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David Crowder and his band stay true to their first love in Waco

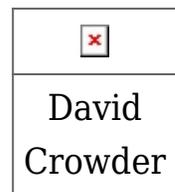
By Leann Callaway

Special to the Standard

WACO-The son of an insurance broker, David Crowder planned to run the family business after graduation from Baylor University.

Instead, he has become one of the most sought-after worship band leaders in the nation and a popular recording artist.

The David Crowder Band's new release, "Illuminate," currently ranks No. 1 on the SoundScan Christian retail chart, selling 13,935 units in its first week on the market. This release more than doubled a record-breaking debut of the band's freshman project, "Can You Hear Us?"



Even in the unique world of Christian music, it's safe to say there's no one quite like Crowder, who lives in Waco with his wife, Toni. In fact, he's been called "the Pied Piper of Christian music."

The Texarkana native says his desire to connect people to God and his passion for college ministry began while attending Baylor as a music major. However, becoming a worship leader and recording artist came as a surprise even to him.

While at Baylor, he was troubled by a campus survey that showed 8,000 of Baylor's 14,000 students said they never attended a church service while in college.

He discussed ways to reach those students with his friend Chris Seay.

"We just started talking about our peers and how there was a lack of student involvement in churches. Being in Waco, there's not a lack of churches, so that wasn't the problem. And it wasn't like, 'Oh, here's a great idea-let's start another church.'

“But we knew those people (at Baylor) because they were our friends, and we thought we could provide an environment they would feel comfortable in and wouldn't feel threatened by,” he explained.

Armed with a vision and a desire to impact their campus, Crowder and Seay founded University Baptist Church in 1996. It is an innovative congregation with a modern worship style designed for students to safely explore their questions about faith. Today, the church regularly draws 1,000 students, and Seay has moved on to establish another innovative congregation, Ecclesia Church in Houston.

But Crowder remains at University Baptist Church as worship leader.

“We've seen a great response since the beginning,” Crowder noted. “But there's still a lot of work to be done-1,000 students is still a long way from 8,000.”

When Crowder became the church's music and arts pastor, he started writing praise choruses he thought students could relate to. At the time, he didn't realize his songs, such as “You Alone” and “Our Love is Loud,” would be sung in churches across the nation.

“For me, songwriting happens when I'm not trying to write a song,” he explained. “I spend a lot of time reading and listening to music. If you pay attention to those small moments in life that maybe others aren't noticing, then you have a place to write from whenever the inspirational moment hits you.”

Among those inspired by Crowder's lyrics was Louie Giglio, who founded Passion Conferences in 1995 and Sixsteps Records in 2000.

“I met Louie through writing some songs,” Crowder said. “I had written some songs for our church, and they had gotten outside our church and were being sung by other churches. Somehow, Louie got a hold of those

songs, and they were put on a couple of the Passion CDs.”

This led to the David Crowder Band being signed to the Sixsteps label-which partners with Sparrow Records for distribution and marketing-and they began performing at Passion Conferences and worship gatherings across the country.

“Passion is uniquely collegiate, but its platform has grown to include a wide range of people,” said Crowder, who currently is participating in the nationwide Passion Experience Tour, which will be in Lubbock Oct. 8, Austin Oct. 9, Dallas Oct. 10 and Houston Oct. 11.

The David Crowder Band is committed to sharing the message of Christ through music. They also have remained dedicated to leading worship at their home church. “All the guys got connected to UBC at some point while they were going to Baylor,” Crowder explained. “They just started helping lead worship on Sunday mornings. These guys that I'm with seem to connect to something that needed to go beyond our church.”

With Crowder on lead vocals and acoustic guitar, the band consists of electric guitarists Jason Solley and Jack Parker, as well as drummer Jeremy Bush, bass player Mike Dodson, and Mike Hogan on electric violin.

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“It's amazing to me how God has used these songs and to find that they are taking root other places. To be really far from home and hear people singing the words to these songs that are so personal and meaningful to a small group of folks in Waco is just incredible.”