

Hope in a Storm

Micah Tyler was supposed to be touring right now, not quarantined at home while his second studio album, *New Today*, releases. But he says God's plans rarely look like ours.

"I was supposed to be wrapping up a tour with 10th Avenue North last week," Tyler says. "It was supposed to be a six-week tour, and we were [a couple of] weekends in. We were in Washington State, where three of the first counties in the entire US were shut down. That was at the forefront of people saying, 'No gatherings bigger than 200 people.' All of a sudden, our tour ended, and I ended up coming home."

The rapidly changing circumstances forced Tyler and his team to reconsider whether now was the best time to release an album.

"What we came up with is, yes, it's weird to be releasing an album in the middle of all this stuff," Tyler says. "But at the same time, I spent the last three years making an album that my hope is then to point people towards the hope of Jesus. So what better time to release music and release these songs than in the middle of a time where people are really searching for that hope right now?"

Tyler describes the album as a "journal" of sorts for the last three years, during which time his home was ravaged by a hurricane and two different family members were diagnosed with cancer. He says those trials taught him the importance of leaning on God in hard seasons and finding his ultimate hope in Christ, not his circumstances. He believes it's a timely message that he hopes will comfort many believers currently facing trials of their own, courtesy of the global pandemic.

"People are really needing that reminder that we don't suffer like people who have no hope—that we have this hope in Jesus and that He is worth being reminded of during these crazy

times right now,” he says. “So we’re just praying the Lord uses it in this circumstance. ... The Lord knows what hearts need and where this needs to go. So we are hoping that people can gather around their living rooms and take some time to be reminded that God loves them.”

Staying Honest

Tyler, who became a youth pastor out of college, first learned how to play guitar and started performing music at 20 in order to lead worship at his church youth group.

“I had spent the pizza budget on this guitar, [so I] learned how to play a few songs and lead worship, and it turned into me writing some songs to go along with my sermon,” Tyler says. “... Then it turned into me leading worship for friends of mine who wanted me to come and do something for their church. I had no idea that, at 27, God was going to call me to do this full-time. That did not come along with a tour bus or a record label or a record deal. It was just the Lord calling [my family] to be faithful. So we ended up stepping out and selling over half of what we owned. We bought a single-wide mobile home trailer that we just moved out of a couple of months ago ... and I was doing odd jobs—I was a substitute teacher at an elementary school, and I drove a sausage delivery truck.”

In fall 2015, Tyler signed to Fair Trade Services, and his first album—*Different*—released Oct. 20, 2017. His singles “Never Been a Moment,” “Different” and “Even Then” reached the Top 10 of Billboard’s Hot Christian Songs chart.

“‘Different,’ the title track from the last album, was a song that I thought was always going to live in my prayer closet—like it was always going to live in my chest to be sung for myself,” Tyler says. “I didn’t know that it would make its way into hospital rooms, into prisons, into cars on their way to divorce court.”

Tyler says he believes the most important thing as a Christian musician is to be honest. To that end, he adheres to two principles in songwriting.

“No. 1, I always try to line up everything that I do with God’s Word,” Tyler says. “I don’t want to present a single song that doesn’t line up with who God says He is and what Scripture proves He is. I want to make songs that are just saturated and dripping with the truth of God’s promises and who He is. That’s rule No. 1. Rule No. 2 is I want to write songs from my vantage point. I’ve only been given my eyes, my heart and my brain to be able to communicate from.”

Tyler says he hears from fans that his authenticity is what drew them to his music—and in turn, that encourages him to keep making more music.

“A lot of the messages that I get from people—if they hear my songs on the radio or find one on a Spotify playlist or whatever—are not ‘Hey, man, I was having a great day, I heard your song, and I’m still having a great day. Thanks so much,’” Tyler says. “It’s typically a lot more like, ‘I was having a hard time, and I heard your song, and it somehow was able to help me express the things that I’m feeling right now.’ I’m trying to make something where a lot of people can feel a lot of different things. And at the end of the day, it always points back that His mercies are new today, that there’s hope for us in the middle of all this, and that God still loves us, no matter what the world around us looks like.”

He says those comments from fans only encourage him to keep producing authentic music.

“Fear and hurt try to isolate us to make us feel like we’re the only ones feeling those things,” Tyler says. “But as I’ve been able to speak about the hurts and the fears that we face and the things that God is teaching us, it’s been neat to find out there are other people who feel the same way that I do.

People get to hear these songs and realize that they're not [alone]."

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Tyler says *New Today* was inspired and shaped by "one of the toughest seasons" of his life, which took place in summer and fall 2017—around the same time his first album debuted and he was experiencing professional success.

"At the end of that summer, my grandmother was diagnosed with blood cancer," Tyler says. "We thought *OK, that's a big thing*, but they gave us some good news on that. It looked like they had caught things early, and they could make some things happen. So we felt pretty confident in that.

"Then, just a few weeks after that, we found out Hurricane Harvey was bearing down on our little area. I was actually on a bus with Big Daddy Weave and We Are Messengers when I got the news. My wife called me and said, 'Oh my gosh, it's gonna hit us tonight.' I left that tour and had to take multiple flights and drive four hours to be able to get back to my house before the storm came. It ended up putting almost 15 inches of rain on my house in just a few days. We had to replace the wall and the floors of four rooms because of the damage from that storm. Then we thought, *Well, this is a lot going on right now. But this is the biggest thing that we're going to face.*

"Just a few weeks after that, we found out that my younger brother, Daniel, was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. This all happened within the course of just a few months. At that point, I was asking God mostly, 'What is happening right now? What are we supposed to do? We're trying our best to be faithful. We're trying to love the people in front of us. We're trying to be who You're calling us to be, and it just feels like we are just walking in the middle of so much hurt.'"

That feeling may be familiar to many readers currently dealing with trials of their own—whether that’s loss of health, vocation or routine. But Tyler says he is proof that there is hope on the other side of tragedy—and that God will be with you the whole way.

“I can report now, a couple of years later, that my grandmother was able to go into remission after two and a half years,” Tyler says. “That’s a big deal. The little house that we had? We had the floors and the walls replaced, and we got those fixed back up. It took us about a year to get it all done, but that’s put back together. And then my brother Daniel got to ring the bell as a cancer survivor last March. ... When we go through tough things, we think about the hurt that we’re feeling. But what we don’t realize is that as God walks us through those things, He starts to ingrain this trust in us. He ingrains this belief that He is who He says He is. He is not just a promise maker, but He is a promise keeper.”

The first single off *New Today*, “Amen,” praises God’s faithfulness through the storms of life, with a chorus that declares: “Every day of my life, I want the world to see/ I can’t get over what You’ve done for me.” Tyler says the album now functions as a time capsule—for himself and for anyone who follows him—of the emotions of walking through a difficult season but coming out the other side victorious in Christ.

He says listening to the album for the first time from front to back was “such an emotional thing for me, because it felt like I was reading my journal. I could point back to lines in songs and tell you the moment that God made that true in my bones—that He put that thing inside of me and made it true to me and to my family.”

Tyler hopes that anyone who listens to *New Today* is able to see hope, even in their present situation.

“In the midst of hard situations, it doesn’t mean that God

doesn't love us," Tyler says. "It means He is walking alongside of us through these tough times. Even in the middle of a global pandemic, we have a God who cares for us personally, who holds the whole world in His hands. It does not dismay or change His plans for us: plans to make us prosper and give us a hope and a future and not to grow weary. At the end of the day, I pray that Jesus is lifted up so that He can draw men to Himself. That's what it talks about in the gospel. So that's always the hope with the music we make, and a global pandemic is not going to change that." {eo}

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