

Contemporary Christian musician sees hymns as legacy for next generation

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Contemporary Christian musician Bart Millard recorded his first solo album of hymns as a tribute to a past generation. He sees his latest collection of gospel songs as a gift to the next generation.

"The first one grew out of a promise I made to my grandmother just before she passed away. She wanted me to record an album of hymns," said Millard, lead singer of MercyMe, who released *Hymned* in 2005. "My grandfather was a Baptist pastor, and I grew up on these songs."

Grandfather Lloyd Lindsey served as pastor of Ardis Heights Baptist Church in Greenville throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Millard recalled old gospel songs and hymns as important influences in his faith development.

Hymned Again is
Bart Millard's
second compilation
of hymns.

So, it meant a lot to Millard when he recognized the power of those songs to capture the attention of his own young children.

"I heard my kids in the backseat singing 'The Old Rugged Cross,'" he said. "Unfortunately, a lot of kids aren't exposed to hymns like that anymore."

Millard's decision to record a second collection of gospel standards—*Hymned Again*—developed from that incident.

"The selfish reason I did it is because I love these songs. The bigger reason is that they are an important part of our heritage, and they shouldn't be allowed to fade into nothing," he said.

Stylistically, the arrangements on *Hymned Again* include everything from Dixieland jazz and blues to country—a far cry from the traditional piano and organ Millard heard in church as a child in Northeast Texas, but with the same familiar tunes and lyrics.

"It's the same message that was enough to sustain the generation before us," he said. But with new instrumentation, he hopes the songs will "take on new life."

In addition to standards such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" and "Brethren We Have Met to Worship," the new album includes one original composition by Millard—"Jesus Cares for Me"—with guest vocals by country recording artist Vince Gill.



Bart Millard (left), lead singer of MercyMe, has recorded his second solo album of hymns and traditional gospel songs, *Hymned Again*, with the help of (left to right) engineer Chris Hooper, producer Brown Bannister and country recording artist Vince Gill. Gill appears as a guest artist on one song, "Jesus Cares for Me," written by Millard.

PHOTO/Brody Harper

"It's a new song, but it's one that sounds like it could have been written 40, 50 or 60 years ago," so it fit well into the collection of traditional gospel songs, Millard said. "And I feel like Vince Gill really knocked it out of the

park."

MercyMe had performed with Gill's wife, Christian singer Amy Grant. So, Millard first approached her to ask if she could persuade Gill to record a song for his new CD.

"She said, 'You'll have to call him yourself,'" Millard recalled. "I was kind of star-struck. So, I called when I thought he wouldn't be there and left a message on his voice mail."

While the hymns and gospel songs on Millard's two solo albums represent a big departure from the contemporary songs MercyMe typically performs, he noted the band has used one selection from *Hymned Again*—"I Stand Amazed"—in worship settings.

And Millard hopes that by recording a variety of hymns, a new generation of church worship leaders will be inspired to draw from the vast reservoir of hymns.

"I would make 10 more albums like this if I could," he said.