

Matthew West Describes His 'Haunting' Conversation With Billy Graham

When it came time to record his latest record, Dove Award-winning singer-songwriter Matthew West ("Grace Wins," "Hello My Name Is") found two words beating around in his heart. The phrase "all in" was introduced in discussions with a friend that spilled over into his next musical chapter. Described as his "most personal work to date," the album, which releases Sept. 22, speaks on themes of faith, family and hope in songs such as "The Beautiful Things We Miss," "Never Ever Give Up" and the title track.

During a recent interview, West explained the concept behind the new record, an unforgettable visit with Dr. Billy Graham, balancing his career and family and co-writing with the music artist who inspired him along the way.

Can you describe how you came to the inspiration for the album title 'All In'?

I think it's kind of been a common theme in my personal life lately, just those two words. I had a friend who would choose a word that he felt like God was putting on his heart to be his theme for the year. So I started doing that for myself in years past. This year, I cheated a little bit and expanded beyond one word and I made it a two-word theme, and that theme is 'All In.' I guess it has something to do with the stage of life I'm in right now, watching my daughters rapidly grow up and just seeing life go so fast before my eyes. I'm at this point where I want to stop and take some inventory and really kind of ask some of the tough questions in my life, like 'Am I going all in in every aspect of my life or are there any areas where I'm phoning it in?' I just kind of set out with that,

something that felt like a big idea in those few little words. It was something I felt would resonate with the audience that's out there listening to my music.

I feel like a lot of times, the reason why people might resonate with my music is because they're walking through some of the same things I'm writing about. *All In* is a song-by-song journey of looking at the areas of our lives where we have a choice ... "Am I going to play it safe and maybe let the fear of 'what if' win, or am I going to go all in and reach the end of my life with no regrets?" I think that's kind of the haunting thought in my life right now. If my life were to end today, would I have any regrets and if so, what would they be? If the answer to that is "Yes, I would have some regrets," then guess what? My life is not ending today, Lord willing, so this means I still have the chance to change some things that need to be changed in my life.

You spoke about regrets, and I've read where you had a conversation with Billy Graham and asked him if he had any regrets. What did he say?

That was a moment I'll not soon forget. Everybody talks about having a bucket list, and then there are things that are not on your bucket list because you don't think they would ever happen. Having a time to sit down and speak with Rev. Billy Graham was something I never even had on my bucket list, but his grandson, Will Graham, took me on a surprise day trip. We drove to visit Billy at his home and sat in his kitchen for about an hour and had a wonderful conversation. I thought, *If I have a chance to ask him a few questions, why would I not get some wisdom from this great man of God?*

I asked him, "Do you have any regrets?" He said that he regretted that he had to spend so much time away from his family and his children. Boy, there was something that really resonated and was haunting, got me thinking a lot. It hit me on two levels—it made me feel better that even Billy Graham

has regrets. In other words, we're all human. We all have things we would do over if we could. I also think he was giving me that information, advising. That's a big theme of this record. Maybe going "All In" is not always the big things that capture headlines. Sometimes it's in the little ways. I wrote some songs about what it means to go all in within the four walls of my own home.

You also had a 'full-circle' moment with Steven Curtis Chapman on this record.

Yes, I had the chance to write with Steven Curtis Chapman, who heavily influenced me in my development. I wound up digging into my own story, so there's one song that's called "The Sound of a Life Changing" that literally talks about me as a college student going to see Steven Curtis Chapman in concert and how that was a real important moment in my life. My life really changed there, because I knew God put me on this earth to make music just like Steven Curtis does. So I called Steven and invited him to come to this cabin where I was writing songs; this cabin built by country singer Alan Jackson, which was so cool. He came out, and we wrote that song together and finished it. Here I was, a college kid at this guy's concerts and now all these years later, he considers me a peer and we're writing that song together. That was a pretty neat moment.

You recently released a book, now a new album and have a family at home. How are you able to balance it all?

That's a good question. I think I'm still trying to figure out how to balance it all. Sometimes I'm guilty of having too many ideas and not really thinking about how I'm going to squeeze it all in first, so I let the ideas lead the way and then I live my life as if there's 13 months in a year and somehow more than 24 hours in a day. Somehow it all gets done, and these are exciting times, to be able to be given a creative voice in something that I love to do is something I'm really

grateful for more than ever.

I was listening to a podcast this morning, and a very successful businessman was saying “‘My work isn’t work because it’s a mission. I don’t feel like I work at all.” That’s kinda how I feel about my music. Sure, I get exhausted sometimes but writing books, making music and traveling around the country singing for people, boy, I sure do love doing it. If I didn’t love it, it would feel like more of a sacrifice. But since I love what I’m doing and I feel like there’s a purpose to it; it fuels me more than it drains me.

All In by Matthew West releases Sept. 22 through Sparrow Records (Capitol Christian Music Group).

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