

Greg Laurie: What You Didn't Know About Pop Icon Diva Donna Summer and Her Journey of Faith

Disco diva Donna Summer, who launched her Grammy Award-winning career with the lascivious "Love to Love You Baby" in 1975, was raised in a devout Christian home. Her father was the pastor of a church. Summer said God first spoke to her when she was 10 years old.

She had just finished singing a solo in the choir when she heard an inner voice. "It sort of knocked everybody out of the pews. When I looked up through my tears, everyone in the whole church's eyes were downcast and they were crying, and I thought, 'Oh my God.' I looked at my dad and he was crying," she recalled in the final years of her life. "It was that, on that first time I ever sang, that I heard God speak to me, and He said to me that I was gonna be famous, and that I was not to misuse the power that He was giving me."

"Famous" doesn't even begin to describe Summer's stratospheric rise to popularity. Her sensual mezzo-soprano voice, slew of disco hits and unparalleled ability to get people on the dance floor made her an icon. But with fame came temptation, aggravation and insecurity.

Summer developed a very heavy dependence on antidepressants and sleeping pills because of the demands of her white-hot career. She also became embroiled in a \$10 million lawsuit with Casablanca Records owner Neil Bogart. Bogart countersued for even more money, citing breach of contract. Summer was a bundle of nerves and breaking down from the inside. She developed stomach ulcers and would barely touch her food. She

had occasional thoughts of suicide despite appearing to the world that she was on top.

Summer returned to the Lord and her roots of faith in 1979 after a period of "spiritual darkness and confusion." She recommitted her life to Christ and yielded to God's will. Instantly, she experienced a sense of elation and relief.

"I was finally filled by God's Holy Spirit and gloriously born again," she later reflected.

The change in Summer was almost instant. She began attending a weekly Bible study and stopped performing "Love to Love You Baby" and "Bad Girls" at the peak of her fame. She also made a point of announcing that her next album (*The Wanderer*) was going to be "spiritually inspired, but not overtly gospel."

As Summer explained, "I never stopped being a Christian. Being born-again is an affirmation that the person is going to make a personal effort to walk closer to God and bring Him into one's life and start following His way. There are parts in your life where you can look back and laugh: 'I can't believe I did that; how could I have said that; where's my head at?' I'm sad that all the running I did was only running; it didn't get me anywhere. The spirit of rebellion in myself and in my songs would not let me rest. But I've chosen to stay in the world's eye, to give a positive image. It's a very spiritual and a very helpful place to be. I love it."

The wanderer had come home.

I spoke at a Bible study some years ago in Beverly Hills where Donna was present. Her face was beaming, and I could see she had a genuine faith in Christ. Not long after that, I was rallying people for a huge Harvest Crusade at Dodger Stadium. I was trying to make my way over to Donna afterward to have a conversation with her, but another person kept bending my ear and I could not break free. Donna left shortly thereafter, and I always regretted not being able to speak with her.

In what would be her final album, *Crayons* (2008), Donna sang passionately about her faith in the song “Bring Down the Reign.” She went to be with the Lord in 2012.

Other rockers of faith found the same hope Donna had—performers like Lou Gramm of Foreigner; the Byrds’ lead singer, Roger McGuinn; the lead singer of Buffalo Springfield, Richie Furay; and Kerry Livgren of Kansas, who shared with fans, “May you all find the miracles in your own lives. Look for them, for they are surely there, and especially the greatest miracle of all – God’s love and provision for mankind.”

These ’70s icons all learned the same lesson in the end, but they came to the answer through vastly different journeys. Some of them lost their stardom; some almost lost their lives, wives or families; while others were fortunate enough to go down smoother roads. But in the end, they all realized that, through repentance and humility, God had a special song for them, if they were willing to listen.

At some point in that decadent decade, they were all dazed and confused. And now they are all redeemed. I write about this and much more in my new book, *Lennon, Dylan, Alice, and Jesus*.

The takeaway of this book: No one is beyond the reach of God.
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