

Declare the Blessing

Cody Carnes says he will always remember March 13, 2020. It's the day his album, *Run to the Father*, debuted in stores and streaming services. It's also the day U.S. President Donald Trump declared a national emergency over the coronavirus outbreak.

With everyone essentially quarantined indoors, Carnes says he's not sure whether it's the best or worst time to release an album. He can't tour in support of it, but then again, many people are stuck at home, killing time listening to music on Spotify and Apple Music. In either case, Carnes believes his album's release overlapping with the pandemic was no coincidence—God knew what He was doing.

"So many people are being drawn to the hope of Jesus in this time," Carnes says. "I've gotten tagged in so many posts saying, 'I haven't been in church in 20 years. I haven't listened to worship music in 20 years,' or those kinds of things: 'I'm not even a believer, but I love this song.' So I think it's been really special to release an album [now]. ... This is the time to release something into the earth that is declaring the hope of Jesus and declaring the promises of God."

Carnes says he wrote the album based on a series of encounters he had with God through the Holy Spirit, and he hopes these songs will lead others into Spirit-filled encounters of their own. He talked to *Charisma* about the stories that shaped this album, his new single with Elevation Worship and wife, Kari Jobe, and how God can use this pandemic season for His glory.

Divine Encounters

Carnes says the creative process behind *Run to the Father* began while writing the song, "Nothing Else," about 18 months ago. At the time, he remembers being frustrated by failing to

receive things he had been praying for and desiring—good things that he felt God had placed in his heart. He was wrestling with these unanswered prayers when he sat down to write with friends.

“We started on the chorus ... and I thought, *Oh, this is an amazing, beautiful song about being in the presence of God*,” Carnes says. “Then I remember having this moment where this light bulb went off really in my spirit, and the line came out of me: ‘I’m not here for blessings. Jesus, You don’t owe me anything.’ And I just broke down crying. It was like that moment of songwriting penned something that I needed to say personally to God, and ... I feel like I got set free in that moment.”

He says the encounter forced him to realize that his requests were not wrong, but his heart was.

“He tells us to bring all of those requests to him—nothing is too big for him—so none of that is wrong to do,” Carnes says. “But what I realized is that the posture of my heart is where I had gotten off course, because I was valuing those things over Jesus. I was valuing those things over being in His presence.”

Carnes says he is reminded of that powerful message every time he performs the song live.

“I’ve been a different person since writing that song,” Carnes says. “Every time I sing it, I still cry. I still have moments with it. It’s like this almost-daily renewal I have to go through of completely just resetting my heart on the heart of God. So every time I sing it, I feel like I do that. I love getting to lead that song and watch other people have a similar encounter.”

He says that initial encounter formed the catalyst for many more encounters over the next 18 months, many of which inspired other songs on *Run to the Father*. He says a mentor

told him years ago that worship songs should be written out of encounters with God, because that locks those encounters into song.

“I wanted to portray what that moment in the room writing it—that encounter with God—was like, and keep the moment as pure and authentic to that feeling as possible,” Carnes says. “... So I write about God as a Father and just how good of a Father He is, which is what the title track is about. There’s a moment of repentance on this, ‘With Nothing Else.’ There’s this prophetic heart-cry of what I feel like the church is stepping into with ‘Let the Light In’ and people coming awake to the goodness of Jesus. There’s all these different themes, but the consistency is that they all came out of these encounters with God over the last 18 months of my life.”

The Blessing

Though Carnes didn’t know these songs would be received by the church during a season of crisis, he says that with hindsight, he can see God’s hand at work in the process. Though it’s not on *Run to the Father*, his new single “The Blessing,” recorded with Kari Jobe and Elevation Worship, exemplifies God’s perfect timing.

Carnes and Jobe were scheduled to lead worship together at Elevation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, during the last weekend in February. They decided to arrive a couple days early to write some new music with Pastors Steven Furtick and Chris Brown. Carnes says they spent an entire day writing a different song before Furtick started riffing and creating the basis of a new song, based on the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6.

“We paused recording the other song and said, ‘What’s this? Let’s jump on this. This feels like something like God’s trying to speak to us with this,’” Carnes says. “... The song was written in a matter of a couple hours at that point. It

just really felt like it dropped in the room.”

The song’s lyrics were fully inspired by Scripture, fusing the blessing from Numbers 6 with the promises of God throughout Scripture. Though most songs are usually demoed and reviewed for a few weeks after being written, Jobe and Carnes decided to perform it live that weekend, since they were in town.

“After leading it at all three services at Elevation, we thought, *Man, this is really special*, because we watched people become so impacted by it in the room,” Carnes says. “We were getting all these texts and messages from all over the world of people streaming it and watching it. And so that led us to, ‘Hey, I feel like God’s saying we need to release this as soon as possible.’ We all felt this unction from God that we needed to put it out as soon as possible. So we wrote it on Thursday, we led it in church on Sunday and we released it [on YouTube] on Friday.”

The live Elevation performance has been on YouTube for less than a month and recently passed 6 million views at the time of publication. The recorded single on Spotify likewise amassed 1 million listens after one week. In hindsight, Carnes believes God knew the church needed this song for this season—and knew they wouldn’t have the ability to record it if they didn’t act immediately.

“I know just for Kari and I and our kids, this is a song that we’re clinging to in the midst of fear,” Carnes says. “We’re declaring the promises of God and the blessing of God over our family. I’ve been declaring Passover over our house—like the blood of Jesus over our doorposts—that this virus and this devastation would just pass over us, that we’re covered by the blood of Jesus and clinging to those things. This feels like the perfect song at the perfect time in a crazy way. And it makes sense now why we felt as soon as we recorded it at church that we needed to release it as soon as possible, because God knew this is the time for the song.”

Carnes believes that despite the grim news, God can use this season for His glory and to bring people into relationship with Him.

“I feel like there’s going to be this massive awakening in the church—and even outside of the church of people coming to Jesus,” Carnes says. “Because if I think about our culture, over the last five years—if not more—it feels like we’ve been on this like freight train locomotive going downhill with no chance of stopping, and everything is just getting faster and you have to keep up and you have to stay engaged on social media and, if you don’t do that, you feel like you’ll get left behind. There’s no time to rest and no time to stop. And this whole quarantine brought about this massive halt to everyone. And I see God using it to reset things.” {eo2}

Taylor Berglund *is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and the host of several shows on the Charisma Podcast Network.*