

## #8 - “Beautiful”

Artist: MercyMe

Album: The Generous Mr. Lovewell

Hello again, everybody! I’m glad to see so many of you have made this a part of your weekly schedules. I have to say that when I first began working on this, I had my doubts as to whether or not it would be of interest to anyone else but me! I went to my good friend, Keri, who is often my sounding board when I’m unsure of something and I just need to talk it out, and she told me that it sounded like something she’d be interested in so others probably would be, too. But then she said something along these lines: if you really feel like God is asking you to do this, then you shouldn’t worry about whether or not people will come. In other words...just keep doing what you’re supposed to be doing...He’ll take care of the rest. That Keri sure is smart!

And so here we are. I don’t think it’s any coincidence that each one of you is here. I know that God has a reason for inspiring you to come. Maybe there’s something He wants you to hear in one of these songs that will encourage you through something you’re struggling with. Maybe there’s something He feels you need to work on in your life, and this is where you’ll find your motivation to begin. Maybe He just wants to spend some time with you and this is your chance to slow down...to not think about the list of things you’ve got to get done...and to just focus on His presence here with you. Many of you have said as much to me since we began so I know that it’s true for at least a few of you. In my case, I can certainly check the “all of the above” box. He HAS helped me, through these songs, to find strength, comfort and guidance in the midst of my struggles. He’s made me aware of things that I need to change. And He has made his presence known to me in so many ways – just by listening to these songs and, I have to say, I really enjoy the time with Him! But there’s something else that I feel He’s doing in this process (and I’d be willing to say He’s doing it in your lives, too). I believe He’s planting seeds in my life, and is waiting to see what I will do with them. I think God’s in the agriculture business!

Isn’t that what we’ve seen in the past two weeks? The first week, through our #10 song “7 x 70” we heard the story of how God planted a seed of forgiveness in the heart of Chris August.

And Chris chose to cultivate that seed, to weed and prune, to work through that tough thing, until he'd found that healing had begun to grow. Last week we saw how Mandisa nurtured a seed of perseverance in her life, learning to depend on God when the waves got rough. It was hard work. But from that work blossomed a deep and abiding faith that made her "Stronger." And how cool is it that when God planted those seeds, and those songwriters did their part in allowing them to grow, He allowed for MORE seeds to be spread through their songs. They multiplied exponentially!

This week, we're going to be talking about seeds that God planted in the lives of the men who make up the band, MercyMe, paying particular attention to our #8 song called, "Beautiful." If you remember, last week I told you how Mandisa's song was the easiest one for me to work on primarily because there was just SO much information out there about the song and about Mandisa's life. This week, however, might end up being my most difficult! Not because there isn't enough information out there about this song; there are plenty of articles and interviews that tell the story. The reason this week was so tough is because I found a video of the lead singer of MercyMe, Bart Millard, telling the story behind the song. It's a simple story, really. But then, in the video, he goes on to say more about what God taught THEM through the song, and what he felt God wanted everyone else to learn from it. It was beautiful. I knew, when I saw that video, that there was nothing I could say or relate to you that would be any more meaningful, any clearer, than what Bart had already said. So this is what I've decided to do: I'm going to show you that video and then we're going to listen to the song. But that'll probably take all of ten minutes! So then we're going to take a look at the story behind 'the story behind the song' to see how God planted seeds into the lives of MercyMe. So this is #8 – "Beautiful."

VIDEO: Story behind by Bart Millard: [Click here to watch](#)

VIDEO: Official video: [Click here to watch](#)

Do you see what I mean? There is no way I was going to be able to top that! So I decided to take a closer look at the band instead. First of all, I was interested in what their name meant. And second, I wanted to see what it was, what magical formula they were using, to have become so successful. Let's face it...these guys are doing something right! Out of six albums that

they've made they've had nine #1 singles. They've ranked in the top 50 across the charts – Christian, pop, alternative, country and adult contemporary. That's unheard of! So here's the story behind the story...

Bart Millard is the lead singer for MercyMe and I guess you could say the band started with him. He, like our previous songwriters, grew up in a broken home. His parents divorced when he was three and he spent a lot of time bouncing back and forth between homes. But when he was in third grade, he had to make a choice. His mother was re-marrying and moving away so he and his brothers had to choose with whom they would live...stay in Greenville with their Dad or move away with their mom. Bart wanted to live with his mom, but his older brother (five years older) wanted to be with their dad. The parents really felt it was best for the boys to stay together, and because they already had a 'home base' in Greenville, the boys ended up living with their Dad.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

Bart wasn't aware of it at the time, but God had begun to plant some seeds in his life even in the midst of his heartache. He saw the person he wanted to be in his father. He saw his dad "falling in love with Jesus" and he wanted a taste of that, too. During that time in high school he came to know the Lord. And Christian music played a big part of that. This is what he says about the kid he was then:

*"I was that kid who, while singing in front of the mirror playing a mean tennis racket, imagined singing with my favorite Christian artist rather than some big rock star. Now some could say that was just the beginning of what would be a major calling in my life. I tend to think I just needed to play outside more and have fewer imaginary friends. Regardless how you choose to see it, that was who I was."*

By the time his father had passed away, Bart had made the decision to enter into ministry and when a youth internship at a church in Florida opened up, he saw this as his opportunity to do just that. He immediately got involved with the church's praise band where he met a young guitarist named Mike Scheuchzer. They sort of didn't click at first.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

As Mike and Bart's friendship developed through the praise band, Bart's love of singing deepened. Recognizing his heart for leading worship, Bart's youth pastor suggested he help out behind the scenes with a traveling ministry group (Awestar missions) during his summer break.

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It didn't take long for the people in charge of that ministry to notice that Bart's talents were more musical than technical and so they invited him to sing with their praise band. The keyboardist in the band was a guy by the name of Jim Bryson. And as the guys toured all over the place with this ministry, their friendship began to solidify. But not only that, they had a taste of what ministering to people through their music was really like. They found themselves in Switzerland where they led a church camp for military kids and it was there, during an outdoor service in the Alps, that Bart's eyes were opened to the POWER of praise and worship.

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Crazy! Nevertheless, by 1994, Bart and Mike had made the decision to pursue music as a full-time career. With the help of Jim Bryson, the keyboardist, they packed up everything they owned and moved to Oklahoma to form the band MercyMe. Now you might be wondering why they chose this name for their band. Does anyone know or think they can guess? Probably not. I sure couldn't figure it out. Well, according to Bart, every time his grandmother would call to check on how he was doing out there in Oklahoma, he was actually home to answer the phone. This troubled her because, in her opinion, he was spending an awful lot of time doing nothing. "Mercy me," she'd say, "when are you going to go out and get a real job?" Bart couldn't count the number of times he heard that statement. And, with tongue in cheek, that's what the guys decided to name their band! You can probably imagine what life was like for these "jobless" guys.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

So now they had a home-base and they started booking gigs wherever anyone would let them play. They needed a drummer, and ended up working with 20 different guys because the money wasn't exactly pouring in and they kept quitting on them! Finally, they found a kindred spirit in Robby Shaffer.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

Now with a full line-up, their reputation began to spread among churches and ministries which allowed them to focus on music full time. They were able to record several independent albums in those years that reflected their taste for the grunge music that was popular in the mid-nineties. But it was their skill in leading worship that kept them working...not their records.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

So they kind of changed their perspective on the plan God had in store for them. Instead of making it big with their albums...maybe they were supposed to spending their time in worship. Bart says that they realized, *"It's not about being something you WISH you could be, it's about doing what God has called you to do effectively."*

Now at this point, when I first heard their story, I went back and listened to the interviews and re-read the articles. And this is what I noticed...God had planted a seed, I think, in the hearts of those boys on that mountaintop in Switzerland...an idea that maybe they could minister to people through music in a big way. And then, I picture God sitting back in His chair, probably grinning and rolling His eyes much of the time ('cause let's face it, these guys are a bunch of goofballs), as He watched them try to make that seed grow.

Isn't that, after all, what we do with our children? I remember when my kids were learning to walk. Especially Nick. I remember when he began pulling himself up and sort of cruising along the sofa, holding on as he walked. He would stand there, looking so thoughtful...and I could just SEE the wheels turning inside his head. "I do believe there's a way I can walk over to that table instead of crawling over. If only I could figure out how to do it." That's what it

looked like he was thinking. Do you remember seeing those looks on your children's faces? And they sort of work up the nerve to try, right? So what did we do, as parents when this was happening? Did we step out of the room? NO! We wouldn't have been there to help them if they fell if we'd left the room. And besides, if you were like me, you didn't want to miss it! So I stood right where I was...I FROZE, really. And I watched and waited as he tried. Did he make it the first time (or even the second or third)? No, and probably your kids didn't either. Did we get mad at them when they fell? No. On the contrary, we silently cheered them on as they made their attempts and then we swooped in to comfort them when they fell. And then we let them go to try again, maybe giving them a nudge or two to encourage their efforts.

This is what I think God did with those crazy guys. He sat back and watched to see what they would do...how far their baby steps would take them. He loved them through their struggles and when they started heading in the wrong direction, He picked them up and turned them in the direction He wanted them to go. COULD he have waved his magic wand or zapped them with instant fame? Absolutely. But they wouldn't have learned anything that way. They wouldn't have grown.

Pastor Fred's sermon at the 11:00 service yesterday was on the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. He talked about how it always struck him the farmer in the parable was just throwing seeds around, willy-nilly, and how farmers today would NEVER do that. That started me thinking – farmers today wouldn't want to sow their seeds that way because...why? Because they wouldn't want to waste the seeds, right? They only have so much money to buy seeds, and when they're gone, they're gone. How beautiful is it that God has an endless supply?! He is like that farmer, lavishly tossing seeds around. And then He sits back and He waits...watching to see what we'll do with it. Of course, we know that it's not through OUR strength that we help these seeds to grow. But, let's face it, there's a certain amount of work that God sometimes wants us to do on our own, isn't there. When we're tending a garden, we need to make sure those seeds get watered, and fed. We need to protect them from the weeds that pop up so frequently, don't we? In gardening, you have to ever-vigilant if you want to produce good fruit. It's work!

That's what was happening in the lives of MercyMe. The guys decided that their next album should be a worship album, since that's where God seemed to be leading them. They got to work and had it pretty much done but they needed one more song to round it out. (For those of you who were here the first week...does this sound vaguely familiar? ☺) So as Bart sat down to write, he started looking through his old song-writing notebooks for inspiration. He says that everywhere he looked, he kept finding a phrase...he'd written it over and over in those notebooks...and that phrase was "I can only imagine."

You see, when his father died when he was just 19, Bart had really struggled with coming to terms with it. Well-intentioned friends had reminded him back then that his father was in a much better place. *"I used to write the phrase 'I can only imagine' on anything I could get my hands on,"* Bart said, for two reasons. *"I did know he was in a better place, and that would set me off thinking about what he was seeing..Getting strength he never had here and seeing things he couldn't fathom here. And it really brought peace and hope to me. But at the same time, I really wanted to know, 'God, what's so great about [heaven] that [Dad] would want to leave me or not come back?' Call it selfish, but it's just being human."*

He'd never really dealt with these feelings. And so now, ten years later, Bart found himself facing those words again... "I can only imagine." Just like Chris August knew that God wanted him to write a song about forgiveness, Bart knew that God wanted him to write THIS song.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

At the time the band recorded the song, they were relatively unknown. They were just scraping by, playing church camps and youth conferences around the country. But two years later, they signed with a Production Company and re-released the song...that's when the floodgates opened. With that song, God began to show them the fruits of their labor. The song shot to the top of the charts. It connected with people. Because of the content, yes, I mean we've all lost someone we love, haven't we? And we all long for that hope of heaven. But also, I think, because this song portrays the beautiful relationship that Bart has with His Lord and Savior. That he could sit and speak with God so openly, so humbly, and know that God loves

him (and his father) enough to bring him peace and the promise of heaven. I think that's something we all long for. And I KNOW it's something we can all have.

So the song was a hit. And it continued to make the charts of Christian and mainstream radio for three years. THREE YEARS! They found themselves in places few Christian bands ever did. (show pictures from video with Leno, etc.) They were suddenly the headline act of their shows, not just the extras! They ended up adding another guitarist to the mix, Barry Graul. He instantly became a part of the family – and that's what the band was – a family. They considered themselves to be brothers...if not literally, at the very least brothers in Christ. And their goal, especially once they had “made it big” was not to keep raking in the accolades or the cash. Their goal was to keep glorifying God through their work. And they say that it their relationships...with God and each other...are what kept them going.

VIDEO: [Click here to watch](#)

And now, years later, the band is still nurturing the seed that God planted within them years earlier. And by doing so, they are spiritually feeding countless people across the world. It has amazed me, as I've researched these songs, to see how just one person working in their own “personal garden” can have such a wide-spread effect on so MANY. I was reading an article on the fruits of the spirit the other day and the writer said something that really caught my attention. She said that, in essence, fruit was nature's way of making sure that seeds are widely distributed. That makes sense right? The seeds are in the fruit (that's one of the qualifications of being a fruit, I believe) and so as the fruit grows, and then nourishes another individual, then the seeds are deposited somewhere else to grow more fruit. That's kind of a literal way to look at it, but it's TRUE! And it's what happened in the life of MercyMe, isn't it? They nourished the seed that God planted, it produced good fruit which then, in turn fed the hearts and souls of their listeners. I believe that's the plan He has for each of us.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm by no means saying that if we work to do God's will...if we tend the seeds that He plants in our lives, nurturing them to grow strong...that He'll turn us all into MercyMe's! We all know that's not going to happen. But the point is, that it's not up to us

what God does with the fruit that we produce. That's HIS job. We're just supposed to grow...to be fruitful. Wasn't that God's first command to us in the Garden of Eden. He made Adam and Eve and then he said what? "Be fruitful and multiply." Now, that is most often interpreted to be a command to have lots of kids and fill up the earth. But I choose to think that if he had only meant THAT by the command, that he would have simply said, "Go out and multiply"! Instead, he told us to be FRUITFUL. To grow the seeds that He's planted within us in such a way that we will feed others. And by doing so, we're helping THEM to be fruitful.

I'll wrap this up today by sharing a little about the album from which our #8 song, "Beautiful" comes from. The title is a bit of a mystery and that's just how MercyMe wanted it. They were intentionally obscure about the title because they wanted to pique people's curiosity. The Generous Mr. Lovewell is the title and the meaning behind it is this: MercyMe knew where God had taken them, career-wise. They KNOW how much of an impact their albums have...not just on Christians...but on all different kinds of people from all different walks of life. When this album was released, it ranked #3 out of ALL the albums that were released that week. Out of ALL of them, not just the Christian albums! People are watching and listening to them. Knowing, this, they wanted to come up with something that would not only share the Gospel of Christ with them, but encourage THEM to be fruitful. They believed that it's the LITTLE things that make big change. So they came up with a fictional character, generous Mr. Lovewell, a man *"who represents those people in our lives who take advantage of every moment to make a difference regardless whether they get the spotlight or not."* Mr. Lovewell is a man who wakes up each morning to do random acts of kindness in his little corner of the world. And those acts of kindness have a ripple effect. They plant seeds. So they set up a twitter account for him, a facebook account for him...he even has his own website. And through these things they are encouraging the world to be "generous Mr. Lovewell" for someone else. And not just to do nice things for people, but to let them know WHY they're doing it...because God is a God of love, and He loves YOU enough to die for you. How cool is that!

These guys are the first ones to admit that they did not see any of this fame coming their way. When they made the choice to be a band that leads worship, instead of one that sold award winning albums, they felt that THAT would be enough for them - to do what God had inspired

them to do from the beginning on that mountain in Switzerland. But God has blessed their efforts more than they could have dreamed. An interviewer asked them how long they would keep doing this and their answer was this. “As long as we continue to see fruits from what we’re doing, we’ll keep doing it.”