

# New hymnal helps engage Scripture word for word

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Twelve years ago, Randall Goodgame’s family was in the thick of homeschooling. His wife Amy struggled to help the kids memorize their weekly Scripture verses. Goodgame decided to help in a way that came naturally to him—writing songs.

It worked.

“It worked so well that ... within a few weeks I realized, well, this seems important,” Goodgame said in a recent interview with Baptist Press.



Songwriter Randall Goodgame introduced his ‘Scripture Hymnal’ in front of a live audience in

October. (Photo courtesy  
Turning Point Media via BP)

Songwriter Randall Goodgame introduced his [\*Scripture Hymnal\*](#) in front of a live audience in October. “There’s something about music that allows us to experience something more than just the information,” he said.

What started as a project to help his kids soon turned into a new phase of his ministry as a music artist. Now, Goodgame’s Scripture songs fill a new hymnal—aptly titled *Scripture Hymnal*—which Goodgame hopes will help churchgoers internalize God’s word.

“Music helps people remember things,” Goodgame writes in the hymnal’s introduction. “And music memories conjure much more than just information. ... In the time it takes to hear a melody, a whole world can flood our consciousness.”

Music involves more than just the intellect, he told BP, which makes it an effective teacher.

“God gave us these emotions, and we are spiritual people,” he said. “We are these eternal creatures trapped in these glorious gifts that we call bodies that were made in the image of the creator. And there’s something about music that allows us to experience something more than just the information.”

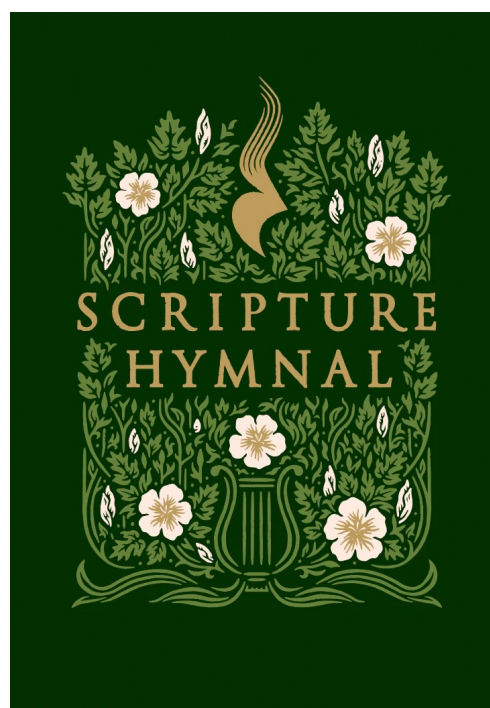
And even more than that, we are called to sing together.

“First and foremost, [singing is] an act of obedience,” Goodgame said. “The Lord only requires us to do things that are good for us. He sanctioned it. We know that means it’s good for us. ... There’s something so powerful about proclaiming the truth of what’s real and what we depend on about this God that we serve and trust—proclaiming it together through song.”

## A labor of love

The hymnal opens with “In the Beginning,” based on Genesis 1:1. Hymn No. 55, “Unless You Change,” is based on Matthew 18:3-5. “Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak”—hymn No. 95—is based on James 1:19.

There are 106 songs, all taken directly from Scripture, plus accompanying Scripture readings and indexes listing the songs by topic, musical style, Scripture passage and more.



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The team of 12 writers who collaborated on the songs committed not to

change the Scripture text in any way. They used mostly the NIV, ESV and CSB translations, choosing what they considered the most lyrical translation for a given passage.

Word-for-word rendering made the songwriting more challenging, but Goodgame had strategies for making the songs easy to learn and sing.

First, he simply immersed himself in the verses, reading them very slowly, praying and letting the passage's theme and text dictate the feel and form of the song.

He took a cue from traditional hymns for the structure of the songs.

"Old hymns were built for unmusical people to sing together," he said, adding that usually means one syllable per beat.

"I really made an effort to try to be aware of the syllables and where they fell on the beat," he said. "And then once you've constrained yourself to that, then you have to find melodies that sound appealing within that restriction. Then it's just kind of problem solving and listening and praying."

Much of his inspiration for which passages to use for songs came from his own Bible study, but Goodgame also asked friends, including several pastors, "If there were one verse that your congregation would be able to sing to each other and to the Lord, what would that one verse be?"

Goodgame premiered the hymnal in a live concert Oct. 11 in Franklin, Tenn., where the capacity crowd was able to sing along with the songs pretty much right away. The lines from the hymnal appearing on the screens helped those who could read music, but even those who couldn't were able to follow along quickly.

"The goal is you want people to feel like this is how a melody was supposed

to be written for these words,” Goodgame said.

## **What he’s called to do**

For more than a decade, Randall Goodgame has been writing songs using the Bible for lyrics.

Goodgame is no stranger to using music to instill important truths. Over the last 20 years, he’s built a kids’ and family music brand called Slugs & Bugs, releasing the first album along with singer-songwriter Andrew Peterson in 2006.

The albums are equal parts silly and serious, with songs like “God Made You” and “May the Lord Bless You and Keep You” appearing alongside ones like “Tractor Tractor” and “Chicken Wiggle.”

But the one thing they all have in common is quality music and production. It’s the kind of kids’ music that parents keep listening to on their way to work after they drop the kids off at school.

After Goodgame’s success in writing songs to help his kids memorize Scripture, he began focusing on using Scripture alone for his lyrics, and the *Slugs & Bugs Sing the Bible* series was born. *Sing the Bible Volume 1* came out in 2014. There have been four others since then.

“It’s what the Lord called me to for well over a decade,” he said. “And I think if I hadn’t had all those five *Sing the Bible* albums under my belt, I wouldn’t have been prepared to have done what I just did with the *Scripture Hymnal*. ... I’ve done it for long enough that I’ve just gotten better at it. Like you do when you do the same thing over and over.”

## **A priceless opportunity**

The *Scripture Hymnal* is not for kids, though the songs are singable enough

that kids can easily learn them. And for those who don't read music or who prefer to learn them aurally, there is a [studio recording](#) of each song online.

A QR code in the front of the hymnal takes the user to the recordings. The recordings also are being compiled into albums, the second of which released Nov. 29. There will be nine albums in all.

"Even though it was written for congregational singing, I really do hope people also see the value of just personal devotion with it," Goodgame said. "They don't have to read music; they can just go to the song through the QR code and flip to the page of the song they want to sing and sing along with the music."

Goodgame said a main inspiration for the hymnal project was learning how his *Sing the Bible* CDs helped people internalize the word of God.

"I always have heard for years and years from people, 'The Lord will bring the song that I need to my mind right when I need it.' I just hear it over and over again," he said. "To carry around God's word with you is just priceless."

Ultimately, he hopes the *Scripture Hymnal* will help the church be the church.

Singing together is proclaiming God's faithfulness "right next to people that you know are going through hard things," he said. "You are going through something hard, and you're affirming it, proclaiming it, choosing to believe or at least try to believe by singing what you know is true with a whole room of other people that are doing the same thing."

And how much more so when the words believers are singing are taken straight from Scripture.

“Every time we engage with the word, we have an opportunity to meet Jesus,” Goodgame said. “And it’s in Jesus that we are redeemed, and we are sanctified, and that dim little spark brightens, and we become lights in the world, caring less about ourselves and more about other people.

“And his kingdom grows because of the outpouring of his love through us to other people. And his word is the beginning of all of that.”