

#6 – “I Will Follow”

Artist: Chris Tomlin

Album: *And If Our God Is For Us*

#5 – “I Refuse”

Artist: Josh Wilson

Album: *See You*

Once again, we’re going about things just a bit differently today – actually for the next few weeks. Summer is getting away from me and I’ve found that I’m going to need to combine our remaining studies so that I’ll have at least a week or two before the new choir season begins to focus my attention on planning. So this week we’ll be covering our #6 song as well as the #5 song. Next week, August 8th will be songs #4 and #3 and then August 15th will be our final session covering our last two songs.

So let’s jump right in! Our #6 song is “I Will Follow” by Chris Tomlin. This is a song we’ve done a number of times in our 9:00 service, and it’s one that I seemed to connect with instantly. I was unable to find a good video of the song so I thought I’d do something radical tonight and teach you all to sing it! The first thing that my husband said when he found out I was going to do this is “but you told them they wouldn’t have to sing!” And it’s true. I did say that. So I’m not going to force any of you to sing! But I will say this: even if you don’t think you can sing...sing anyway. There is great power in our song. But we’ll talk more about that later! I’m going to play the chorus for you a couple of times so you’ll get the hang of it and then I’ll invite you to join in. The words will be up on the screen so you’ll be able to follow along.

*(for those of you following along on-line, here is a link to a video with the lyrics:
<http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=7YYZK7NX> There may be a short commercial at the beginning.)*

Chris Tomlin was actually one of three songwriters who worked on this song. The other two artists are Jason Ingram and Reuben Morgan. The first name I mentioned, Jason Ingram, should be vaguely familiar to you since he also co-wrote last week’s song, “Your Love.” The fact that this song was a group effort might be why I wasn’t able to come up with a lot of background information on the story behind the song – by that I mean, what was happening in the life of the songwriter that inspired him/her to write the song. But I was actually able to find something better for this one. Chris Tomlin wrote a devotional based on the song and I’d like to share it

with you. And oddly enough (or should I say “Godly” enough since He’s the one who planned this whole thing in the first place ☺) it leads beautifully into our #5 song.

Chris Tomlin is a big name in contemporary Christian music today. Many of you have probably heard of him, or at least heard one or two songs that he’s written and recorded: “How Great Is Our God”, “Holy Is the Lord”, “Made to Worship”, “Indescribable”, and “Sing, Sing, Sing”. He’s a very prolific writer and most of his songs, he says, are based on scripture. That’s where he receives his greatest inspiration. And, speaking as a church musician who struggles to choose songs that are more than just “fluff”, that is probably why **I** think so many of his songs are so popular. You can’t go wrong with scripture! And so when I heard the chorus to this song, I knew this was a song that had some real MEAT.

“Where you go, I’ll go. Where you stay, I’ll stay. When you move, I’ll move – I will follow. Whom you love, I’ll love. How you serve, I’ll serve. If this life I lose – I will follow.” These are pretty powerful words don’t you think? These are not casual, feel-good lyrics that make you feel as if you’ve received a hug from God. Something like “God is so good, God is so good, God is so good, He’s so good to me”...now that’s a comfy-cozy kind of song, isn’t it? It feels good to sing it and there’s nothing wrong with that. But THIS is a totally different kind of song. THIS is a ‘til death do us part’ kind of song! Do you know what I mean? We’re making promises here, folks. Promises to do things that will be life-changing. Chris says that, *“While those words might be a true expression of the heart, when we hear them coming out of our own mouths it should still be a little sobering. Are we really considering the implications of what we’re saying?”* “If this life I lose – I will follow” is a line that will be difficult to follow through on. It was for Peter. And Peter was the inspiration behind this song.

Listen to these words from Chris Tomlin’s devotional:

“[Peter] was the brash one, the impulsive one who was always making those sorts of big, bold statements. He told Jesus things like ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ But when Jesus was arrested, those claims fell apart. Peter ran and hid and even renounced Jesus. Thankfully, that failure wasn’t the end of Peter’s story. In time, God’s grace and power would transform him into a man whose boldness was based on God’s strength rather than his own. But

it cost him something to get to that point of understanding what following Jesus was really all about.”

The 8th chapter of Mark contains what Chris Tomlin sees as the most pivotal moments in Peter’s journey as a disciple. Let’s take a look at Mark 8:31-33. Keep in mind that prior to this passage of scripture, Jesus has been doing miraculous things: he’d fed thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread and some fish; he’d given sight to a blind man. And along the way, despite Jesus’ teachings, the disciples still didn’t quite understand what was going on. Now, I can’t really blame them. I mean, I would probably have been the same. I can picture the disciples getting really excited about the stuff that was happening. I can imagine how blessed they felt that THEY had been chosen to be a part of it. I mean this was the MESSIAH...the one whom God had sent to save them from Roman oppression. He was “Superman” and they were his loyal sidekicks! How cool is that?! But then Jesus proceeds to fill them in on what was REALLY going on...

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

And then he goes on with the verses that we looked at last week. He gathered the people and his disciples around him and told them as clearly as he could, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”*

Jesus knew what was ahead and he was trying to fill the disciples in on it. But Peter, and probably the other disciples, too, already had their OWN ideas of how things were going to pan out. They couldn’t wait for the day when Jesus was going to take off his Clark Kent glasses and show the Romans who was boss. And so when Jesus started talking about a “suffering and dying Messiah” Peter had to do something about it. He hadn’t signed up for THAT! So he pulls Jesus aside and starts giving him an ear-full. I love Chris Tomlin’s take on this passage:

“You have to wonder if Peter’s rebuke of Jesus was born out of fear. Because what Jesus was revealing was threatening the dream that Peter had invested his hope in. And yet, what Peter had

in mind was not what God had in mind. How often do we find ourselves in similar positions—feeling disappointed, or angry or scared because God’s plans turned out to be something very different from our own expectations?”

Chris goes on to say, “In time Peter did respond in the only way a disciple can, by laying down his own ambitions and embracing what it meant to truly follow. At the end he even willingly gave his life for Christ. But I think the hard work of divestment from the things and hopes and dreams of this world was already complete by the time Peter allowed himself to be nailed to a physical cross. I think the hardest step for Peter must have come the moment right after this conversation in Mark 8, because that was the moment he realized this business of being a disciple, of following Jesus, was not about seeing his own agenda accomplished and his own dreams fulfilled. It was about seeing them crucified, and surrendering them to God’s greater purposes instead.”

So for Chris, being a disciple of Jesus Christ means putting aside our idea of what our lives should be like...crucifying our own self-centered desires...so that we can truly reflect Jesus to others. *“In the end,” he says, “it’s not about bravado and bold statements. It’s about simple, ongoing obedience to the words of our Lord. To say “I will follow” is really not so different from saying ‘Help me every hour to die to my own desires, Jesus, so that you can live more fully through me.’”*

And that leads right into our #5 song, “I Refuse.” Now, you might be thinking “how could a song called I REFUSE possibly tie in to the message we heard?” If you haven’t heard the song, the title can be awfully misleading! Though many of us, when faced with Jesus’ challenge for us to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses and follow him, might respond with those very words...I REFUSE! It would be easy to say that, wouldn’t it? Well, that’s not what this song is talking about.

“I Refuse” was written by a fellow by the name of Josh Wilson. Josh is a youngster in his musical career compared to Chris Tomlin. His second album, “See You” was released in February of this year but gained critical acclaim for not just the music, but for the message found within it. Josh has interesting “takes” on things and this song, “I Refuse” is an example of that.

I'm going to play the video for you and then I want to see if you can figure out what the message behind the song is.

VIDEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6B1Lv8k5pEc&ob=av2e>

So what do you think? What is the message Josh is trying to get across here? (He's saying we can't just TALK about what should be done...we shouldn't just SAY "I will follow you"...we need to DO it.)

Josh's take on this is so interesting to me. It's songs like these that make me envy (though I know that's not a good thing!) his craft. If I'd tried to write that song, I would have come at it from the obvious direction... "I've got to do something. I need to do more than just talk about it" But he comes at it from the other way and makes a much more powerful statement: "I refuse to do nothing." So cool. "I REFUSE" has so much more impact doesn't it? That little statement is not just a call-to-arms, it is basically saying that whatever I do, even if it seems small...even if I'm stuck in a wheelchair or a bed and it might seem like I don't have anything of value to give... whatever I do will be used by God. And though I might be weak, his weight, his strength is backing me up now. And He can work MIRACLES with that little thing that I've given.

My mother is a retired Methodist minister and she's finding herself in a situation, due to health problems, where she feels as if God has no use for her anymore. Now, I know that's just the enemy talking to her – and she knows that, too! And so when she is feeling at her worst, when she can't do anything but maybe say a prayer for someone who is hurting, or send a card to someone who is sick...that's what she does. It's her way of saying "I refuse to do nothing." And I am convinced that God is still using her for his purposes.

The story behind the song is simple, really. Josh lives in Nashville. In May of 2010, Nashville experienced a flood. A "1000 year flood" they called it, that devastated entire communities. Josh prayed and prayed for God to move in and work. He spoke about how he trusted in God to help these poor people. He, like Peter, made grand statements of their faith. But when it came right down to it, Josh realized maybe God needed to move through HIM.

VIDEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6md9teDFMU>

I'm going to leave you with one last thought. It's something that has been on my mind a lot lately. Remember at the beginning when I urged you to sing even if you don't like to or if you think you're not good at it...because there's power in our song. It's really true! I'm reminded of the Old Testament story of King Jehoshaphat. He and his people found themselves facing a HUGE army that was coming to overtake them. There was no way they were going to beat this army. But Jehoshaphat prayed to God and asked him what to do. God told him not to worry...that the battle was already His. And he told Jehoshaphat what to do. So Jehoshaphat went to his people and told them the same thing: don't worry – God's got our backs. And then he did something CRAZY! He gathered up all of the singers...the choir...and sent them into battle first. They started singing and their praises so baffled the enemy that they started fighting amongst themselves. And the next thing you know, Jehoshaphat and his people find themselves looking down at this great army that had come against them and that army was HISTORY. They were wiped out! The praises...the songs of God's people...had led to victory.

I know I'm taking a while to get to my point but here it is: we are what we sing! If all we eat are Krispy Kreme doughnuts, we'll end up looking like a doughnut...and if all we let come out of our lips is PRAISE for God's great love, his peace, his faithfulness...then that's what we'll become. And if God truly inhabits our praise like the Bible tells us, then he'll truly be living in US. I can think of no better thing. Can you?

Would you pray this prayer with me? I'll start and then you can repeat after me out loud or silently in the quiet of your heart:

Gracious and loving God
Thank you for this wonderful gift of music
That inspires us
And moves us into action
That wraps us up in your love
Help us walk daily with you
That the songs that we sing
Might be more than just words
So that you will truly live in and through us
Amen.