

NFL's Ben Utecht playing for an audience of One

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CINCINNATI—By successfully balancing dual roles as a Christian musician and NFL player, Cincinnati Bengals' tight-end Ben Utecht desires to spread the gospel by the example he sets on and off the field.

Whether he is on the gridiron in front of thousands of cheering fans or performing concerts, Utecht says his priority is to “play for an audience of One.”

In 2007, Utecht helped lead the Indianapolis Colts to victory over the Chicago Bears in Super Bowl XLI. In 2008, he became a free agent and signed with the Bengals.

“My primary identity is as a Christian, not a football player or musician,” Utecht said.

Ben Utecht with his guitar.

“In music and sports, the things people are doing become who they are. When people come to hear my testimony as a professional athlete, or see me as a musician, it is who I am as a believer in Christ that I want people to see.”

The son of a pastor, Utecht grew up singing songs in church but said he didn't pursue music in college because of scheduling conflicts with athletics.

“Before my dad became a pastor, he was a music major in college. I grew up in a really musical family and also a very athletic family. That's really where the two passions came from,” he said.

“Most pastor’s kids get stereotyped one of two ways—you’re either going to follow in the faithful footsteps or you’re going to be the rebel. I was very fortunate that I saw the love of Christ in my parents’ relationship and became a Christian at a young age.”

Faith, family, football and music became central to Utecht early in life.

“It’s something that I took into college, and it’s really something that the Lord is continuing to bless today,” he said.

After being signed by the Indianapolis Colts, Utecht was asked to sing at several events in the area—which led him to pray about more opportunities.

“I started to pray, ‘Lord, if music is an avenue that you would like me to go into, I pray that you would open doors and bring people into my life.’ That was a huge part of the prayer—that people would come into my life to mentor, encourage and motivate me to take that step,” he said.

Within a couple of years, Utecht developed a friendship with Christian musicians Bill and Gloria Gaither, Sandi Patty and Jeremy Camp. “They’ve opened so many doors for me,” he said.

This spring, Utecht [released his debut album](#). He wrote the lyrics and music for the majority of the album, and he also collaborated with songwriting friends.

“My inspiration for songs comes from life experiences and my testimony—going through different times of joy, trials and suffering,” Utecht explained.

“I want to be vulnerable in songwriting so people can see mistakes I’ve made, and they can learn from those mistakes and take wisdom from those experiences.

“I want to be very open with my feelings and my heart, and that’s kind of

what I pour into my music. By sharing these experiences in songs, my desire is for people to see how Christ shines through and how he is stronger than any obstacle or situation.

“When I get a chance to perform concerts, it’s with the sole purpose and desire of drawing people closer to God. That is really exciting to me and fills me with emotions that I don’t get anywhere else. It’s so exciting for me to be on stage and really trying to create an environment where people can experience the heart of Jesus.

“Whether I’m on stage or on the field, my focus remains on playing for God and always remembering that his purpose is greater.

“I want to be a vessel that the Lord can use to impact hearts and bring people closer to him.”