

The Thread: Song Explanations
By Graham Jones

Introduction

Think of this document like the "Special Features" button on a DVD menu. If you'd like to know a little bit more about my thoughts behind the music and lyrics of some of these songs, read on! If you don't like to know every little detail, that's totally fine, maybe this isn't for you. If you're just curious about a certain song or lyric, find that page and see if I mention it on there. In the likelihood that I may not have written about that particular line or phrase, please feel free to email me (graham@thefieldschurch.net)! I'd love to talk with you about songwriting, lyrics, and faith.

Enjoy reading!

Word of God

"Word of God" really started this whole process for me. When we first began our study of the book of Hebrews at the start of 2015, I was awakened by the opening four verses of the book. Take a moment and read it for yourself. They sparked this combination of excitement and reverence in me about Jesus that, frankly, I don't think about much during a normal week. Jesus is God, revealed to us in this age as the perfect imprint of the Father, the radiance of His glory.

In songwriting, there are some sections that can take hours and hours of work, and there are several tracks in *The Thread* for which that is true; but the chorus to this song was a simple response of praise in song from my heart: *You are the glory, You are the brilliance, You are the imprint, You are the Word, You are the story, and now You are sending it out; oh, let the Word of God be heard!*

I recorded the idea for the song the first time on January 7th on my phone, and then worked with it some more over the next several months. When our church reached chapter 13 in Hebrews on August 30th, it seemed fitting to sing this song together as we all approached the end of our journey. As you can hear in the final moments of "With Our Lives," when our church sings this chorus once more together, this song truly wraps up the idea of Jesus as the center of all things.

Fun fact:

The percussion for this song involved a lengthy writing process for Logan. Instead of constructing a single drum set part, he wrote a variety of parts that build together as the song goes along, so that by the end, there are two full drum set parts playing. I'm suppose I'm biased, but I think he did a pretty great job.

Rest

This track is a great example of how much writing for the concept of the album differs from writing for the concept of a song. Not long after writing "Word of God," I wrote another song about Moses and the Sabbath-Rest. I really loved the energy of the song and the truths it spoke of. However, later on in our walk through Hebrews, I quickly realized it didn't have a place on this album. For one, it would have ended up sounding very musically similar to "Like Wine, Like Bread." Most importantly, it was a fast-paced, fresh song that didn't convey the idea of entering into the Sabbath-Rest of Jesus very well.

So instead, I wrote this version of "Rest." It is very simple, soft, and short. It does reference the chorus of that first song I wrote for this theme, but recorded as less of a declaration and more of a prayer. You can think of this track as a musical representation of the Psalm 95 verse that the author of Hebrews references several times: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." This is a track for waiting on the Lord, just like the Israelites were waiting on Him for direction and purpose, even after He rescued them from Egypt. While "Word of God" is for singing, "Rest" is for listening.

Fun fact:

To get the open and reverberant sound for this track, we recorded it in one take with two microphones set up. In other words, instead of recording the guitar and the vocals separate (like the rest of the album), I played and sang each together. Even though that's more risky for getting the right notes, it gives the track a nice open sound.

Like Wine, Like Bread

This song went through a lengthy writing process. I have found that in my walk with God, seemingly unrelated verses, songs, feelings, or moments get bound up with important times in my life. You probably know what I'm talking about: something someone else said earlier in the week is directly related to what you're dealing with now; a song that you remember your kids dancing to comes to mind when you're thinking of home while on a business trip; you gag at the smell of some random food only because it was what you ate the last time you had a stomach bug.

This all happens in songwriting, too (without the vomiting, thankfully). I remember writing the words to this chorus after talking with a friend of Bethany's and mine who had gone through a really hard time. Some days she just didn't know how to handle the pain, and it was hard to tell how remembering Jesus would make things better. But I remember us talking about our hope in Him, despite the pain. I remember us talking about communion, about what it meant that we could "celebrate" the Lord's Supper when we think about His body and blood, some pretty real and gruesome stuff. The truth that we came to was that even though we suffer, He understands. Directly. Personally. This is why He is the perfect High Priest. That all happened in late 2014. Little did I know that a simple stanza would eventually find its home in a song in 2015. It took several months to craft a good structure for this song, and I went through several drafts and several different ideas for verses. I believe the final result is what these different lines were all intended for.

This song is unique from many other songs on the album in that it decreases in energy instead of increasing. The general decrescendo represents the fact that we, just like Aaron and the Levitical priests, need less of us and more of Him. The priests transformed something God gave as a connection to Him into a ritualistic culture of actions that didn't mean anything. Jesus came down and suffered with us so that we would know how fully He understands us. Though we will face suffering of all kinds, Jesus gives us hope by connecting us to His Father.

Fun fact:

At the very beginning of the song, right before the claps come in, you can hear a guitar in reverse. It's subtle, but it helps lead into the introduction.

Melchizedek

Ah, Melchizedek. Without a doubt, I had the most fun writing this song than any other on the record. I'll admit, it's almost too strange...but then again, what a strange passage of Scripture, comparing Jesus to this random priest-king from Genesis as a way of showing His superiority!

I love lyrics, especially ones that make you think. That means sometimes as a songwriter, I end up writing some fairly strange lines. There are probably several on this album, but I'd like to explain my thinking behind one in particular in this song: *Abraham had zero sons until the God of Isaac saw his faith and made him one of His own.* Maybe it's because I was thinking about the way that God and faith work, or maybe I was thinking about Abraham because of his connection with Melchizedek in Genesis, or maybe I was just going crazy as I was writing the chorus...but I kept thinking of that kids' song, "Father Abraham." You know, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham..."? I was thinking about how ironic that was, a 100-year old man without a son except for the grace of God being called the father of many sons, and in my mind, I kept thinking, "No, Abraham almost had zero sons! God just gave him one!" Then I realized both what the kids' song meant and what this song was supposed to mean: God didn't just give Abraham a son, He adopted him as His own son (Genesis 12:1-3). He took an old man with no kids and no purpose, and gave him both a spiritual and physical family and a promise.

The truth in that line helped me later on in finalizing the song. There were lots of options I had with the music and lyrics early on, but I realized after several months that I needed to settle into a structure. The result is the concluding lines of the song, which connect this idea of our faith with Jesus being our eternal priest. With faith like Abraham, we see how God has made a new covenant for us in Jesus, who is our Priest-King of mystery, whose life is the once-and-for-all foundation of our faith. This hope is also an assurance of salvation, that if Jesus is our eternal priest, He secures us in His righteousness. Our adoption is eternal.

Fun fact:

Most of this song is in 13/4 time, which means there are three measures of 3/4 and one measure of 4/4 in different patterns. For that and other reasons, Paul's inspiration for the sounds on this one was "demented circus." If you listen to the electric guitar tone by itself, I think you might agree.

Purify

Like other songs on this album, "Purify" came together from several differing songwriting efforts. In fact, most of the lyrics to this song were first written for entirely different parts of *The Thread* (namely "Rest," "Like Wine, Like Bread," and "With Our Lives"). Though certain sections (like the first part of the chorus: *in my heart, in my soul, in my mind...*) were written early in the spring, it wasn't until June 16th that I recorded a version of the song that adapted it specifically to the section that speaks about how Christ's blood purifies the conscience.

It didn't take long after for me to realize that this was the direction this song needed to take. Many of the lines already spoke to the truth of how Christ both finishes and fulfills the sacrificial law in His life, so it was only a matter of organization and fine-tuning from there. The bridge was a later addition to the song, in efforts to try and emphasize how the futility of our efforts is replaced by Christ's perfect sacrifice for us. There are two parts to that. One is that we depend on God totally for what is good and perfect in life, just like the line in the bridge says, which is a quote from James 1:17-18.

The other is that when we do things apart from the blood of Jesus, it's just a waste of time. This can be found even in the opening lines, which aren't just talking about the Old Testament sacrificial system. We should remember this in our daily lives, because although they may not seem like *countless sacrifices, offered blood*, when we try and do things to earn God's favor or feel better about ourselves they're just dead carcasses. Only Jesus's blood and righteousness count for anything in God's eyes. This may sound harsh, but it's the truth! Even if I can write a song or great piece of music, what is it really going to be worth in a thousand years? When we live in Jesus, that's when we really do things of eternal importance.

Fun fact:

This is the only song on the album that has no acoustic guitar in it. It does have Appalachian dulcimer in it, though, which is kind of like a 3-string acoustic guitar that sits in your lap.

No Other Way

“No Other Way” was actually written very early on during our journey through Hebrews, despite it being on the second half of the album and referencing a passage later on in the book. My first recording of it is dated January 26th, so it was written well before we even finished chapter 2, which is hard to believe in hindsight. I think the reason this song came so quickly was because the concept of writing this album and our study through Hebrews was still so new and fresh to me.

In looking ahead at this section in chapter 10, I latched onto the confidence and assurance that Jesus gives us in being the one and only Way for us. This song, in some ways, chronicles our hearts’ transformation in salvation, where we move from Christ being our stumbling block and excluder to Christ being our cornerstone and Savior. In another sense this song simply sings of how often we want to rebel and find our own way. But, there is no other way besides Jesus. That truth is why we’re still here, why we live in His Kingdom now. He is our Way, and we have confidence that comes from the word of our testimony, the story of the gospel in our own lives.

Fun fact:

The line about “Holy Son or raving lunatic” is a little reference to “Lewis’s trilemma,” a little apologetic argument that C.S. Lewis wrote, saying that Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or truly the Son of God. While it’s debatable how perfectly logically sound the argument is, it’s certainly an important question to think about personally. Do I treat Jesus as a lunatic or a liar or something else entirely, or do I really consider Him as Lord?

By Faith

Up until this point in our walk through Hebrews, I had written all of these songs entirely on my own time, either long in advance to our study in the passage or later on in response. "By Faith," however, was written directly for the three weeks we spent in chapter 11 during the month of July. Most of the songs for the album had been written at this point, so this was a challenge for me to work quickly yet effectively in crafting a song that would really stand out musically and be challenging and edifying in our worship time. The unconventional meter of this song helped that effort greatly, as did the opportunity to write ten different verses to this song, depending on which heroes of faith we were discussing that week.

Deciding not to record all ten verses for the album was a difficult decision for me. For one, I struggled to find a balance between my "favorite" verses and the verses that would best convey the idea of the passage. Additionally, finding verses that just made sense together without the full picture was hard. Nevertheless, I do think that the resulting track is the best depiction of this journey, introducing this chapter to those who didn't walk with us through it and reminding those who did of the bigger picture.

The concluding bridge that comes from the first part of Hebrews 12 is really the most important part of the song and the passage. This entire album, if you haven't figured out by now, is about Jesus; but, there's something about the first two verses of chapter 12 that really bring everything together. It's a sort of battle cry for believers, to take all of these truths to heart from the previous chapters and turn our eyes to Jesus and run to Him.

Fun fact:

Producing involves many things, but part of it is the give-and-take of suggestions and ideas meant to make the song sound the best it can. One example: after we had gotten everything recorded, Paul had the idea of putting orchestral bells at the end of the bridge. It ended up being a fantastic idea that really brought a vibrant, hopeful sound to the end of the song.

As We Proclaim

I'm sure that I'll change my mind over time, so I probably shouldn't even take the effort to say this...but this has got to be my favorite song on the album. I wrote it a few months before we ever got to this passage in chapter 12, but I was so excited for this one, I made sure I remembered to share it on the day we studied that section. In looking ahead at the rest of Hebrews, I came across this section and was blown away by the beauty and the gravity in the writing. After all, it ends with the author calling us to worship as we receive the Kingdom, His church, which cannot be shaken.

In fact, I was so overcome after studying the passage that I couldn't even write a song. I remember picking up my guitar and hearing symphonies in my head that weren't worth the simple chords I could pluck out. So I set the guitar down and did something I don't often do: I just wrote some poetry. I wrote several stanzas in response to the passage and then stopped. A few weeks later, I went back to those lines and just sang through them. If you could hear my recording from June 16th, you'd hear that the song didn't change too much from that original take. It didn't really seem to need it. Though it has a somewhat unconventional structure, the words and the music just seem to flow. There are times when it is necessary to work articulately and laboriously in songwriting, but there are also times when you just need to respond to something and sing.

Fun fact:

The little melody during the instrumental sections is composed of two sounds: the harmonics from a dulcimer and the same notes played lower on a guitar.

Also, to make the "Thank You, Father" section sound congregational, Paul, Bethany, and I recorded us singing it several times over in different voices, high and low. On its own, it sounds kind of weird, but when you add it in low with the instruments, it sounds just like a crowd singing along.

With Our Lives

This song is a diamond to me on this album, not because it is so great, but because of how much work and time it felt like it took to finally see it shine. There are a few early recordings of this song, most of which are very poor. There are several reasons why this song was so difficult to write, but they all are related to one problem: I just didn't know how to end this project. I kept singing these different stanzas I'd written in different ways and it wasn't working.

As mentioned before, the end of chapter 12 dramatically concludes the whole study with a powerful call to worship based on all of these truths about Jesus, and there is great power in that conclusion; but the writer isn't done yet, just like we're not. As a Christian, it's so easy to learn about Jesus and then think that's the big accomplishment. Like James says, "Even the demons believe – and shudder!" We have to live it out, otherwise we haven't really learned it.

All of these songs are important to me, and I hope you'll find the truths in them important to you, but please never listen to tracks 1-8 without considering track 9: *we're meant to live out what we're tempted only to sing*. The conclusion of Hebrews doesn't necessarily introduce some staggering new truth or dramatic passage as in the previous chapter. It simply calls us to transfer this truth about who Jesus is from our heads to our lives. It was only natural, then, for me to sing the chorus from "Purify" at the end of this song, with our church singing the chorus from "Word of God" once more. This is where it all comes together: the truth of who Jesus is pushes us to live differently. These songs will not stand the test of time, they just speak of the One who made time. I pray this song especially calls us to live out the Kingdom, not just know about it.

Fun fact:

One early recording of "With Our Lives" was 9 minutes long and included me singing parts of "Purify," "Yesterday, Today, and Forever," "Word of God," and "As We Proclaim." It was getting a little out of hand. At that time, it was just called "The Life." Writing the final stanza not only helped me re-write the song in a much better way, but it also gave me a better title.

Yesterday, Today, and Forever

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Matthew 28:18-20

"Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8

Fun fact:

I wanted the album as a whole to have diversity in expressing the different qualities of Jesus, but ultimately to show how Jesus is the one thread. That's why the chord progression in this short track is the same as the beginning of "Word of God." It's also in the same key. The keys of "Rest" and "With Our Lives" also match...