

Audra Haney: Thanks for tuning in to the Newborn Promise podcast. A production of Graham Blanchard Incorporated. You are listening to an interview with Ellie Holcomb, called "A Conversation on Music and Motherhood." For today's show notes, transcript, and more information about Your Newborn Promise Project, please visit [grahamblanchard.com](http://grahamblanchard.com).

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. We think today's guest is a total treat. Ellie Holcomb is an accomplished songwriter, Dove Award winner, and is recently celebrating the success of her much-anticipated fourth album, Red Sea Road. Ellie is also the mom of two young children, so we interviewed her to get a peek into her world. How she balances career and children, and how motherhood has changed her. Ellie has a strikingly joyful spirit and immediately makes you feel as if you were longtime friends. We personally think her amazing laugh and her awesome insights into parenting will have you laughing out loud and loving Jesus even more at the end of the interview. We hope she brings you as much inspiration as she did us.

Hi Ellie. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Ellie Holcomb: Absolutely. I'm thrilled to be here. Thanks for having me.

Audra Haney: Ellie, before we dive in and talk about motherhood, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your music. You just released a new album, Red Sea Road, at the beginning of 2017. Talk to me about how God placed these new songs on your heart.

Ellie Holcomb: You know, it has been, the past two years for our community, we have this beautiful community of friends and family here in Nashville, Tennessee, and the last two years for our community have been really heavy and full of a lot of suffering and sorrow and loss. Red Sea Road is really just a record full of songs about how I've seen God show up in the middle of all of that pain. So, every song really was kind of birthed in the midst of me going, "Okay, Lord, I need to remember who you are or I want to remember how you're meeting us in the midst of these struggles and these trials. I want to remember this" because I tend to forget.

I am so grateful to have this record full of songs that really do celebrate the way that I've seen God be faithful no matter what we're facing. I've seen him draw very near to our broken hearts and sort of make a way for us to all keep going when there seemed to be no way.

So, it's a record that really is born out of a lot of suffering and sorrow, and then out of the way that I've seen God be so faithful to draw near to us and to give us hope in the middle of all that suffering and loss.

Audra Haney: Well, that's so powerful. Tell me a little bit about the title track. You wrote that for some friends in the midst of a tragic loss. Tell me about the name and the inspiration behind it.

Ellie Holcomb: Sure. So, I got together with my friends Crystal Wells and Nicole West who are dear friends and co-writers of mine. I was just kind of catching them up on what had been going on in our community. There are two families specifically who lost babies in the past two years. I was just sharing with them the grief, but also the nearness of God that we were experiencing even in the midst of that grief.

But, man, there are times when the sorrow is overwhelming and so I sort of felt even as I was talking to them, sharing with them, that I felt confronted with the choice to either despair or hold on to hope. It was Crystal Wells that pointed us to this beautiful blog post that our friend, Ann Voss Camp who's an incredible author and writer, that she had written.

She told this beautiful story and she kinda describes it like this, she says, "We believe that an unseen hope makes a Red Sea Road where there seems to be no way." Man, I ... that is what I was seeing Jesus do. When you think about the Israelites, you know, there's an army behind them. They've been delivered from slavery and there's an army behind them and eminent death behind them and then they come to that Red Sea Road, and I don't know about you if I'm the Israelites I'm going, "Okay, I'm definitely going to die if I stay here. But it may kill me to walk through the middle of an ocean." It is a scary thing to trust God and to take him at his word some days. But what does he do? He opens up that Red Sea and in Exodus 14:14, I love the verse, he says, "You need only to be still. The Lord will fight for you."

That is what I've seen God do. I've seen him make a way for us, for me and our community to carry on. Even under the weight of great sorrow and great suffering, he's made a way for us to continue and he's given us a reason to sing and to have hope because he was broken for us so that we could know we'd never be alone in the brokenness that we're experiencing.

Audra Haney: Wow. That's so powerful and I think it is, it's that great pull between we don't want to suffer, yet we do and we do see God show up and we go so much deeper in our relationship with him. We experience his presence in such a powerful way.

Along those lines, tell me about "Find You Here." You had a story that hit close to home behind that song.

Ellie Holcomb: I wrote "Find You Here" in the wake of a cancer diagnosis for my dad. It was actually a year ago yesterday. My mom and dad's response to ... nobody's ever ready for that, really. No one's ever ready for that call or for that text. It was a year ago yesterday that my mom and dad, in the wake of that, wanted to have a praise and worship night at their house. You know, the journey ahead of us looked pretty bleak and daunting and so many unknowns. So many questions. I will never forget that night watching my parents run into all the darkness ahead of them with their hands raised in the air just praising God. It seemed like the most unnatural response to that circumstance. But, in the same breath, it was irresistible. I couldn't help but want to just follow them.

"Find You Here" is really about the profound peace that my family and I experienced in the midst of that overwhelming diagnosis. It comes out of the promise of Philippians 4, 4 through 7, "Rejoice in the Lord, always. I'll say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." We experienced the nearness of God and that profound peace in a way that marked me. It will mark me for the rest of my life.

My prayer is that everyone who hears that song would encounter that same hope and peace that we found in Jesus during that trial. We really did experience God drawing near to our breaking hearts and he was bringing comfort into the chaos of what we were facing and he was covering all of our fears with his faithfulness and I'm so, so grateful.

Audra Haney: Yes, and with that journey you guys have had great news on that front as well.

Ellie Holcomb: Yeah, we, my dad is in remission. We are so, so grateful for that. We know, in the same breath, that that's not the end of everybody's cancer story and we also know that there are no guarantees in this life with health. So, it's been a really sweet thing to hang on to the one guarantee that we do have and that's the love and the faithfulness of God.

We know that this life isn't the end of the story. We know that because of what Jesus did on the cross, 'cause he died on the cross and walked out of the grave, that there's hope and there's healing ahead. We're not really home yet. It's been a sweet thing to have a taste of what we're headed towards here on this side of glory.

Audra Haney: I love that and you have described this album as declarative. Tell me what you mean by that.

Ellie Holcomb: You know, my record before, As Sure as the Sun, I felt like was sort of more, "Okay, God I believe this! But, help my unbelief!" I wrote a lot of

these songs on this record wanting to remind myself of how, I just cannot deny at the end of these two years that God is faithful. I just, I feel like I can say from the bottom of the pit, I've seen Jesus meet me there. So, I wanted to write songs that would remind my soul, "Hey! He shows up even here. Even in the midst of this sorrow that feels totally overwhelming. God can meet us right here. This record is me reminding my soul that he is who he says he is and that his promises are true.

Audra Haney: I can speak for myself and I'm sure many, many others, that it's truly a powerful album and really beautiful songs. I want to shift gears a little bit because as you were writing this, and I'm sure this could speak to a lot of new moms, the process looked a little bit different for you. Speak to that a little bit and what the song writing process looked like with two little children underfoot.

Ellie Holcomb: You know, I have two precious little kids. Emmy Lou's four, Huck is 19 months old and in the midst of writing for this record ... the last record I wrote, when I was actually pregnant with my daughter, so I didn't have any children on the outside, so writing this record was so interesting because I had two little ones running around so I was writing during nap times, or after I'd put them to bed at night. Sometimes, they'd be in the kitchen and I'd just be like, "You know what? I need to sing this right now." Inspiration would hit and I'd be cooking in the kitchen and they'd be at my feet running around and crazy dancing and I'm doing a voice memo on my phone.

But honestly, what a beautiful picture because that is sort of what I was seeing Jesus do, is meet me in the middle of all the chaos of everything that was happening and so, the writing process was a little more chaotic as well. It was sweet to just be able to sing what's true in the middle of everyday life. It wasn't glamorous a lot of times. But, um, it was a good journey to take for me.

Audra Haney: And how has your new role as a parent had an impact on your music overall?

Ellie Holcomb: You know, I think as a mom I am always with my kids just want to ... I am so grateful for parents who have modeled out for me a lifestyle of repentance. That's sort of like my dad says, the biggest thing he can give to his kids is love, obviously, the love of God, but also just walking in repentance. It has been such a relief of me as a mom to know that I don't have to do this thing perfectly, because I don't.

I think it is sort of this constant accountability of going okay, all right, I really want to do this well. I want to do this parent thing perfectly and I am not going to, so I think the change for me has been that I just get to live broken and to live constantly turning to Jesus. I'm having to do that more and more because there's always people that I'm in charge of. I'm

always where I am like dropping all the balls, and losing my cool, and not remembering what is true. I get to then live out in front of my kids to say, "You know what? We need to pray. I am so sorry I did not do this well and I'm going to pray for God to forgive me and I'm going to ask him for his help."

So, it's this constant sense of man, okay, we're just going to get to live out what it looks like to walk with Jesus and then to be reminded ... man, I'm going to cry talking about it ... but, reminded by my kids, especially my daughter, and she'll repeat things that I've said to her at very important times when I need to hear them. So, it has been such a gift to hear them absorbing some of the truths that I'm just having to live out in front of them. And to be reminded of what matters in that really childlike beautiful way.

Audra Haney: Talk to me about building those moments in with the Lord, because when you have children it doesn't always look as nice and neat as you would like it to.

Ellie Holcomb: It really doesn't. I don't know about you, but I wake up every morning at 4:00 am in the dark ... no, I'm just kidding. I don't do that! I mean, I tell you what, I will say this, whenever I do that ... whenever I do get up early and spend time with God, never once do I regret it. It has definitely been a fight for me, I've had to fight for that time with the Lord and in his word.

But, in the same breath, to receive grace in knowing that it does not always look like that. But to kind of learn that God is able to meet us in the chaos of our everyday lives. So, to know that you can pray with your kids right there. And you can open up God's word with your kids right there. It doesn't look like my time with the Lord used to always look like, a Bible, and my journal, and a coffee ... you know, songwriting and time with the Lord look different sometimes.

But, I think about too, I just love that picture of hey, we're all in this together. It's kind of messy sometimes and ... I love ... I was reading this little tiny book called, "Praying Circles Around Your Children." I can't even remember the name of the author, that's terrible. It was presenting this idea that we will be gone one day, but our prayers for our kids go on and on and on. I was just like going, "Man, that is so powerful!" How am I teaching my children how to pray? I was kind of wondering, thinking back to when I was a kid, like how did my mom teach me how to pray?

And it's so funny because I was like, you know mom never sat down and was like, "Okay. This is how you pray." She just prayed. All the time, she prayed. If something was hard, she prayed. If I was struggling with

something, she'd say, "Okay we're gonna pray about this, babe." So, it was just her living out her relationship with Jesus in front of me.

Sometimes, I think, "Oh, I'm supposed to be doing these organized studies with my children." It doesn't always happen that way. But, Jesus meets us in those everyday moments and we can go to him. Always. I'm so grateful for that.

Audra Haney: Talk to me a bit ... because, I know you really feel at times that pull between motherhood and career and I know for a lot of people there's just mom-guilt either way. Just talk to me about what the Lord has taught you in that and how you've learned to take that to him.

Ellie Holcomb: You know, mom-guilt is real. It's the real deal. Honestly, I did not want to do this music thing. I was in a band with my husband for years and we actually took our little girl on the road with us for the first year of her life. I actually quit my husband's band to be a stay-at-home mom. Like, I'm like, "Okay. That was really fun, but that was kind of crazy. That was kind of crazy and I think it's just time for me to be at home."

I think being a stay-at-home-mom is such an amazing, beautiful calling. I was like, I want to do that! And the Lord just has a sense of humor because, he's like, "Actually, I would love for you to sing songs that you're writing. Go out and do that."

And I'm like, "No, no, no, God! I don't want to do that!" So, I think my fear all the time has been ... and really the lies that the enemy tells me is if you do this thing that God is calling you to do, it will destroy your family. I mean that is the biggest lie that the enemy says to me. It has been such a gift to see the Lord give me his word to fight that lie with and to just ... Psalm 91 has been huge. "I'll hide you under the shadow of my wings. I will be your refuge."

So, it has been a serious journey for me. The pull of working and being a mom, I mean people always say, "How do you balance it all?" And I'm like, "I don't" I feel like I'm dropping balls all the time and when I overextend myself, that's the important time to say, okay, I'm going to pull back and take a step back.

But, I think the most important thing for me has been, and this is another mom that does music and has children said this to me. She said, "You know, for you to get your marching orders from the Lord and say, 'God, where do you want me and where do you want me to be serving you?' And if that's at home, I'll be at home, and if that's at work, I'll be at work, and if it's both, I'm going to trust you to show me how to do that."

That has been a huge deal for me. I don't know about you, but I'm always looking at other moms. But every feeling is different and every calling is different. God doesn't call us all to the same thing and so, for you to say get your marching orders for him and to say, okay, Lord, you tell me how to serve and love my family and how to do this job thing at the same time. That has been a huge shift for me.

Audra Haney: I love that.

Ellie Holcomb: I'm grateful for that wisdom that she gave me.

Audra Haney: If you don't mind, just talk to me about marriage. It really can be a huge transition for couples, having children. Tell me about some of the unexpected joys and challenges of just adding children into your marriage.

Ellie Holcomb: It has been one of the biggest gifts to our marriage. I think the thing that I didn't expect was to re-fall in love with my husband watching him be a father. It has been a sweet thing, the tenderness that God has grown in my husband's heart. Especially after our first girl was born, and then our boy too. But, I didn't know that that was there.

But man, we have done some really hard, good work in our marriage. I'm so grateful. We landed in counseling early. It was so good for us. So, we had learned ... I honestly didn't know how to have conflict. I was a peacemaker to the point of just really being a liar because I just wouldn't ever say if something was hard or if something had hurt me, I would never share that. God was really kind in showing me through counseling that where there's truth, there's freedom.

That has been such a gift. It has changed my entire life. I don't have to pretend anymore to have it all together. I'm so grateful for that. That has been a huge gift to our marriage and especially as we've become parents. You're on less sleep, it's not just about you guys anymore. There are such beautiful things that come with that. That you get to be in charge of nurturing these little souls. But there are stresses that come with that as well. So, it's been such a gift to be able to be honest with each other and say, "I'm totally stressed out and I need help," or "I'm so sorry to snap at you because I don't know how to do this parenting thing and I'm worried!"

So, the honesty and the vulnerability has been for us as parents. I guess I didn't realize when you have kids, you actually don't know what you're doing and so it's been a gift for us to encourage each other in that on the days when you have all the self-doubt and you're like, there's a thousand decisions I have to make about taking care of this little baby.

To encourage each other, but to also let each other in when you're feeling overwhelmed. It just has been, being a parent has been a road to deeper vulnerability with each other. Which has been beautiful.

Audra Haney: That's so good. There's not only that vulnerability that you have to have in marriage, but also talk to me about the importance of having community and being vulnerable with other women and just having that strong faith community around you as you parent.

Ellie Holcomb: I am so thankful that we ... like, so clearly, all over scripture we were not meant to do this life alone. One, God is with us, Immanuel always, but Jesus had twelve disciples and what a context of community. Some people say, "How do you do this? How are you a mom and you travel and your husband travels in a different band? How do you manage that?" It is such a beautiful thing to say, "We can't do it alone."

We have an amazing community of people here in town who surround us and who surround our kids. Our families, we have an incredible nanny, a part-time nanny who has been helpful. It is so interesting, and I don't know what that is, but I always wanted to be just the one to do it. I wanted to be able to do all the things by myself. And that's so proud, I guess at the end of the day, but it has been such a sweet thing to be in a job where it's literally like, you actually can't do this by yourself.

Audra Haney: You know, when you think back on your parenting, did you really draw from any parenting heroes or people who set an example for you along the way, where you are able to say, man, I really love the way they did that?

Ellie Holcomb: This is cool, but my parents and my husband's parents are ... we're so grateful for them. They would be the first to say that they didn't do things perfectly. I remember when I was going through counseling, my place where I went was real near my mom and dad's house and so I would end up just swinging by their house a lot of times after counseling and they would be like, "Okay. Just tell us what we did wrong. We're so sorry."

It's not all about you! There's some other things that I'm working through. It has been a really sweet gift to have our parents to kind of talk to and glean wisdom. They have both lived just honest and vulnerable, repentant lives. And vibrant lives.

Drew's parents were kind of like, had been [inaudible 00:27:27] of, "Hey, you are in our family and you're welcome into this adventure that God has us on." And it wasn't so much all about the kids. I am so grateful for that.



My mom and dad in a lot of ways too, were just following Jesus and loving on people and saying, "This is what our life is about. It's not just about us. We get to be swept up into a story that's so much bigger than ourselves and really live that out." I'm so grateful for that.

Audra Haney: It's so amazing to have that example on both sides for you guys, and with that, tell me one practical piece of advice you have for keeping your marriage strong post-baby.

Ellie Holcomb: This happened, this story I'm about to tell you happened quickly after we had Emmy Lou, our little girl. I was feeling really overwhelmed. She was two months. We were in an RV headed up to a wedding with Drew's family. We were getting ready to go on a really long tour and we were going to be gone for months on end, and I was just totally overwhelmed. I remember the Lord just speaking to me. I remember I curled up into the little bed above the RV. I was just so exhausted. I remember the Lord saying this, "I've given Emmy Lou to you to raise as your daughter, but she's my daughter and I'm going to take such good care of you. I know that I've given you the role of being a mother now, but you're also still my daughter and I'm going to take such good care of you."

So, I think the most practical piece of advice, and that's an Ebenezer moment for me because before I'm a momo, before I'm a wife, before I'm a friend, I am a daughter of the most high God. When I can remember that and stay there and start there and look in his face and remember how he loves me and what he's called me to, it changes every other relationship and every other encounter I have in the day. So, I think just remembering that I'm his daughter.

Audra Haney: That gives us so much freedom to release our own children too, knowing that they're ultimately children of God and even when we can't meet every need and be everything to them when there just aren't enough hours in the day, we can trust him in that.

Ellie Holcomb: Oh, man. Yeah. It's funny, two kids is really good, 'cause you're going, oh man I am outnumbered sometimes when I have both of you by myself. So, it is a sweet thing to point them ... to point myself first to my Father and then to point my kids to their heavenly Father is such a gift.

We weren't made to be everything to our kids. We weren't. I forget that. You are kinda responsible for their like survival. You're feeding them, you're keeping them alive ... so, that weight can feel so heavy somedays. But, man it is so sweet to know that they are also in the hands of their heavenly Father and that he's got 'em.

Man, my little girl, a lot of times when we pray for people we sing. Instead of praying we'll sing, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," then we kind of insert all the names of our friends or whoever. It has been such a sweet thing, for whatever reason, the other day my girl was like, "Mom, God's hands are huge! He's like a giant and he can hold all of us in his hands. Right mom?" And I'm like, "Yeah, baby! That's right! He's got us!"

It's just funny. As a mom I think sometimes your kids are teaching you and reminding you of what's true.

Audra Haney: I love that and I love that example. Just that childlike faith. What's so encouragement that you would have for expectant moms before they start this parenting journey?

Ellie Holcomb: I would say, get ready because it's one of the sweetest journeys that you'll take and at the end of yourself, which is I feel like where being a parent brings you, there is more and more and more of Jesus. He's a good father and he's going to carry you through. I would just know you don't have to get it all right, and you're not going to get it all right, but there are everlasting arms underneath to catch you every time you fall and that is a really good place to be. In his arms.

Audra Haney: I love that. Ellie, would you mind just wrapping up our time, saying our prayer for new and expecting parents, just to encourage them and bless them in this new journey ahead.

Ellie Holcomb: Absolutely. Jesus, thank you so much that you are a good father who wants to give your children those gifts. I just pray for all the moms and dads who are expecting and there's so much joy and anticipation. I remember for me Lord, there was so much fear and worry too, Lord. I just pray that you would cover every single one of those worries or those fears, or the anxiety, that you would cover those with your presence and with your peace, Father. I thank you that, just like you say in Psalm 139, all the days ordained for these little ones for their lives were written in your book before one of them came to be. And I thank you.

You're knitting them together in the womb right now, and that you see them and that you know these children. They really belong to you. I pray, Lord, that you would give us all sense of being your beloved sons and your beloved daughters and that as these new moms and dads, as they learn and walk through this journey of becoming parents, I pray that they would be reminded that you are the best dad. You're the best dad! Just in the way that they're going to delight in this little son or daughter of theirs, you delight in us, Father.

I just thank you. I pray blessings over each one of these families. I pray that these families will be places where your presence is known and where you are drawing near and you're bringing life and vitality as they learn through how to be moms and dads, and how to be husbands and wives in a new season, Lord. We ask your blessing and we ask that your presence would go with them every single step of the journey. We thank you, we can laugh at the days to come, even though we don't know what they'll hold because you're the same yesterday, today, and forever. We thank you for your faithfulness and for your love for us and that we can trust you with our lives and we can trust you with the lives that you've given us to care for.

We love you, and we ask all this in the precious name of Jesus.

Audra Haney:

Well, thank you so much for joining us for this amazing interview with Ellie Holcomb, if you'd like to find out more about her music, remember you can get today's show notes, guest bio, and more information about Your Newborn Promise Project at [grahamblanchard.com](http://grahamblanchard.com).