

Chris McClarney: God Is Our Defender



When as a boy you spend your formative years moving every couple of years to a new place and to a new church, while watching your Baptist preacher-father burning out in the ministry, seeds are planted in your heart.

For Chris McClarney those seeds—full of the potential for disillusionment and doubt—grew instead a garden of gracious gifts: the desire to serve others; eyes to see the deeper lessons in the hard knocks of life; a fundamental belief in the goodness and faithfulness of God; and the words to bring those realities together in song.

Now, with the release of *Defender*, McClarney delivers one of the most soulful modern-worship collections in recent years—a triumphant proclamation that God’s sleeves are rolled up and He’s working it all out for our good—even if we can’t see it.

“That whole Job story is often misunderstood,” McClarney says, just a few short days after flood waters ravaged thousands of homes in Nashville, Tenn. “God didn’t do bad things to Job. All the horrible things—floods, Katrina, earthquakes, economic fallout, tough times—God has not forgotten us. He’s not mad at us. He’s got great plans for us. His love and grace are endless.”

And who could possibly deliver such a truth as convincingly as one ordinary guy who has experienced it.

Picture McClarney, a young husband and father of two little girls, tucked away in a tiny church office, preparing for worship at a small, but growing congregation. He’s wandering through the book of Romans, concerned about a friend who is going through a rough time. By Wednesday night, while leading worship, he finds himself singing Romans 8:28: “All things work together for my good / You make all things new.”

“I sang it for a really long time,” McClarney says of the song that would eventually become “Your Love Never Fails.”

“Something was right about it; it felt like everybody there needed to sing it, to

feel it ... so it stuck." Months went by, and McClarney wrote a few verses and rehearsed it with his church band.

Like many songwriters, McClarney believed God wanted him to record some of his songs. "I thought maybe that was just my own voice in my head," he said. "So I told God: 'If this is from You, You'll provide the money. I'm not going into debt.'"

"A couple days later, a guy e-mails me, saying: 'I'm supposed to give you money. What do you need it for?'"

Within a few days, a very large check arrived. Meanwhile, the sound tech at the church bootlegged the rehearsal recording of "Your Love Never Fails." It wound up on MySpace, and the Jesus Culture recorded it and it went around the world.

Within a matter of months, "Your Love Never Fails" landed in the Top 100 on iTunes' Christian chart. Then the CD *Introducing Chris McClarney* headed into production, and McClarney signed with iconic U.K. worship label, Kingsway Music. Just like that, the impossible became reality.

And so, with 15 years of worship leading under his belt, 30-year old McClarney's insightful way with words and his authentic, bluesy voice began achieving a certain recognition. Not that recognition was ever the point. "God's either in it or not, and there's nothing you can do about it. ... I can't help but think of the story of David," McClarney says. "God anoints him to be king, but he doesn't do king things or go to king school. David goes back to doing what he's always done, tending sheep."

McClarney recently was named a Top 10 Artist to Watch in 2010 by . His first full-length CD, *Defender*, is packed with songs inspired by real life among the sheep, the lessons learned and the truth of Scripture.

"Your Love Never Fails" continues to impact people worldwide with its powerful message of God's unwavering faithfulness. "Many of us are currently facing an immediate, dire need for God to come through in a big way," McClarney says. "The truth: God has not forgotten you, He is closer than you could ever imagine, He is still the same today as yesterday, and His ultimate goal is that you might have life, and life abundantly."

"Defender" the title track, was inspired by a difficult "he-said-she-said" situation

that sent McClarney back to the Bible looking for answers. He landed in the story of Jehosophat. "He's surrounded in battle," he says, "and he puts the singers at the front of the army, the marching band—of all people—which would've been completely ridiculous in real life, but God wanted it that way. And God fought that battle for them. He was their defender, just as He is ours."

"The song says, 'We don't know what to do, but our eyes are fixed on You.' There's just something about saying 'God is our defense.' When we say, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are saved,' it takes a lot of pressure off. We need to say it, to proclaim the truth of who God is, not just because we need to hear it, but because times are tough and because God's promises are real."

As McClarney has watched God do impossible things in his own life, he has learned to stay on his knees, relying on the promises of God and focused on what matters most. "Sure, there is this part of me that wants to be a rock star," he says. "I would never do anything to push that. I've been real hands off, surrounded myself with people who remind me that I'm a regular guy. There's nothing special about me. ... It is what it is. There's nothing more important to me than following God and being a husband and a dad. If anything ever interfered with that, I'd lay it down. What's gonna matter is that my two little girls know they're loved."

"When it's all said and done, I hope I'm like Mary Magdalene who 'wastes it all,' who gives every precious gift over to God."

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