filled with men who spent their lives trying to enlarge themselves and expand their power, mercilessly killing millions of innocent people in the process. And to what end? They either grew old and weak or were eventually defeated and died, their conquests and domination feeding their megalomania.

Power can be a dangerous, intoxicating motivator, and it seems everybody wants it. How we choose to use power says a lot about in what and in whom we believe.

And yet the One who had the right to claim power and authority over the whole world came to earth as an innocent baby and died helplessly on a cross.

Jesus didn’t kill anyone or have anyone killed. He didn’t put together a great army and ruthlessly crush neighboring nations. He didn’t overtax people until they couldn’t feed their families in order to build a great palace for himself. He didn’t aggrandize himself with royal robes and jewels. He didn’t throw opulent parties, strutting around like a peacock and requiring everyone to bow before his presence. He never subjugated the people in any way.

Instead, he washed his disciples’ feet. Jesus shared meals with the outcasts and dregs of society. He healed the blind, the lame, and the sick. He forgave people for their shortcomings and mistakes. He defended and blessed the little children. He taught that “whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,” adding that he had not come to be served but to serve, giving his life “as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). Not very kingly
sounding stuff, you say. No, not if your idea of a king is Henry VIII. Jesus turned the concept of what it meant to be a king on its ear.

Because he was already above all, he had no need to behave as if he was. Because he was God’s gift to humanity, he didn’t have to act like it. For those who need evidence that Christ was who he said he was, I can think of no greater argument.

Although you and I will probably never be the leader of an army or a country, we’re still involved in situations daily that give us the choice between seeking to control others or to serve them.

As a parent, an employer or supervisor, the head of a church committee, a Little League coach, or the child of an aging parent—there are any number of times in our lives when we will find ourselves in authority over others. How will we use that power? We can choose to use it to nurture and encourage, blessing others with an attitude of gratitude and service. Unfortunately, however, the opposite often happens. Feed the fragile human ego a little power, and it can easily become ravenous. If we’re not careful, we will shortly be impressed with our own importance and soon be throwing our weight around, bossing people and using them as a means to our own ends.

A Closer Connection
How do you place others above yourself in your service to Christ? Whom do you have power over? How do you use that power to serve others and honor Christ?

A Challenge and . . .
You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be
quite different. . . . Whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all.  

Mark 10:42-44

A Promise

“Don’t be frightened, Mary,” the angel told her, “for God has decided to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. . . . And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”  

Luke 1:30-33
Adonai

Written by Lorraine Ferro, Stephanie Lewis, and Don Koch
Recorded by Avalon
1999 Dove Inspirational Song of the Year

One single drop of rain
Your salty tear became blue ocean
One tiny grain of sand turning in your hand
A world in motion
You’re out beyond the furthest morning star
Close enough to hold me in your arms

CHORUS
Adonai
I lift up my heart and I cry
My Adonai
You are Maker of each moment
Father of my hope and freedom
Oh my Adonai

One timid faithful knock
Resounds upon the Rock of Ages
One trembling heart and soul
Becomes a servant bold and courageous
You call across the mountains and the seas
I answer from the deepest part of me

CHORUS
From age to age You reign in majesty
And today You’re making miracles in me
Have you ever been to the redwood forests of northern California? These majestic trees are breathtaking. To stand among them is to stand in a natural cathedral. The glory and magnificence of God’s creation leaves one in a total state of awe. These silent sentinels, many of whom have stood witness since the time Christ walked the earth, testify to a God capable of miracles—the same God who created you and me.

That’s right. The God who created stars that are so far away you can barely see them with the naked eye is the same God who created you and longs to live in your heart. The same God who created the vastness of the ocean is there to wipe away every single tear you cry. And that same God who is capable of creating miracles in nature like the redwoods is capable of creating miracles in you.

Maybe you don’t feel very miraculous. Well you should! After all, the God who made rainbows and sunrises made you, too! That’s pretty amazing. What’s even more amazing is that the God who is the author of the whole universe could be so caring that he desires a personal relationship with each and every one of us!

But if you’re anything like me, there are times when you feel like nothing extraordinary could ever happen through you. You’re too inexperienced, too discouraged, too stressed, too young, too old, or just too plain tired. You want to make a difference, but you feel uncomfortable or unqualified. You don’t have enough education. You don’t have enough confidence. You don’t have enough money.

Here’s the exciting news! God has already given us everything we need for the work he wants us to do! In the Beatitudes passage in Matthew, Jesus says, “God blesses
those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of
Heaven is given to them” (5:3). It’s exactly when we’re most
weak that we’re ready to be filled with God’s strength. Once
that happens we’re able to do things we never thought pos-
sible, things beyond ourselves. It all begins with calling out
to our Father, maker of us all.

We don’t have a dispassionate creator. We have a God who
actively seeks to be in relationship with us and is constantly at
work in his creation. We can bring every concern of our heart,
no matter how small it might seem, before him in prayer.
While often we might feel unworthy because of something we
have said or done, we need to remember that God will forgive
our sins through Jesus if we only ask him to. We can bring
anything before him. Even our most shameful mistakes, our
most troubling experiences, can be transformed by God into
blessings for others and ourselves.

It is, in fact, especially those sins over which we have the
most guilt and regret that God wishes to extend his forgive-
ness to us. In the circumstances where we have suffered the
greatest injustice and over which we have the most anger,
God longs to heal us. Through the regenerative power of Jesus
Christ we can be restored and made new. He is at work to
bring reconciliation and peace to all of us—a future where we
can be free to live joyfully in the light of the love he has for us.

What a comfort to know that the God who spoke the world
into existence is still on the job. What a comfort to know that
he would step into history to sacrifice for us and redeem us.
What a comfort to know he is alive today, changing and remak-
ing those who put their trust in him through his Son, Jesus.

Let us never stop admiring and praising the works of
our Creator. Furthermore, may we always honor him as our
Creator, committing our lives to his care and our hearts to
his renewing grace.
A Closer Connection
What are some areas in your life that you thought could never be made new? Prayerfully place all the unresolved pain of your life into the reconciling hands of Jesus Christ.

A Challenge and . . .
*Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.*
Matthew 11:29-30

A Promise
*God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*
2 Corinthians 5:21
Another Time, Another Place

Written by Gary Driskell
Recorded by Sandy Patty and Wayne Watson
1991 Dove Song of the Year

I’ve always heard there is a land
Beyond the mortal dreams of man
Where ev’ry tear will be left behind
But it must be in another time
Oh there’ll be an everlasting light
Shining a purest holy white
And ev’ry fear will be erased
But it must be in another place

CHORUS
So I’m waiting for another time and another place
Where all my hopes and dreams will be captured
With one look at Jesus’ face
Oh my heart’s been burnin’
My soul keeps yearnin’
Sometimes I can’t hardly wait
For that sweet sweet someday
When I’ll be swept away
To another time and another place

I’ve grown so tired of earthly things
They promise peace but furnish pain
All of life’s sweetest joys combined
Could never match those in another time
Oh and though I’ve put my trust in Christ
And felt His Spirit move in my life
I know it’s truly just a taste
Of His glory in another place
ANOTHER TIME, 
ANOTHER PLACE

*What Will Heaven Be Like?*

The reality of heaven is sure to be glorious beyond anything we can imagine. This lyric frames many beautiful images of the afterlife and confirms our hope in an eternity filled with the joy and the peace of Christ. But is it possible to focus too much on the afterlife? Can we sometimes be in danger of not being the Christians we are called to be in the here and now when we point too single-mindedly toward our days beyond this earth?

Interestingly enough Christ himself doesn’t spend any time at all describing heaven. He doesn’t talk about what we’ll see there, what we’ll hear there, or what we’ll feel there. His discussions of heaven seem to be much more focused on motivating us to be servants in the world we live in.

Consider the following statements of Jesus:

In Matthew 5:12 Jesus tells that “a great reward” waits in heaven for those who are persecuted for following Christ. In verse 19 Christ says that anyone “who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” In Matthew 6:20-21 Jesus tells us to “store your treasures in heaven,” rather than on earth, for “wherever your treasure is, there your heart and your thoughts will also be.” Later in Matthew 16:19 Jesus says, “Whatever you lock on earth will be locked in heaven, and whatever you open on earth will be opened in heaven.” In Matthew 18:3 he says, “Unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.” This suggests that Jesus thinks that heaven is an enjoyable place and worth aspiring to attain. However, the connection in all of these statements is Jesus’ desire for us to understand the way that
we should live on earth. How all of this will ultimately translate to the afterlife remains a mystery for those of us still breathing.

So if Jesus, our Lord and Savior, doesn’t describe for us what heaven is, how are we supposed to know? Or perhaps an even better question is, are we supposed to know? Why can’t we get a clearer picture of heaven from here on earth? I suspect that if any of us could experience the perfect peace and glory of heaven for even one instant, we wouldn’t want to stay here on this troubled globe for another minute, and God knows that. Just as God wouldn’t let Moses see his face, “for no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20), perhaps God can’t allow us to see the face of heaven for the same reason.

As a result, we’re kept just enough in the dark to remain committed to the journey God has given us here—knowing that at the journey’s end there awaits something that’s beyond anything we can imagine.

So is heaven lined with streets paved with gold? Are there really wolves lying down with lambs? What exactly awaits us on the other side of this life?

I think it all comes down to this: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ offers us the ultimate promise that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For those of us who trust him, that should be enough. If it’s something he offers, it will be a reward well worth having. Until that day comes—in another time and another place—let’s serve him faithfully with all our days in this time and in this place.

A Closer Connection
What sins have you had difficulty turning away from? What does becoming like a little child mean to you? How could you serve Jesus even more in your life?
A Challenge and . . .

Don’t be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s home, and I am going to prepare a place for you.  

John 14:1-2

A Promise

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.  

2 Corinthians 5:1
Awesome God

Written by Rich Mullins
Recorded by Rich Mullins
From the 1990 Dove Nominated Praise and Worship Album of the Year

When He rolls up His sleeves He ain’t just puttin’ on the Ritz
Our God is an awesome God
There is thunder in His footsteps and lightning in His fists
Our God is an awesome God
And the Lord wasn’t jokin’ when He kicked ‘em out of Eden
It wasn’t for no reason
That He shed His blood
His return is very close
And so you better be believin’
That our God is an awesome God

CHORUS
Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom pow’r and love
Our God is an awesome God

And when the sky was starless in the void of night
Our God is an awesome God
He spoke into the darkness and created the light
Our God is an awesome God
The judgment and wrath He poured out on Sodom
The mercy and grace He gave us at the cross
I hope that we have not too quickly forgotten
That our God is an awesome God
Have you noticed how the word awesome has been trivialized in our culture?

You’re more likely to hear someone say, “Wow! What an awesome cheeseburger!” or, “Man that movie was awesome” than you are to hear the word awesome used in reverence. While Rich Mullins’s lyric starts out playfully enough, by the time it gets to the chorus it is making a very serious point. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, the word awe means “an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime.”

The New Merriam-Webster’s Thesaurus lists only one synonym for awe, and that is reverence. It does list some of what it calls “related” words. They are esteem, regard, respect, veneration, worship, admiration, amazement, wonder, and wonderment.

Looking at these two entries one is struck by a thought. Contemporary Christians do a pretty good job of seeing God with wonder and amazement. Esteem, regard, and even respect are part of our relationship with him. Contemporary praise and worship certainly depends largely on our admiration and veneration of God. So in other words, we seem to be doing pretty well with the relative definitions in terms of the way we view God.

But take another look at the actual definition of awe: dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime. I’m not so sure we’re doing quite as well on these.

In contemporary Christianity we have done a pretty good job of distancing ourselves from the fire-and-brimstone God.
The Old Testament is all right, but it’s the New Testament where the identity of our God emerges, and he’s a warmer, friendlier, more approachable God than the One who brought all that rain down on poor Noah and turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt. He isn’t busy kicking us out of the Garden of Eden. He’s trying to fix it so that we can get back into a relationship with him.

There’s one problem with that perception. When we focus too much on only the characteristics of God that we are comfortable with, we diminish who God is. We must be very careful that in emphasizing the wonderful qualities of the Son that we don’t disregard some of the attributes of the Father.

Our God is a God of mystery. “‘My thoughts are completely different from yours,’ says the Lord. ‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine’” (Isaiah 55:8).

Our God is a God who commands a healthy respect and should be feared, especially by those who would take him too lightly. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7).

If we begin by revering and worshiping God and obeying his commands, then that respect and discipline will extend into our daily lives and our interactions at places like school and work. We need to be aware that people are going to make judgments about how seriously we take our God from the behavior they observe. And, by the way, God will too!

It’s wonderful to have a close, loving relationship with the Savior who came to us as a gentle baby in a manger. However, we must not forget the Father, the author of that supernatural event and Lord of all creation. Yes, in Christ God came to earth. But in our anxiousness to be comfortable with him, let’s not bring him so far down to earth that we lose our respect and our awe.
A Closer Connection
Which attributes of God have you *not* considered as you worship him? What adjustments might you make in your spiritual discipline to see a larger picture of God?

A Challenge and . . .
*Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.*  
Hebrews 12:28-29

A Promise
*In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.*  
Acts 10:35
Be the One

Words and Music by Al Denson, Don Koch, and Dave Clark
Recorded by Al Denson
1992 Dove Nominee for Song of the Year

CHORUS
Will you be the one to answer to His call
And will you stand when those around you fall
Will you be the one to take His light into a darkened world
Tell me will you be the one

In a world full of broken dreams
Where the truth is hard to find
For every promise that is kept
There are many left behind
Tho’ it seems that nobody cares
It still matters what you do
’Cause there’s a difference you can make
But the choice is up to you

CHORUS
O sometimes it is hard to know
Who is right and what is wrong
And where you are supposed to stand
When the battle lines are drawn
There’s a voice that keeps calling out
For someone who’s not afraid
To be a beacon in the night
To a world that’s lost its way
BE THE ONE
The Out Crowd

Mobs are ugly. Nothing good ever happens in a mob. It was a mob mentality that prevailed the day of Christ’s crucifixion. In a mob people stop thinking. They allow the passions and the heat of the moment to override their own judgment. They ride on a wave, and often it’s a wave that’s headed in a very destructive direction. That’s a flow with which you don’t want to go.

In fact, the exact opposite direction is usually the most Christian path. But it takes being an individual to walk away from a crowd—to go against what everyone else is doing. It takes an individual who is following Christ, the same Christ who taught us that things are quite often different from what they seem.

As if that were not enough, Jesus takes it even one step further! He wants us to stand out from the crowd even when it’s not an angry mob. In our world even the nicest among us are looking out for number one and want to be in first place! But Jesus says in Matthew 20:16, “Those who are last now will be first then.”

In our world countries routinely seek supremacy through military might. On a daily basis corporations treat business like a war in which only the strong survive and the big swallow up the small. But in Matthew 5:5 Jesus says, “God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them.”

Ordinarily we seek to be important and in control, looked up to and admired for our accomplishments. However Jesus presents a different way to live. He says, “Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44).

We dream about having lots of money and think about all
the wonderful things we could do for the church if we only had more wealth. After many rich people put in large amounts in the temple collection box, a poor widow dropped in two pennies. Then Jesus said, “I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given” (Mark 12:43).

All of these Scriptures are examples of a God who surprises us by turning things upside-down. It’s all backward from what we would expect. And guess what? If you start thinking like this and doing as Christ would have you do, you’re definitely not going to be in line with the mob. You’re probably not even going to be in line with conventional “wisdom.” Forget being part of the in crowd. You’re going to stand out from the crowd!

It isn’t easy to be the party pooper, the one who is always going against the grain to take a stand. Sometimes it’s going to be scary to speak up for what’s right, maybe even dangerous. God never promised us that doing things his way would be easy. He has, however, promised to love and never forsake those who put their trust in him.

Don’t go along with the crowd. Be the one who stands up for what’s right.

Be the one who stands up for Jesus.

A Closer Connection
How do you give more credence to the words of coworkers and family members than to the words of Jesus? In uncomfortable or challenging situations, when did you go along to get along instead of letting the Scriptures guide your response? How did that make you feel?

A Challenge and . . .

Stand your ground, putting on the sturdy belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. Ephesians 6:14
A Promise

*God blesses you who are hated and excluded and mocked and cursed because you are identified with me, the Son of Man.*

Luke 6:22
Because He Lives

Written by Bill and Gloria Gaither
Recorded by Bill Gaither Trio
1974 Dove Song of the Year

God sent His Son
They called Him Jesus
He came to love heal and forgive
He lived and died
To buy my pardon
An empty grave is there
To prove my Savior lives

CHORUS
Because He lives
I can face tomorrow
Because He lives
All fear is gone
Because I know
He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives

How sweet to hold
Our newborn baby
And feel the pride
And joy he gives
But greater still
The calm assurance
This child can face uncertain days
Because He lives
BECAUSE HE LIVES

The Reason for Our Joy

It has been said that every new baby is God’s way of telling us that he wants the world to go on. It’s true there is almost nothing that brings as much joy as holding a brand-new baby. Here’s a fresh start at life. Somewhere in the back of our minds we know that the baby is going to grow up and have to face all the pressures and problems of the world just like the rest of us, but basking in the bliss of a new birth we can put all those concerns on the back burner for a while. The pure contentment of the child as she sleeps washes over us like a blanket of peace, reminding us that the gift of life is good and that there’s hope for the future.

But someday that child will have to grow up, and the hope and promise of infancy will turn to the cacophony and confusion of the teenage years. Then will come the pressures of college, the stress that is the modern work-a-day world, and the responsibilities of citizenship and raising a family. Challenges and disappointments will come. Where will that child’s joy come from then?

Ironically it will come from another baby—the Christ child, God’s own Son.

Perhaps no song captures more succinctly the reason for our joy than this one does. Jesus Christ lived a life of love, healing, and forgiveness. With his death on the cross, he bought our pardon from sin, and his resurrection gives us assurance that he’s Lord of all. When we realize that Christ holds the future, there’s nothing to fear. We have eternal life and eternal peace through him. The twists and turns of this world may leave us bowed but not broken. Therefore, we can remain joyful in all circumstances, remembering the words of the apostle Paul from Philippians 4:12-13: “I have
learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.”

Our assurance further comes from knowing that Christ has paid for our sins with the greatest act of love in the history of the world and forgives each of us for all of our transgressions. “He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west,” says David in Psalm 103:12. Through his healing love we have been made new. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!” How can we not be filled with joy at this wonderful news?

Of course, as human beings, we always have the option to choose not to experience the joy that comes from knowing Christ. But at that point, that’s exactly what it is—our choice. We’re the only ones who can accept that gift.

Let’s face it, none of us knows what our tomorrows will bring, and we all get scared sometimes. But the ability of an uncertain future to steal our joy has been overcome once and for all in the person of Jesus if we but accept him.

Christ, then, is the reason for our joy. May we see in every newborn baby that joy proclaimed anew. And may we live secure in knowing that nothing and no one on earth can ever take our joy away from us—because he lives!

A Closer Connection
How is the joy of knowing Christ reflected in your life? What kind of difference does it make when you trust him as opposed to giving in to fear? Pray for the calm assurance that comes from trusting Christ completely in all things.
A Challenge and . . .
He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God. So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus. Romans 6:10-11

A Promise
I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. Revelation 1:18
Blessed

Words and Music by Cindy Morgan and Ginny Owens
Recorded by Rachel Lampa
2001 Dove Inspirational Song of the Year

I may never climb a mountain so I can see
the world from there
I may never ride the waves and taste the salty ocean air
Or build a bridge that will last a hundred years
But no matter where the road leads
One thing is always clear

CHORUS
I am blessed
I am blessed
From when I rise up in the morning
’Til I lay my head to rest
I feel You near me
You soothe me when I’m weary
Oh Lord for all the worst and all the best
I am blessed

All along the road less traveled
I have crawled and I have run
I have wandered through the wind and rain
Until I found the sun
The watching eyes ask me why
I walk this narrow way
I will gladly give the reason
For the hope I have today
CHORUS

You’ve given me joy
You’ve given me love
You give me strength when I want to give up
You came from heaven
To rescue my soul
And this is the reason I know
I know

BLESSED

How’s Your Glass?

Have you ever seen children with caterpillars crawling across their palms? They are full of joy! Their gleeful appreciation for the simplest experience is instinctual. They haven’t yet learned how to be busy. The fine art of shutting out the wonder of the world around us is something we’re taught. We also learn how to complain, to see ourselves as not having everything we deserve. However, as far as blessings go, most of us have all we deserve and much, much more.

When we’re at a crowded supermarket parking lot and the handicapped spot is the only close space available, do we get upset over having to park fifty yards away from the store? Or do we give thanks for the blessing of being able to walk?

When we sit down to pay the bills, do we feel a spirit of complaint come over us, wondering why everything has to cost so much? Or are we grateful to live in a country that affords us a bounty of services and for the job that provides the income with which to pay for them?
There’s so much to be thankful for that if we started thanking God the first thing in the morning, we couldn’t finish before bedtime. As Christians we have been admonished to pray without ceasing. Expressing gratitude alone could make that possible.

Ask my father how he is, and he’ll always give you the same answer. “Terrific! I woke up breathing again today!” I know, I know. It sounds corny, but it’s true.

We have a choice about the way we’ll face each new morning. Awakening with a spirit of gratitude and joyfulness can’t help but make a difference in the way a day turns out.

Stop and think. When was the last time you gave thanks to God for any of these “ordinary” miracles that touch your life every day, beginning with the air we breathe? the water we drink? What about the ability to see, to hear, and to speak? What about the beauty of a sunset, the music of a songbird, or the splendor of flowers?

Even a bad turn of events is received differently if we reside continually in the peace of Christ. A friend of mine related a story of a man who loaned his new van to some friends. A phone call came that they had been in an accident. The friends were OK, but the van was totaled. The owner of the van responded to the news by saying, “That’s all right. This is no surprise to God.” In other words, everything will work out. My friends aren’t hurt. It’s just a vehicle. God will provide the transportation we need or money to repair the van. It’s all about attitude.

Charles Swindoll puts it this way: “Attitude, to me, is more important than the facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people say and do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. I am convinced
that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.”

There’s a great irony inherent in Swindoll’s remarks. Most of us like to be in control. Yet in the one area where we truly have the control, we give our power away, letting things outside of us determine how we will feel.

So it’s up to us. Will we choose stress or peace? Will we choose to see problems or opportunities? Will we hold grudges or be forgiving? Will our glass be half empty or half full?

As children of God we are blessed. As followers of Jesus let’s choose to see ourselves that way.

A Closer Connection
What current “problems” in your life could you reframe as “opportunities”? How often during the day do you express your gratitude to God?

A Challenge and . . .
*Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

A Promise
*But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. . . . For you bless the godly, O Lord, surrounding them with your shield of love.* Psalm 5:11-12
Appendix A:
MUSIC PERMISSIONS

Above All
© 1995 Integrity Hosanna! Music / Lensongs Publishing, Inc.

Adonai

Another Time, Another Place
© 1990 Word Music, Inc., Housewife Music

Awesome God
© 1988 BMG Songs, Inc. ASCAP

Be the One

Because He Lives
© 1971 Gaither Music Co.

Blessed

Circle of Friends

Dive
© 1999 Sparrow Song / Peach Hill Songs BMI (All rights administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing.)

El Shaddai
© 1993 Mole End Music (Administered by Word Music, Inc.)

Embrace the Cross
© 1989 BMG Songs, Inc. / Pamela Kay Music ASCAP (All rights administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing.)
Notes

Blessed
Quote by Charles Swindoll, “Attitudes,” can be found at <www.businesspipeline.com/pressreleases/poem_3htm>.

Embrace the Cross
Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, ed. James Reimann (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House, 1992), 9/1, 6/14.

For Future Generations

For the Sake of the Call

Forever
Quote by Branch Rickey can be found at www.baseball-almanac.com/quotes/quoabr.shtml.

Friend of a Wounded Heart

The Great Adventure
Dr. Dan Moseley quote is from a Sunday school class in 1993 at Vine Street Christian Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

He Is Exalted
C. S. Lewis quote.

How Beautiful

I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb
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