

Ricky Skaggs sees God's plan as personal and perfect

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NASHVILLE (BP)—In the fall last year, Ricky Skaggs found himself in Texas with nothing to do for a day, after a church canceled his scheduled Saturday night appearance. He remembered a friend of a friend who lived in the area—someone Skaggs wanted to meet after the man had sent words of encouragement for Skaggs via text messages to their mutual friend.

So, he made a few phone calls, and soon the country and bluegrass music star was in a stranger's home in Bertram.



Ricky Skaggs and Sharon White admire Skaggs' plaque at the 2018 Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Medallion Ceremony in Nashville, Tenn. (Photo by Terry Wyatt/Getty Images for Country Music Hall Of Fame via BP)

After a brief exchange of pleasantries, the man said: “The Lord is giving you more fame to glorify his name. This is the year that you’ll go into the

Country Music Hall of Fame.”

Skaggs wrote the man’s words down in a notebook and even recorded the conversation on his iPad.

The man made the prediction one year to the day before its fulfillment. Skaggs was inducted into the hallowed hall Oct. 21.

“You think that’s a coincidence? I don’t. God never does anything in coincidences,” he said in an interview.

A longtime member of First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., near Nashville, Skaggs believes God wants to be intimately involved in life’s details.

“The Lord likes coffee,” Skaggs said of his regular time with God. “He doesn’t mind me pouring him a cup of coffee. If we invite him in every morning, he looks forward to it. ...

“God is such a personal God. He loves the journey in our life, and he wants to walk with us, and he wants us to walk with him.”

God at work

Skaggs has seen God at work throughout his five-decade career, but never more than in the past year, when in addition to his country music recognition, he was inducted into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and the Fiddlers Hall of Fame.

“It’s amazing to see what the Lord has done,” he said. “God has been showing up and showing off.”

Born in 1954, Skaggs began playing mandolin and singing in churches and stores around his hometown of Cordell, Ky., as a young child. Once when

the legendary Bill Monroe came to town, the Father of Bluegrass Music asked “Little Ricky Skaggs” to join him on stage for a song, put his own mandolin around the youngster’s neck and a career was born.

At age 7, Skaggs earned his first paycheck performing on the popular Flatt & Scruggs TV Show. He was playing for a living while still in his teens and was a recognized master of the genre by age 21.

In the late 1970s, Skaggs took the virtuosic musicianship and homespun subject matter found in bluegrass, added some Nashville sensibilities like piano, electric guitar and drums, and took country radio by storm. During the 1980s, he had 12 No. 1 country radio hits, won four Grammy awards and was named the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year in 1985.

The 1990s and 2000s saw Skaggs start a record label, Skaggs Family Records, form his band Kentucky Thunder and return to his bluegrass roots. On his own label, he has received 11 more Grammy awards—for a total of 15—for his own recordings as well as those he produced.

These days, a concertgoer at a Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder show is as likely to hear a gospel song or a testimony as one of the artist’s many hits.

A Christian and a musician, not a Christian musician

But he’s quick to say he is not a “Christian musician.”

“My work on the road is a marketplace ministry. I feel like Paul many times,” Skaggs said. “Paul was not making Christian tents. He was a Christian making tents. I’m not a Christian musician. I’m a musician that’s a Christian. Big difference. The Lord told me a long time ago when I first

started trying to speak and go to churches, ‘You can go to churches and speak, but that’s not your calling.’”

Skaggs was baptized at Holiday Heights Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., at age 21.

“I got saved when I was 13,” Skaggs recalled. “But I really didn’t grow as a Christian.”

An offhand remark from a relative after his salvation stunted him for some time. When Skaggs was unable to describe how he felt about being saved, the family member said, “Well, you must not have got saved then, if you don’t know how you feel,” Skaggs recalled. “And that seed of doubt crept into my heart. And it wrestled me for a long time.”

For several years, Skaggs said he did not read the Scripture.

“I didn’t have a whole lot to fight with.” After struggling to read his family’s big King James Version Bible, he was given a modern translation by a friend.

“It was so easy for me to read,” he said. “I started reading that and seeing God’s promises to me.”

Soon, he wanted to recommit his life to the Lord and be baptized. And he has never forgotten the effect one remark can have on a life.

Power of words

“When somebody like that speaks a word, that word has power. We don’t realize how much power we have in our words,” he said. “The Lord says we’ll be held accountable for every idle word that we speak.”

Skaggs has more people listening to him than most, and he is careful to use

his considerable platform to encourage people and lift up his Savior. He has a few words for the church too.

“The Achilles heel of the church is unforgiveness—finding fault, judging others,” he said. “We’ve got to always stay humble. That means take the low position. We have to live a repentant life. People think they don’t have to repent. ... (The New Testament book) 1 John will tell you that you’re a liar if you say that. We’ve got to always examine ourselves.”

In early 2018, after playing the Grand Ole Opry, Skaggs and his wife Sharon were asked to come to a private room backstage for a meeting with a Country Music Association executive.

“When I heard the door close, I thought, ‘Nah, I’m not going to think this could happen,’” he said. Then the woman smiled, confirming his hopes he was to be inducted.

“I just started bawling and praising Jesus,” he said.

In a speech prior to placing a medallion around Skaggs’ neck at the Oct. 21 induction ceremony, fellow hall of famer and superstar Garth Brooks recounted how Skaggs’ music came to define country music in the 1980s.

“This was a breath of fresh air for everybody like me,” Brooks said, recounting how Skaggs’ music influenced him as a young singer and songwriter.

Country Music Hall of Fame Director Kyle Young presented Skaggs with Bill Monroe’s mandolin—the same instrument Skaggs held almost 60 years earlier as a child, removed from its glass enclosure in the adjacent museum just for the occasion. A visibly moved Skaggs demonstrated his skill on the instrument, leading the audience in a rendition of “Will the Circle Be Unbroken.”

‘Wake up, stand up, look up’

Skaggs is not afraid to use his platform to call for prayer, revival and repentance, although his approach has changed through the years. Early on, music industry insiders were unsure how to take his outspokenness.

“That was a new paradigm for them,” he said. “They were not used to that. They were not ready for that.

“I was like a kid with a butcher knife. I was young, and I was not mature. And I was letting people know I was saved. ... And that they needed to be saved too.”

For the last 20 years, having his own record label has allowed Skaggs to do things his way, including becoming involved in groups and events devoted to revival in America.

Skaggs likens modern-day America to the Babylon of the prophet Daniel’s day, insisting the country needs repentance and a return to the Bible.

Daniel, though seemingly blameless, Skaggs said, “humbled himself when he prayed and said, ‘We have sinned.’ Not them. Not ‘they have sinned.’ He said, ‘We have sinned.’ We have got to identify ourselves with the sins of the church. ...

“If preachers are preaching self-help, and five easy ways that your life can be better, and not preaching the unapologetic word of God, I’m telling you ... a self-help book did not get me saved. The word of God is what I heard that convicted my heart. And it still convicts me. It is the plumb line.”

Despite the challenges, Skaggs is hopeful for the future.

“Our greatest days are not behind us,” he said. “The great cloud of witnesses are praying for us and cheering us on. Wake up, stand up, look

up.”