

#4 – “Children of God”

Band: Third Day

Album: Move

#3 – “This Is the Stuff”

Artist: Francesca Battistelli

Album: Hundred More Years

As I mentioned last week, we’re going to be doubling up the song list for today and next week. Tonight we’ll be looking at songs number four and three, and next week will be our last song study with our final two. I appreciate your willingness to just go along for the ride and take things as they come!

So tonight’s first song is “Children of God” by Third Day. Third Day is one of the top touring Christian rock bands and they’ve been around for a long time. Mac Powell, the lead singer, and Mark Lee, the acoustic guitarist, originally formed the band back when they were in high school. Gradually they added several more band members and signed with a recording label. They released their first album in 1996 and now, have released their 11th album, entitled “Move.” It is on this album that we find our #4 song, “Children Of God.”

The song was inspired by scripture. If you’ve brought your Bible with you, I’d like you to take a look at 1 John, chapter 3, verses 1-3 before we listen to the song. The Apostle John writes:

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,^[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

This scripture is quoted in the song you’re about to hear. Mac Powell, Third Day’s lead singer and writer of “Children of God,” was caught by the first line in this scripture... “*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*” He began to look at this passage through the eyes of adoption. He and his wife, had just adopted a baby boy into their family, and he gained a fresh perspective on what it meant to be adopted into God’s family. You’ll see that demonstrated beautifully in the video we’re about to see. There are several families depicted in the video who have adopted children, one of which is Mac’s family.

(He's the one who kind of looks like Jesus!) By the end of the video, you'll understand the point Mac is trying to make with the song...

VIDEO: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6jO7xhU_Pw

Isn't that video beautiful? At first I was kind of taken aback by how they singled out the children who were adopted – the white shirts. I felt kind of bad for them! But then, when everybody started taking their shirts off, revealing the “Adopted” shirt underneath...it was quite a moving thing. Obviously what Mac was trying to do was change our perspective from what we commonly think of as adoption, to a more Biblical idea of adoption.

I found it interesting that this is not the only passage of scripture that refers to us as God's adoptive children. There are several more that I'd like to point out. In John, 1:12, John reaffirms this notion by saying, *"to all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* In the book of Romans, chapter 8, verses 15 and 16, Paul writes: *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* In the book of Galatians, chapter 3, verse 26, Paul again writes, *"We are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* And again in Galatians 4:4-5, he writes, *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."* And yet AGAIN in Ephesians 1:4 and 5: *"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."*

This idea of adoption, of God giving us a place in his family, is obviously a big deal to Paul. Why else would he be writing about it SO much? I wanted to dig a little deeper and find out what adoption meant in Biblical times. I wanted to know if it meant anything different THEN, than it does today. In the process, I stumbled across an article written by Rod Martin, a man who had been adopted as a child. He wrote, *"I was two days old when my parents chose me to be their son. Being adopted is an amazing thing. I was taken from a situation that probably would not have turned out well and was given the opportunity to grow up in a loving Christian home. I became a member of a new family. I had a new identity, a new name, a new opportunity, and eventually a new inheritance. I was chosen!"*

Biblical adoption is just what Rod states here, but so much more. In biblical times, bloodlines were a big deal. And so, adopting someone into your family was a HUGE move. There had to be SEVEN witnesses to the adoption in order for it to be legal. Being adopted meant you were entitled to an inheritance. And you didn't just get Great-grandma's china or your parent's house full of knick-knacks. In biblical times you inherited a name, a title, a people... the tribe, and everything that came with it. And not only that, when you were adopted, any debt you owed, anything that had happened before the adoption...was cancelled. Not just cancelled – it was erased! It was as if the person you were before had never existed. You were considered to be born on the day you were adopted into your new life and your new name. With this in mind, the idea of being adopted as a child of God should kind of give you goosebumps! It obviously did for Paul.

I'd like to do something we haven't done in a while – I want to break out into groups and take a few minutes to discuss this idea of adoption. Within your groups, take a look at what it means for us today, what it meant in biblical times and what significance this would have had for Paul. Why would it have been a big deal for him, especially?

BREAK-OUT SESSION

Isn't it interesting to see things in a new light; with a new perspective? As time consuming as this study has been for me, I have grown so much just by taking the time to take a closer look at things, at scripture, at my "take" on these songs. To look at them through the eyes of the scripture writers and the composers has been really enlightening for me. Is it the same way for you? I've heard from so many of you, saying that you have so enjoyed this study because it gives you a fresh perspective on not just the songs, but on your faith and your discipleship. The GPS each week doesn't have earth-shattering epiphanies, but the questions force you to look at the scriptures differently, don't they? They force you to see with new eyes. And that's the point I'm trying to make this week: God CHANGES US when we change our perspective.

I've got a few pictures to show you, in terms of perspective. My brother sent me one of those forwarded emails a few months back and I was amazed at the pictures. They are all chalk art pictures, drawn on streets or sidewalks. Take a look at how perspective changes things...





“breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” He was out to get every Christian he could get his hands on. You know that show, “America’s Most Wanted”? They try to track down the most wanted criminals in the US, right? Well, Saul would have been #1 on GOD’s most wanted list, wouldn’t he? As it turns out, he was. He was God’s most wanted, but not in the way we look at it through our eyes. (here’s another change in perspective!) Through God’s eyes, he was truly wanted, desired, cherished, valued...God WANTED him! And God went after him. So when Saul found himself on the road to Damascus, on his way to hunt down some more Christians, God stopped him in his tracks. All of a sudden a blinding light began to shine and Saul dropped to his knees. He heard Jesus’ voice asking him why Saul was persecuting him so. Jesus told Saul to get up and go to the city. So Saul gets up but he can’t see! The light has blinded him, but he goes to the city anyway. And he waits three days. Imagine what those three days were like for him! You know the rest of the story, right? God sends Ananias to Saul. God tells Ananias to fill Saul in – that God wants to give him new sight, and to fill him with the Holy Spirit. And then, scales fall away from Saul’s eyes and he can see...but not like he ever did before. He takes on a new name...Paul...to reflect that new perspective and that new life. Saul was dead. His debts had been wiped away. And “Paul” was born on that day – the day that marked his adoption into God’s family. And as a child of God, he was given an inheritance...an inheritance so precious, that he couldn’t keep his mouth shut about it. And he couldn’t help sharing it with the world.

Take another look at the words I quoted you before, by Rod Martin, the man who had been adopted as a child. And look at again, as if Paul were speaking it. *“I was two days old when my parents chose me to be their son. Being adopted is an amazing thing. I was taken from a situation that probably would not have turned out well and was given the opportunity to grow up in a loving Christian home. I became a member of a new family. I had a new identity, a new name, a new opportunity, and eventually a new inheritance. I was chosen!”* THIS is what Paul experienced! And this is what Mac Powell was trying to convey in this song, “Children of God.”

I read an interview that Mac gave, where the interviewer was marveling at the fact that after eleven albums and nearly 20 years as a band, they were still able to come up with something fresh and new. He asked Mac how he did it...how is it that he still had something relevant to say. Mac’s response was this:

“You just have to ‘tap into life.’ Whether it’s everyday dealing with your family, or a mission trip you’re going on, or something that you heard someone say, you’ve got to tap into that stuff and let [it] change you for the better. And then be willing to pass on what you’ve learned to other people.”

In other words, you’ve got to live your life with your eyes open, looking at things from a different perspective, so that you can see how God is teaching you through the things that you experience. Big or small.

And that’s what our #3 song is all about. It’s a song by Francesca Battistelli called “This Is the Stuff.” Let’s listen to it first and then we’ll talk a little bit more about changing our perspective.

VIDEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPEQKIpFUwI>

There’s really not much of a “story” behind this song. It pretty much speaks for itself, doesn’t it? Francesca says that, as she sat down with her co-writers, Tony Wood and Ian Eskelin, they just started throwing around some ideas for songs. They ended up talking about all of the stuff that gets on their nerves, and that’s how this song came to be. She said, *“We all deal with frustrations and I tend to make bigger deals about things that go wrong than I should. [This song] was perfect, because I needed to hear this song and knew others did as well.”* These things that happen are what God uses, Francesca says, to *“refine our character and make us more like Him.”*

The scripture she ties with the song is taken from James 1:2-4. It reads as follows:
² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds,* ³ *because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.* ⁴ *Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

As I re-read this scripture, the phrase that stuck with me was “whenever you face trials of many kinds.” I have always thought of that phrase as showing us that we’re going to face NUMEROUS trials... “many” referred to a number in my mind. I guess I had always interpreted this passage of scripture to say that we would encounter a lot of trials, but that it would build our perseverance. But in light of this song, I saw the words “many trials” with a new perspective. MANY became VARIOUS in my mind. As in... “whenever you face trials of various

kinds”....big and small. God wasn’t only going to use the BIG things, he was going to use the little things...all kinds of things...to teach me how to persevere.

I’ll admit that this song has been stuck in my head ever since the first time I heard it. And I’ll also admit that it probably stuck in my head because the music is catchy and because I love the sound of a ukulele. But the message never got much deeper than surface level for me, until this week happened. The message went from “God teaches me through this stuff” to “God CHANGES me through this stuff.”

Here’s what happened to me...and I’m warning you now, it’s kind of a long story so if you’ve got somewhere else to be, you might want to escape now! About a week and a half ago, I looked at our calendar at home and realized that I was running out of time. There was no time left this summer for us to get away for vacation or to see the last few colleges that Lauren was interested in touring. So I decided the only way we could fit a trip in was to block off last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to make a last-ditch, whirlwind tour of three different colleges. Now, you know as well as I do that it is never easy to clear a schedule and rearrange your life. But I was determined to do it. I moved three rehearsals up from Thursday and Friday to Tuesday night. I managed to get all of the music prepared early and to get all of my stuff in the bulletin. I lined up somebody to stay at our house to take care of the dog. But, of course, if somebody was staying at the house, I had to CLEAN, and make sure I had food for them. So I got all that done and on Wednesday morning, we threw a bunch of stuff in the suitcase and took off. It was like a collective sigh was breathed as we started driving in the car that morning. Whew....it had all come together and we were off! I was a little worried about my prep time for tonight’s study but I knew that I’d have all day after church on Sunday to take care of it. So we’re driving, through the backwoods of Maryland, on our way to the Bay Bridge, when traffic begins to slow. And then it stops. Up ahead we see blinking lights, telling us that there’s been an accident. No problem. We’d left with a bit of time to spare before we had to be at Gettysburg college for an information session and tour. But the minutes tick by, and we still aren’t moving. Some people are turning around, but we really didn’t know what to do because we don’t know another way to get to the bridge. Surely, they’ll open up one lane to let people slide through, right? Well, when the helicopter landed in the field next to us, I knew that they weren’t going to be letting traffic by any time soon! And guess what the first thought in my mind was? Not – “uh, oh...somebody

must be really hurt up there. I'd better pray for them." No. It was "geez, now we're REALLY going to be late." As I my knee began to bounce with impatience (does your knee do that?), I saw the paramedics from the helicopter run out towards the crash. And it was then that I had a SAUL moment. It was as if a light began to shine and I heard Jesus saying, "Joyce, why are you complaining? THIS is the stuff I'm going to use..." And the five days that followed were exactly that...full of STUFF...annoyances that made the scales fall away from my eyes. We made it on time to the college but when we got to our hotel that night, we realized that I had no underwear packed and neither Todd or I had any clean socks. "This is the stuff," I found myself saying. Thursday we got a call from my brother saying, "What are we doing for dad's birthday? It's Monday, you know." I had forgotten my Dad's 75th birthday! Again, I found myself saying, "this is the stuff!" We decided that Sunday night was the only night we could have a party. No problem – I'd still have Sunday afternoon to work on the bible study, right? And we could spend Saturday making sure we had a really good gift. Lauren decided to make a cake upon which she'd make little figures of all of my dad's favorite things. She and Nick spent hours on Saturday creating a beautiful recliner, TV remote, a little table with a plate full of cake and ice cream, and a tiny jigsaw puzzle (made of clay) that had the Attix family portrait on it. It was beautiful. Lauren went to bake the clay figures in the oven so they'd become hard, only to find out that at the end of the allotted time, those little works of art had been reduced puddles of multi-colored ooze. I'd bought the wrong kind of clay – the DO NOT BAKE kind! "This is the stuff..." And it was just about that time when Todd looked at the calendar and said, "Uh, honey. Lauren has a clarinet recital tomorrow afternoon." Sunday afternoon...the only time I had left to work on this study! THIS is the stuff! And so we get through church, and the recital, we get the cake baked and new figures made to go on top of it (this time using the right kind of clay.) We'd found some nice gifts for Dad and went to the party and by 8:00 pm, I was seated at the computer, ready to spend all night if I had to, to get this study together. At approximately 9:15 last night the lights began to blink and then....nothing. Pitch black. The electricity was out. I eventually gave up and went to bed, telling God, "It's up to you now."

Right about now you might be wondering how God CHANGED me through this stuff, right?

This is how: I was reminded, over and over and over again, that there are so many things outside of my control. I'm the kind of person that likes to know what's happening when. I like to plan.

I like to be prepared. And so God showed me, time and time again, through these seemingly random things, that I am NOT in control. And that's all right. I needed to learn to trust Him, through it all. I needed to depend not so much on what I could do, what I could pull together, how I could line things up because sooner or later, I was going to fail. I need to rely on Him to make things work out in his timeframe. Not my own.

Tonight's study is a perfect testament to that fact. Mark Hall, the lead singer for Casting Crowns, likes to say that he thinks God lets us face this STUFF, because then when we make it through the STUFF, we have no other option but to give God the credit. There's no possible way we could have done it on our own. That's how I'm feeling right about now! Can I truly say that I am a new person because of this stuff, like Paul was when those scales came off of his eyes and he saw things through God's eyes? No. I'm still working on it. But I will say this – there has not been a situation or circumstance (big or small) since I saw that helicopter last Wednesday, when I haven't stopped and thought, "How does God want me to see this?" And that change has made all the difference.

Would you pray with me?

Gracious God, Heavenly Father, Dad – thank you for the stuff that we encounter in our lives. Help us to look at it with new eyes, and new perspectives, so that you might truly refine our character and make us more like You. So that our old lives might be gone, and we might be given new lives as your children. Thank you for that divine inheritance that you've promised us and for the joy and hope we experience as your adopted sons and daughters. In Jesus' name we pray...Amen.