

The story of
for you alone

The Journey of Making a CD

“For You Alone” is a project that has been in the works for a couple of years now. Although, I’ll have to admit that I didn’t set out to record a CD. (That part of the process didn’t come in until April 2007 or so.)

In the spring of 2006, I just started writing songs again after several years of doing almost no real songwriting or composing at all. To be honest, I’m not sure exactly what triggered my desire to write again. I think I actually wrote my “first” song right after I purchased my keyboard. We had some guest musicians coming to the church a few days later, so I thought I might write a little something to share with them. The product of that effort was a VERY rough version of “Come to the Altar”. It is so different from the final version that I doubt that the original version is even recognizable. But, from there, the music seemed to flow. Since then, I have been writing 1-3 songs a month and I just feel that God is using my songwriting as an outlet for me and more importantly, a way for God to use my talents for His work.

I have tried to write a little about each of the songs and how they came to be. I hope that this is a blessing to you!

I really wanted the CD, “For You Alone” to tell a story. And, the songs reflect that story. The first several songs deal with being far from God - not feeling like we are in His presence. And, I think that everyone at one time or another has felt that way. But, if we will “Come to the Altar” or live our lives for God, then our lives can turn around from a life in darkness - far from God - into a life of worship and praise.

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Track 1:

prayer

“Prayer” started out as a melody and background similar to what you might hear from Kirk Franklin (a huge influence and inspiration for me) ballad. I was needing to hear something that was comforting to me, but at the same time allowed me to confess my state of being so far away from God at times in my life.

I think that too many times we find ourselves feeling far from God’s presence, comfort, and even His will. It can be too easy in those times to assume that God has forsaken us. But, like the father of the prodigal son, God is always there with open arms running in our direction.

The song really talks about this in the second verse:

“You know I’ve been waitin’

For you to come and solve the problems of my life - to remove despair and strife.

I’ve wasted days, I’ve wasted years thinking that you’d forgotten me -

You were just waitin’, for me to see the truth - I was on your mind - it was me who’d forgotten you!”

I think that is the heart of the song - that God is our protector, provider, Lord and King, but when we pray, we can connect (or reconnect) with God and make God a priority in our life...

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Track 2:

come and fill

Ok, here's a little secret, I get a lot of ideas for my songs in the shower. I suppose it is just a spin-off from singing in the shower! Anyway, "Come and Fill" is one of those songs. I started singing the chorus of this song in the shower and kept singing it over and over in my head until I got to church and then I wrote it down. I think we might have even sung it that night at Total Praise practice (a choir at Heritage UMC that sang for a "blended" service on Sunday mornings).

For me, it just had an immediate appeal. It came from a place inside of me that I knew was feeling empty and unfulfilled. It wasn't a space that could have been filled with money, success, friendship or stuff. This was a space that only God could fill.

"Come and fill this empty heart,
O come and still my restless soul,
Lord, come and rescue me,
Lift me up and make me whole, Holy God."

I think a lot of my songs are really prayers that I've set to music. This is a prayer that I sing often...

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Track 3:

for someone like me

Have you ever felt like you're not worth a dime? Have you ever wondered why anyone even puts up with you? Can you see your own faults so clearly that you can't seem to stop thinking about them? Have you ever wondered in the midst of all of that why God would send His only Son to live His life here on earth and die an agonizing death **JUST FOR YOU?!?!**

I wonder that sometimes. It is hard for me to believe that God would love me so much that He would do **ANYTHING** to redeem me and cleanse me from my sins.

Jesus gave His life to pardon us and take away the guilt and shame of this world and allow us to live in His grace and glory. It is because of this that we should bow down and worship God every chance we get...

"I couldn't believe that somebody like You could love somebody like me.
I bow down in the glory of your presence. 'Cause You gave Your life...
For someone like me."

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Track 4:

we cry holy

I had started writing “We Cry Holy” in the fall of 2006 and had only gotten as far as writing the chorus. It stuck there for a little while - but one evening Libby got an email that one of her best friends was diagnosed (for the second time) with breast cancer. The compassion and love that Libby displayed for her friend was so moving. It made me realize in that moment that the events of our lives have a huge effect on us and those around us.

Sometimes we get news - tragic news - that changes our lives. But, it is in those times that we can cry out to God for comfort. God will raise us up. God will let us feel that His love has no end...

“I got some news today. I don’t know if I’ll make it till tomorrow,
Sometimes its hard to say, “I’ll trust in You”,
Through all this pain and sorrow.
But I cannot do this alone. I need You, Lord, and that’s why...
We cry "Holy! Holy!" We cry "Holy! Holy!"
Though we can’t understand, we have faith in your plan.
You’re holy, holy!”

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Track 5:

come to the altar

I mentioned “Come to the Altar” in my introduction. It started as probably the first song in several years that I really sat down and wrote. I originally wrote it out for full four part choir. I’m fairly sure that it wasn’t a hit and retired the piece quickly and quietly.

Maybe 6 months later, I pulled it out again and started reworking it. I replaced the verses first – totally new lyrics, melody and chords. Once I was fairly happy with that, I started rewriting the chorus. It kept a lot of the same words – just a few changes here and there – but now had a new melody and chords. All in all, it is probably not close to the same song it was to begin with – but the overall idea of the song stayed intact.

Although the words changed, I didn’t change the main idea of the song. It was important to me that people hear that the altar is a place you can go and just be with God. It can be a place of renewal and consolation.

“Come to the altar when all hope is gone,
You’ll find new life and strength to carry on.
Come to the altar, and find your way back home,
Come to the altar and you’ll never be alone.”

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Track 6:

i will live my life for you

“I Will Live My Life for You” has an interesting history. I was invited to go to a Michael W. Smith concert one evening. So, I went and when I arrived back home, I decided that I wanted to sit and play and I even felt a little inspired to write. So, as I played a bit that evening, I saw in a stack of papers a small torn piece of paper on which my friend, Sarah Morton, had written. I wasn't sure if it was scripture or her original thoughts and at the time, I didn't mind either way. I just began to play and sing those lyrics. Those lyrics became the basis for the chorus of “I Will Live My Life for You.”

“When You saved me, You raised me up. You anointed me to preach Good News,
So I will walk before you, Lord. I will bow before You, Lord.
I will shout before You, Lord. I will praise You!”

I also used bits and pieces of some of the other phrases she wrote to be the seeds for the verses as well. Thank you, God and thank you, Sarah! This song has ministered to me many times!

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Track 7:

breathe life

“Breathe Life” came along quite late in the overall process of recording this CD. We were just about to start the process of recording vocals, being done with most of the instrumental tracks, and we realized that we had 13 tracks on the CD. It seemed quite silly, but the cost of having 13 tracks mastered and 15 was the same. But, that was \$100 more than having 12 tracks mastered. Is this a good reason to write a song? I certainly thought so!

I actually started out to write a song that would sound good with just a piano and vocal. But, as with many things, it didn't go quite as planned and I really wanted a more “earthy” hand drum and guitar sound. So, we had Tyler Benton in to play djembe and congas. He had lots of great ideas and the next thing you know - bam! Here's the song!

Also, I wanted to write a worship song. Most of the songs on the CD aren't actually what I would consider worship songs. (I am pretty strict that a worship song directly worships God. The singer of the song isn't singing about themselves or “about” God, but really TO God.) So, as far as I can tell, this is really a hybrid: prayer and worship song.

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Track 8:

you are my god

Oddly enough, I'm not even 100% sure how this song came to be. The one thing I do know is that all of the music was written before I had one word of lyrics. Sometimes that happens - and I'm fine with it. In fact, that happens more often than not, really.

When this happens, I usually just play the song over and over, most often with an open Bible in front of me and I read, pray and sing... over and over and over. At some point, the words and sentences begin to form and the ideas and images grow out of a time of prayer and private worship.

I may not remember the exact circumstances of how this song came together, but I do remember the timing of this song. At Heritage Church (in Van Buren, AR), we had a guest from the International House of Prayer. He really spoke about following the leading of God. He said that there would be choices we would have to make as followers of Christ. He urged us to pray and seek God's will for our lives...

“Like the rich young ruler, I have a choice to make,
To be trapped by riches or be saved by grace.
If I kept my money, or my dignity,
I'd never know the meaning of Your truth revealed through me!”

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Track 9:

use all that yo ve got

Back on “Come and Fill”, I mentioned that I write songs in the shower sometimes. Well, this is another one of those “shower” songs. It was one of those times when the entire form of the song just jumped in my head all at once and even though the words were very sketchy and hardly there, a lot of the music was just there waiting to be written down.

I suppose that it took me a couple of weeks after that to really put it all together and have a finished song. The best part was putting it together with a gospel trio in Oklahoma City. They really got into it and added so much spirit and energy into the song!!

“Use all that you’ve got to praise the Lord!
Use all that you’ve got! Use all you have and more.
‘Cause when you praise God takes your troubles all away,
For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised!

David danced before the Lord, Peter spoke His mighty Word, Paul and Silas sang their chains away.

When we come before the Lord, there is power in our praise!
Joshua felled the Jericho walls - that Goliath had a fall. We know our God is victorious!
As for me and my house, we’ll serve the Lord!

I say you gotta use your hands (Gotta clap!) I say you gotta use your voice (Gotta sing!)
I say you gotta use your feet (Gotta walk!) I say you gotta use your head! (Gotta think!)
I say you gotta use your knees! Pray and praise the Lord!
Come into His courts with praise!”

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Track 10:

wash over me

God's blessings are all around us. So many times we probably don't notice them or we take them for granted. There are blessings in each breath we take and there is so much beauty around us - if we will just look.

This song is a recognition of how blessed we are and how all God wants from us is our praise and our hearts. We can feel so unworthy sometimes - yet God always showers us with blessings.

We don't even have to do anything - He just gives and gives to us! What an incredible and wonderful God!

"You sent Your only Son,
Who gave His life to rescue me,
I realize my unworthiness,
But still Your blessings wash over me!

CHORUS

I've got nothing but my praise to offer You!
But still your blessings overflow my soul!
You are the greatest love that I have ever known!
My soul is flooded with Your peace!"

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Track 11:

you are beautiful

The chorus to “You Are Beautiful” was written on my wife, Libby’s, birthday, June 12, 2006. I was just recounting how beautiful my life was at the time and all of the blessings and gifts I had from God. The chorus formed out of a deep sense of gratitude and praise.

The chorus is definitely a celebration of God while the verses talk about the inherent guilt, frustration, pain, and depression of our day to day lives. Christ can redeem those lives and turn them from days of darkness to days of praise.

“Frustration’s just around the corner.
Guilt is just a word away.
A shadow of depression follows me.
I feel as though my hope has left me,
That my tears are all in vain,
Emptiness and sadness fill my heart.
But then I say your name
The sun clears all those clouds of doubt and pain.
I feel your joy!
With you my hope has been renewed!”

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Track 12:

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“For You Alone” was another song written late in the recording process. “Breathe Life” and “For You Alone” were both written within a couple of days of each other. My goal on both of them was to come up with a piano and vocal song that didn’t have any other instrumentation. While “Breathe Life” turned into a percussion/guitar instrumentation, “For You Alone” could stand alone for piano as the only instrument.

As we began to record it, I found that adding a few background vocals really added to the texture of the music and brought it to life. So, we layered a few background vocals and ... voila!

I think that this song, aside from being the title track to the CD, really captures the essence of my worship life. When we see the wondrous things around us - the beauty of nature, the majesty of the mountains, the wonder in the world around us, we can see all evidences of our God in these things! When we see these things and when we think about all that God has given us, how can we help but to praise Him?

“When I look up to the skies above me,
I swear sometimes I can almost see Your face.
And when I think of all You’ve given me,
I can’t help myself, I have to praise Your name.”

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Track 13:

soon and very soon

I arranged “Soon and Very Soon” to sing with the Total Praise choir at Heritage Church in Van Buren, Arkansas. It was a song many of us knew and it was so much fun to sing. So, I just gave it a bit of a kick and came up with this arrangement of it.

I thought it was a great song to end the CD because it brought everything full circle. I really wanted the CD, “For You Alone” to tell a story. And, the songs reflect that story.

The first several songs deal with being far from God - not feeling like we are in His presence. And, I think that everyone at one time or another has felt that way. But, if we will “Come to the Altar” or live our lives for God, then our lives can turn around from a life in darkness - far from God - into a life of worship and praise.

What greater praise is there than to sing with rejoicing - “No more cryin’ there, no more dyin’ there - we are going to see the King!” -

Hallelujah!!