

Newborn Promise Podcast

Episode 26: “Echoes” and Generations: Matt Maher on faith, fatherhood, and music

Audra Haney: Thanks for tuning in to the Newborn Promise Podcast. A production of Graham Blanchard Incorporated. You're listening to an episode called Echoes and Generations: Matt Maher on Faith, Fatherhood and Music. For today's show notes, transcript or more information about your Newborn Promise Project, please visit grahamblanchard.com.

Thanks again for joining us on the Newborn Promise Podcast. I'm Audra Haney and we are so excited about today's episode with worship leader, recording artist and song writer, Matt Maher. Not only to hear about his new music but also the inspiration behind it. Matt says his latest album Echoes was inspired by both the generation before and the generation coming behind him. Matt originally named the album with the idea of echoing the gospel to his children. But after recording most of the album and experiencing the loss of a close family member, he realized that Echoes had a much deeper meaning than he originally intended.

Matt said this record is a declaration of Christ's goodness in the midst of suffering through all the ages and how we can keep that message alive from generation to generation. Matt also has some wise and sound advice for new dads, so be sure to stay tuned for that. Here is our interview with Matt.

Matt thank you so much for joining us today and congratulations on your newest album release, Echoes. Would you mind telling us about this new collection of songs. So much of it was inspired by hymns right?

Matt Maher:

Growing up in Newfoundland Canada, where I grew up, my heritage was sort of Irish Catholic and so Baptist hymns were necessarily part of my heritage. When I moved to Arizona 20 years ago and got sort of re-involved in church ministry and became a worship leader, I always said that it wasn't so much I discovered those hymns as they found me. There had been this collection of songs and I think there was sort of this underlying thread through all of them, which was sort of just the notion of declaring the goodness of God and the faithfulness of God I think especially in hardship.

I started to record some of this and in March of this past year, sort of in the middle of recording and being on tour, my father who still lived in Canada in Newfoundland fell ill. His health had been struggling for a while. He got very sick very quickly and ended up passing away on the 19th of March. I'd flew up there up to Canada, spent a week with him in intensive care and had very, very powerful time just praying. Praying with him by his bedside but it made me think a lot about, what do you find yourself holding on to in the midst of suffering and hardship and loss? And how do you process your grief and your emotions?

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What I realized is that there was this group of songs that I found myself being ministered to the most by and there were these songs that were inspired by hymns that spoke of the faithfulness of God and the goodness of God. Then I started looking at the stories of these hymns. The amount of times the writers of these hymns found themselves going through hardship of some kind. Almost all of them were born out of a season or hardship in some way or another. I've realized that more and more, the Christian life isn't really a life lived without suffering. It's a life lived with purpose in the midst of suffering.

Audra Haney: Maher that is so powerful. How is writing this album really healing to you as you walked through that grieving process? It seems like this album was, as much a gift to you as it was to the world.

Matt Maher: Well, I always tell people that when you write worship music, for so many people obviously ministry happens when they hear the song and when they sing the song. I feel that for song writers the ministry happens when you write the song. There's one song in particular that it wasn't actually when I wrote it but it was when I recorded it that the song ministered to me the most. It's a song called just as I am, threw in the record and ... I actually wrote it with some friends the day my dad went to the hospital. I wrote that song that day and that night my dad ended up going into a hospital.

Well 48 hours later, my cousin was at the hospital visiting my dad and that was when his health started turning for the worst. One of the last things he said was I need God to forgive me. This is very real moment of desperation. That was kind of one of the last things he said. So the song Just as I am is obviously inspired by the hymn and Charlotte Elliott, who is the author she wrote that hymn in a moment of having an existential crisis where, she needed to write something that was true because she was having all these doubts and anxieties about her faith. The lyrics to the song, the chorus are just as I am Jesus you welcome me, you took me. The hymn lyrics were just as I am without one plea, but that your blood was shed for me, and that you bid me come to thee, oh lamb of God I come.

Just as my dad in that moment was just so desperate for God, he was left with one plea. So that song, the process of recording it was very, very ... Had there a lot of healing I think and closure I think in way. You lose a parent there never really fully is closure in this side of heaven, because you'll miss him for the rest of your life. Not every day, not every minute of every day but the memory lives on. It's not excruciatingly difficult with every moment but there's been plenty of moments where my youngest will do something or say something and I'll want to record it 'cause I'd think to myself, my dad would love to see this. It's stuff like that. It's very bitter sweet. I also see glimpses of him in my children and I can give testimony to how I think God arranges things.

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Audra Haney: I think that really brings it full circle to the name of the album, which is Echoes. Tell me about the inspiration behind that.

Matt Maher: Well my kids they're a little bit the inspiration for it. Before everything happened with my dad, just seeing the notion of how do you stand up for your faith? How do you stand up for things that you believe in this day and age. And that was really what the record was going to be about. And I realized that in some ways it still is, but the main sort of antagonist isn't so much the world, it's death, it's suffering. When Paul talks about the fact that we are pressed on every side but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned, struck down not destroyed. I know there are definitely powers and principalities that sort of seek to hinder the life of a believer. But really 9 times out of 10 is just the fact that we live in a broken world and none of us are perfect and we end up just experiencing hardship and suffering.

So much of how we learn to communicate and this is part that I learn from my kids. I realize that my kids learn to communicate by literally repeating the things that they've heard. that's how you teach them how to talk. And I realized it in my faith, so much in my faith is repeating things I've heard. Either things I've read in the scriptures, things I've heard in sermons, things I've heard said by anyone that I've looked up to. I think that is the natural part of not only how we learn to communicate but then how we communicate now more than ever, we retweet and we re-share and we repost videos on Facebook and things that people say because it articulates how we feel. And just wanted to try to put together a collection of songs that echoed things that were more eternal.

Audra Haney: Yes and I think that brings it full circle to Echoes too as our faith is lived out, it is echoing again in the next generation and the next. I think that is a beautiful tribute to your father and our heavenly father and how he works. Matt you have shared a lot of great insights about parenting already just by sharing your heart on this album. But for those listening who are preparing or are already new parents, you are the dad of three. So would you mind sharing some of your own experiences and some of the things that may have surprised you most about becoming a parent.

Matt Maher: Oh boy. There is no higher profession. I think family is the domestic church. I think particularly is there's anybody listening who's involved in church ministry, I just want to go ahead and just say your family comes first. Give yourself permission to say that. Give yourself permission to admit if that's not how you feel. I think there's a lot of times those things that we know that are true and our ego and our fears sort of get in the way of us, actually allowing to admit that currently don't agree with that. But I think until you're honest with yourself, it's hard for the Spirit of God to make a substantial transformation.

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I would say for me fatherhood was something that the first year of my son's life I was pretty afraid of. I think some of that comes with the fact that when you're a dad the first six to eight months you're really not sure what your job is. And it's really simple, do whatever your wife tells you to do, that's your job. Do whatever she needs you to do and do it with all the love and charity you can master. And do it for Christ. If there's days where you're not sure why you're doing it. Then at some point your baby is going to smile at you and there's this light that goes on where you're like, "Oh my goodness, they actually recognized me."

It happens for moms almost immediately because literally a baby has heard their mother's voice in the womb. But at some point your baby recognizes your face and your voice as a father and that's a really amazing moment. And I would cling the moments. I think memories are so so important and trying to be present as much as you can to all these little moments. People try to capture the perfect developmental photos with the same alphabet letters or the same chalk board or the same carpet because we kind of want to live like a Pinterest moment. And that's just great but what I would say is that if you're actually present, then when you look at a picture ... The whole point of looking at photos is they actually bring you back to the experience that you had. But you weren't present the first time around, there's nothing to be brought back to.

My wife does this thing where we do photo albums every year with our kids. So we just got the one for our youngest Callum. He's 20 months now but we just finally got his first year done. 'cause with number three that's what happens. I think it's just looking at those photos, it made me great hope for how much my wife calls me to be present because I was present through the moment I had something to remember more than just a photo. I think being in the moment, is the number one thing as a parent. Just being in the moment. Fully being in the moment, not allowing your regrets or your fears or your anxieties or what you think other people's expectations are about you. To be truly present to the moment, I think that's so critical.

Audra Haney:

That's great advice Matt. How do you see your role as a dad? And maybe just fathers in general and how they shape their child's awareness of God. How does that spill over into their relationship with him later?

Matt Maher:

I think as the father you have to accept that you're the closest thing to God. That your young children especially can understand 'cause they call you daddy and you're the only person that gets that title on the planet. And you're cruising along for about six years of your life. And time processes by the way, we know this. Doctors tell us that time actually processes slower when you're younger. I don't know how long six years feels like to a six-year old but it's longer than what six years feels like to

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me. At some point you're in school and hopefully if you're in a Christian schooling or even if you're home schooling, at some point your kids hear an adult talk about God and they use the word daddy. And it's word association.

The only other person they know that word with is their dad. Whatever kind of a dad you've been, good or bad, in the good ways, they go, "Oh." They think of daddy, so God is playful or God is fun or God spends time with me or God draws with me or God plays with barbies. It sounds silly but it ultimately comes down to the biggest economy in the mind of a child's time. Biggest indicator of whether or not you care about him. That's how they spell love, TIME. I by no means have been perfect. Obviously especially with what I do, I'm doing this interview, I'm on the road right now.

Audra Haney: Absolutely it's a lot of balance, I know.

Matt Maher: It is a lot of balance and I think it's a job for me as a dad in some ways early on to be informing in my children come help, how great their heavenly father is. 'Cause I know there's some people who are maybe listening to this who didn't have a great relationship with their dad and maybe for the first time are actually thinking, wow! Maybe my view of God is actually based on my experiences with my earthly father. That's kind of a hard thing to process I think as a parent. But with children there's so much healing that happens into stepping into sort of the vocation. There are moments where you have all this love, you all this affection for your child.

Like I remember it with my firstborn son. This is before he could even crawl, I'm just looking at him and I'm so in love with him. And there's nothing he could do that would change that. Immediately having the Holy Spirit sort of whisper into my ear and hearing the father's voice say, "And that's how much love I have for you. In fact that's nothing compared to the love I have for you." It really, really is amazing. There have been moments where I've realized too that even my children ... My wife and I we're in this covenant with God and we've created these lives but they're not ours. They belong to God and God has given us the great responsibility of stewarding their development. But I think definitely there's this sense of reverence for them in terms of how we look at them and obviously it's not there all the time. Especially they a sharpie to your dining room table or dump a pale of glitter on their bedroom floor. I think it's always stuff like that.

But I do think that it's a good thing for parents to still have moments where you stop and you look at how you view your child and stop and say how is God using this to reveal something to me in terms of how he views me.

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Audra Haney: Matt thank you so much for these amazing insights today. Would you mind just closing out our time together, praying for these new parents that are passionate about echoing Christ in their own families.

Matt Maher: Absolutely. God I thank you so much for this day and I thank you for just the calling and vocation of marriage and parenthood. I pray right now for your Spirit to inspire and speak freedom into the hearts of every parent who's listening to us. Parenting is no small task and especially there's lots of parents who find themselves really just with little to no margin in life. Their schedules are maxed out, their time has maxed out, they're working twice as hard just to provide and they're struggling for time. I pray that you would give them just a sense of peace right now. Jesus the one thing you promise in the scriptures is peace.

So we pray for peace in the middle of hectic schedules and going from one event to another event. We pray for the ministry of presence. That as parents you make us present to these precious little people that you're calling us to help steward and raise. We pray for the ministry of presence for those moments where we're making memories that we can look back on with great love and affection. Give us patience. Give us the father's heart of patience with their children. Give us wisdom to know how to navigate the never changing world and above all give us love. That we could echo your love and your son's love in the worlds of our children. We pray this all in Jesus name.

Audra Haney: Thank you so much for joining us for this interview with Matt. Please checkout our next episode as we talk with recording artist Brandon Heath about the gift he and his wife are expecting this Christmas. Again for today's show notes, transcript or more information about your Newborn Promise Project, please visit grahamblanchard.com