

CASTING CROWNS COME TO THE WELL

Song by Song

Courageous

Have you ever noticed the way kids act out at a movie they've just watched? As soon as they walk out of a theater, they pretend to be the movie's hero, even if it means imitating the super levitating karate kick they just saw. Here's the thing: Deep down inside, grown men have the same feelings.

What is it about us men that fires us up when we watch an action movie? Think about it. We just sat on our butts for two hours and stuffed our guts full of extra salty popcorn and a half-gallon of cola, but after the movie we're like, "You want some of this?" We're ready to take on the world.

We all have a desire for significance. We want to know we matter. We want to know we count for something. But the best way to count for something is to stand for something—or better yet, for Someone. And the only way we'll ever stand is on our knees with lifted hands.

When I talk to people about this innate desire, I ask, "Do you ever wonder if maybe it's your spirit longing to be more than just an audience to somebody else's fight?" We weren't created to be the audience. We were created to take part in what God is doing in his world. This song is an anthem of encouragement. It's one brother reminding all of God's men we were meant for greatness, and that greatness is defined in contagious and courageous abandonment to Jesus.

We have a men's Bible study at our church called Man Up. It's a group of about 150 men who meet on Wednesdays, and they're the crowd that is singing in the background on this song. They sang with gusto and a wonderful spirit. Maybe it's because it's one place where they're learning real action heroes are the ones who actually surrender.

City on the Hill

This story song depicts the body of Christ. Jesus Himself referenced his Church as a city on a hill, a beacon of welcoming brightness and truth to the world.

The song draws a picture of two old men sitting and talking. They're trying to remember what happened to the city on the hill because it's not there anymore. As they weave through the stories, they remember the warriors thought everyone was weak so they went off and started their own city. The dancers didn't think everyone had enough spirit so they went off and started their own city. It's an allegory of the factions of the modern Church, the result of predominantly like-minded people often dwelling upon non-essentials and personal taste to go their own direction.

If you were to walk in your church right now and ask five different people, "What is the most important emphasis in your church?" each would give a different answer. One would say the proclamation of God's Word is most important, one would say discipleship, another would say small groups, and yet another would say missions. God designed us with different personalities and preferences. Unfortunately, we often make personalities and preferences the priority.

First Corinthians 12 inspired this song. The Apostle Paul recognized the differences in us all—some of us are a hand, some are a foot, some an eye—but we all serve a distinct and important purpose

and are interdependent. We have to dwell on our like-mindedness if we are ever going to forge a lasting impact for God's Kingdom. The song reminds us that we really do complete each other in the kingdom when we come together.

Jesus, Friend of Sinners

I've often said that the world doesn't know enough about what believers stand for, and too many times they only know what we're against. This song is a reminder that we all need to do something about that.

While the song uses strong words to grab our attention, the truths are meant to lead us to the prayer within the chorus: Lord, open our eyes to the world at the end of our pointing fingers and let our hearts be led by mercy. If we're to do nothing else, it's to do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly before our God. (Micah 6:8)

I have said from the beginning that Casting Crowns' ministry primarily is to the Church of Jesus Christ. We try to minister to his body. Jesus talked straight to the church folks when he walked the Earth, so I think we need to heed his Word and turn the finger inward a little bit.

When I first read the lyrics to my wife, Melanie, she gave me that cocked eyebrow look. "OK, are you sure you can say that?" she asked. While it's true this is one of the more direct songs we've written, it also speaks truth. And I think believers should speak truth to each other as long as we do it in love. The people who worship with us know we love them. We aren't some angry artist standing outside and criticizing the church. We're in it right alongside other believers, and we're also preaching to ourselves first. In fact, you'll notice in the first verse that I'm speaking about myself: *The world is on their way to you, but they're tripping over me; always looking around, but never looking up; I'm so double-minded.* I think God has given us a platform where we can talk honestly about issues important to his heart. That's why the cry of this song is, "God, break our hearts for what breaks yours."

Finally, the heartbeat of the song is wrapped up in the bridge, which speaks the biggest truth directly to the most important Person of all—Jesus: "You are good, and your love endures forever."

Already There

We adopted a little girl from China on Mother's Day 2010. Beautiful little Meeka Hope has some special needs and required three surgeries before we got her. She's had more procedures since we brought her home. She's really had a rough time, but so has Melanie. When a child hurts, no one else hurts like Mama.

In the midst of a rough stretch, God gave me a gentle reminder that whatever we face ahead of us, he's already there. And he's in control. When I deal with high school seniors who are trying to figure out what their future looks like, I always tell them, "God is already sitting at the end of your life looking back on it. He's not stressed, so let's not stress on it now."

We have a God who is not bound by time or space. To him, space and time are mere creations. A thousand years is as one day to God, so if you have anxious thoughts try to remember Philippians 4:6-9. Paul encourages us to give our worries and fears to the Lord and pray *with thanksgiving*. How do we pray thanksgiving when we're anxious? I like to simply whisper, "Thank you, Lord, that you are not anxious about this." It reminds me that God is standing at the end of my days and looking back on them. Whatever comes, he's already there.

Someday, an orphaned little Chinese princess will be able to testify to this wonderful truth. In English.

The Well

The heart of the entire album is this song that came from a sermon I shared about the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. What started as an address to my students on a Wednesday night turned into a book and then into this song.

When Jesus met the woman at the well, he talked to her about spiritual water, symbolic of eternal life in him. She did what lost people do. She related everything to the physical, to the here and now. When he offered living water, she hoped he meant providing her a shortcut to the daily chore of drawing water, and she likely was a little cynical in her response. Jesus said, "I'll give you water and you'll never thirst again." The Samaritan woman was like, "Oh, yeah? Well, give me some of that water so I won't have to come back to this well anymore."

This woman thought she was standing by a well and talking to a man, but really she was standing by a hole in the ground and talking to the Well.

We're all like this woman. We come to Jesus and we think we already have our wells that sustain us. Our wells are called control or power or approval or talent or even entitlement. When we already have what we think is going to fulfill us, we usually just come to Jesus only to ask him to sprinkle blessings on our thing so our thing will work even better. But Jesus isn't life enhancement. Jesus is life.

All he asks is that we take what we think are our wells, realize that they are nothing but dry holes in the ground, and leave it all behind.

He asks us to come to the one true Well.

Spirit Wind

This is one of the first songs I ever wrote. It appeared on a little CD that my youth group and I put together way back in the day.

It came from a sermon by a country preacher who was on fire for God. As he preached his heart out to our little church in Alabama, he recounted the story of Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. The whole time he preached about Ezekiel shouting down to these dead bones, I realized I was sitting in one of the deadest churches I had ever experienced. It dawned on me that I was watching a genuine man of God preach down to these pews full of dead bones. It saddened me, and my reaction was a prayer of revival that turned into this spare song.

You'll hear the song go from Ezekiel in the first verse to the country preacher in the second verse and finally to a prayer for God to raise his Church again as a mighty army. It also features the encouragement that soon these risen warriors will battle again. And the only way that will happen is for us to be filled with the Spirit Wind.

Just Another Birthday

I have been living this song for two decades as a youth pastor talking to girls who all too often don't have dads at home. More times than I can count, I have watched these girls grow up and look elsewhere, trying to find the love that's missing at home. It's a sad journey that often scars them.

These days as I try to be a spiritual father to so many teenagers, I meet one-on-one every week with about 23 students. We sit knees to knees in my office and walk through the books of the Bible and talk about friendships and family. The absence of the father—in some form or another—seems to be the problem in most every situation.

The chorus of this song hit me one night at a restaurant. I had spent time with some of my students that day, and their familiar plight gripped me until these words came out. Throughout the song, the girl tells her story as she's growing up and trying to reassure herself: "It's OK, it's just another birthday. He's not here but he will be next time."

The song has two purposes. Hopefully, it'll shake up some fathers and remind them of their true priorities. But it's also meant but to encourage kids out there who don't have an involved dad here on Earth. I wanted to remind them that God is the Father to the fatherless.

Wedding Day

It's rare to hear a modern song discuss such grand eschatological themes as the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ, but that's exactly what *Wedding Day* describes—meeting Jesus in the sky. The Bible refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ and describes the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When I pictured that imagery and remembered that Paul says we are an adulterous people who go our own way and do our own thing, I realized we are cheating on Jesus. We need to look upon our relationship with Christ for what it is—a union that should remain holy and undefiled.

Wedding Day anticipates the thrill of reveling in the presence of God as the Bride of Christ. And while we may look like a motley bunch right now—muddling through this sin-stained world and battling our flesh and the wiles of the devil—we are promised that when we stand before him we will be clothed in his righteousness. Though the Bride knows she's undeserving and bears the shame of her history, this worn and weary maiden is not the bride that he sees. She wears white head to toe, and, praise the Lord, only he could make it so.

Angel

I wrote this song for my own precious bride, Melanie. I met her when I was in fifth grade, and the song references the first time I saw her. I still remember being at church, running around with a bunch of guys, and seeing this big, long car pull into the parking lot. Melanie's family stepped out of the car, and when I saw her, I thought, "WHO is that?" They were moving to Montgomery, Alabama for her dad to serve as minister of music at our church.

The song also flash forwards to our wedding day more than a decade after we met, and I mean it with all my heart when I sing, "With a sacred promise and a ring that says it all, oh, I've just begun to fall."

I'm still falling after nearly two decades of marriage. There never really has been any one but Melanie. We grew up together in the youth group and I had girlfriends and she had boyfriends, but to me she was always the one.

My Own Worst Enemy

Every believer knows what it feels like to grapple with the flesh. We all struggle with the desires welling up within us that if acted upon would lead us away from God. Sometimes, it feels as if we're our own worst enemy.

This may be the hardest rocking song we've ever played, which is fitting because it's about dealing with our dark side. The Apostle James says we are tempted because each of us is lured and enticed by his or her own desire. These desires come from the fallen nature within us. Though we've

been made new through redemption in Jesus Christ, as long as we're wrapped in our fallen flesh we're going to have a fight on our hands. Even the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 makes it clear he endured a daily battle within himself. He says he still didn't do things he knew he should do, and the things he didn't want to do were the very things he wound up doing. He called himself a wretched man. I know the feeling too well.

The song's opening verse talks about seeing an old familiar face—like I caught a glimpse of my old self even though I never wanted to see him again. The visual I can't get out of my head is the children's story of Peter Pan and his wandering shadow with a mind of its own. The second verse says, "I feel like my shadow is dragging me around." It recalls those times when it feels like your old life sneaks back in on you. The answer to the dilemma is found in Paul's conclusion in Romans 7:

"Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24b-25a)

Face Down

I've come to realize that I have the natural tendency to try and write or create something new and extraordinary to bring to a God who already has the world and little me in His hands.

It's when I realize that HE is the creator and I am the creation and he alone makes things new that I find myself humbled before Him. It's also here that I find that I'm most usable by God to bring Him glory. What He desires from us is a humble heart.

Face down in reverent posture before the Holy of Holies is where I know I belong, and I pray with grace that this world sees in me someone humbled and broken at Jesus' feet.

So Far to Find You

I wrote this song for Meeka Hope, our little girl whom we adopted from China. Steven Curtis Chapman and I wrote it together. When we traveled to China to get Meeka Hope, Steven's wife, Mary Beth, accompanied us. We took all our kids and they got to play with their new sister, which was great. But Meeka Hope didn't want me to hold her. Most white men that Chinese orphans see are doctors coming to do surgery on them. She was petrified of me.

Only after a tearful session of pouring out my heart to God about Meeka Hope's refusal to come to me did I realize that I often had done the same thing to my Lord. It took several weeks before Meeka Hope warmed up to me, and in the process I came to the realization that I need Jesus way more than his blessings. We are so quick to run to him for what he can do for us. We're so slow just to sit with him and enjoy in his presence, and my crying out to him in China was really a God moment for me.

The lyrics speak toward Meeka Hope, but the parallels of God reaching out to bring us home to him are evident throughout the song. We enjoy our relationship with God only because of how far Jesus was willing to go for us. To him be the glory.