

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

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WACO—David Crowder has been called “the Pied Piper of Christian music”—drawing in young people to hear the gospel.

Crowder, who grew up in First Baptist Church in Texarkana, said his desire to connect people to God and his passion for college ministry began while he was attending Baylor University. However, becoming a worship leader and recording artist came as a surprise even to him.

Despite a hectic touring schedule, the David Crowder Band has remained dedicated to leading worship at University Baptist Church in Waco.

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

(COURTESY PHOTO)

“I still remember banging away on the piano when I was really young,” Crowder said. “When my mom signed me up for lessons, I kicked and screamed the whole time. But in retrospect, I’m glad that I took those lessons. I picked up the guitar in college and couldn’t put it down. I’ve always loved music, and it felt like something that I would be doing for a long time, whether it paid the bills or not.”

As a student at Baylor, Crowder 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," he explained.

Armed with a vision and a desire to make an impact on their campus, Crowder and Seay founded [University Baptist Church](#) in 1996—a contemporary church de-signed so students would feel safe exploring their questions about faith. Seay later moved on to establish another innovative congregation, [Ecclesia Church](#) in Houston.

In 2005, University Baptist Church experienced a devastating tragedy when Pastor Kyle Lake was electrocuted while performing a baptism.



"All of a sudden, we were confronted with this tragic loss of our friend and

pastor,” Crowder said. “We knew that we needed to minister to the students, many of whom were just beginning their faith journey, and help them to find comfort and hope in the promise of salvation. During this time, the songs took on new meaning. We had to ask ourselves if we really believed what we were singing about or not. Was it just a collection of nice thoughts about our faith, or was it something more?”

As the church’s music and arts pastor, Crowder desired to write choruses to which students could relate.

“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.”

Despite a hectic touring scheduling, the David Crowder Band has remained dedicated to leading worship at their home church. With Crowder on lead vocals and acoustic guitar, the band consists of electric guitarists Jack Parker and Mark Waldorp, as well as drummer Jeremy Bush, bass player Mike Dodson, and Mike Hogan on electric violin. All the band members became connected to University Baptist Church while they attended Baylor.

“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,” Crowder said.

Now, University Baptist draws more than 1,000 students each week, and the songs originally created for students in Waco are making an impact on churches around the country.

“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.”

Recently, the Dove Award-winning band released their fifth album, [Church Music](#), and embarked on a 32-city tour in churches across the country. Adding to the uniqueness of this project, the band also made the album available on a vinyl record, which includes a code to provide owners the ability to download a digital version of the record.

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For the new album, packed with 73 continuous minutes of music, Crowder researched the history of church music around world.

“I think that ‘church music’ is a powerful phrase. It can create expectation and provoke very differing thoughts for different people. Someone who is in a more progressive, modern worship setting might think that church music means stodgy choir robes and think it’s a weird title. Someone from a more traditional setting might view this music and go, ‘Oh no-no-no, this is not church music.’ I think there’s critique for all of us in that,” Crowder said.

“I think the music of the church is really diverse, broad and a reflection of how diverse the church is around the world. The Christian faith exists in lots of cultures, and the music is a reflection of the different entities.”

As this album depicts the diversity of music within the church, it includes songs ranging from the earliest known hymn [“Phos Hilaron”](#)—to “The Eastern Hymn” which Crowder was inspired to write after finding a Chinese prayer book—to modern worship songs such as “How He Loves.”

“Throughout the history of church music, I think there’s been a struggle to figure out how to maintain distance from culture, and at the same time, embrace culture. I feel like when the church’s music has been most effective in expressing that experience has been when it has embraced popular art within culture, and that’s what we’re attempting to do. I really

think music is one of those unique things we have in the material world that lets us get a glimpse of something bigger,” Crowder said.

“Whether it’s in a concert setting or through an album, our desire is to provide people the opportunity to ex-press themselves to God through music. Our intent is that these lyrics, sounds and these little constructions of songs would allow people to say things to God and respond to who he is and what’s he done in their lives—as well for them to be shaped and to grow in the process.

“We want to share with people the story of who God is and why we worship and adore him. When we share this story through songs, we’re trying to paint this story with as many colors as we are able to and tell it in as grand a way that we can.”