

**Columbia, Missouri**  
**The Worship of God • July 10, 2022**



**THE SCRIPTURE**  
**John 20:24-29**

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

**THE MESSAGE**  
**“Then Sings My Soul: Personal Jesus”**  
**Mark Briley**

*Reach out, touch faith.* Isn't that what we're after? There's a lot of grasping in the dark these days. We're hoping to find something to hold onto... we want faith within arm's reach. Reach out, touch faith.

That's what you heard Depeche Mode<sup>1</sup> front man, Dave Gahan, sing in their 1989 hit, *Personal Jesus*. These electronica rockers from England pushed this tune into America's Top 40 list that year and *Q Magazine* has since named it one of the 100 greatest songs of all time. Have you ever heard this song in church before? But he names Jesus... it has to be spiritual right? That's what we're wondering in this new series that we launch today called *Then Sings My Soul: Finding Sacred Hope in Secular Music*. It's based on the more than 70 song submissions you shared with us over a three-week span. We asked you to submit a secular song that raised some theological questions you have about living in our world right now. So, for the next 70 weeks, we'll be listening to your songs... just kidding. We *are* taking this series through Labor Day weekend, however, and we are grateful for the creative and challenging songs you submitted.

I loved when you said to me, “*I submitted such and such a song, but I won't be offended if you don't pick my song.*” I hope you all mean that! In all sincerity, it wasn't easy to decide. So many good choices and we listened to all of them. John DeLaporte is putting a list of every submission together that you can use as a devotional of sorts during these nine weeks. See what other songs were named... it will tell you something about the personality of our congregation, and it might open your spirit to something God is longing to stir in your soul right now.

So how *did* we choose? We wanted a diverse offering of genre, style, and time in history. We wanted songs that could send us into the whole of Scripture overlaying the secular and sacred and seeing Spirit in it all. In the end, we landed on a nine-week series that we pray will be fun, meaningful, and have you seeing (*and hearing*) the world in a whole new way!

Why start with *Personal Jesus*? I wondered if we needed some grounding today. I think I was feeling that for sure. Our attention is splattered all over the place and we can't live such fragmented lives and stay grounded in our faith. When we're tired, all we can do is try to get a grip on Jesus; to remember why we needed saving in the first place. Maybe it's an identity thing.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.depechemode.com/> While I pulled info about the band and song from various sites, I share here the band's homepage which shares the latest information about the band and gives you a genuine sense of what they are about.



Depeche Mode gives us this song in a season when they were figuring out their identity as a band. The evolution of the band's name tells that story well. These band mates had tried all sorts of things, playing in bands they formed along the way, a buddy they wrote tunes with, an affinity that inspired them at one moment or another. But these band names? Where do they come from?

Here are some of the names they played under before solidifying their identity as Depeche Mode. *No Romance in China. The Plan. Norman and the Worms. Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark (technically that was just a band that inspired them but was a significant part of shaping who they became).*

There are entire online tutorials now about how to select a good band name. Or you can enter a few simple answers into a Band Name Generator, and it will do it for you. For example, take your pet's name and a favorite food or random beverage name and that can be your band name. Mine might be *Tullamore for Taylor* or *Tay Tay Queso*. Boom. Band name. Ultimately, the band became Depeche Mode – a French name that was lazily translated in English to Fast Fashion – a nod to the ever-changing fashion scene of the '80s and '90s. *Fashion News* or *Fashion Update* is a better translation. The band front man pulled the name from the fashion magazine, *Depeche Mode*, that he was using as inspiration for the fashion design and window displays he was working on.

“Personal Jesus” quickly struck a chord with people. It had a driving sound and edge which captivated fans, but that lyric connected more deeply. “*Reach out. Touch faith. Your own personal Jesus. Someone to hear your prayers. Someone who cares.*”

Martin Gore who wrote the lyrics was inspired to do so after reading the autobiography *Elvis and Me* by Priscilla Presley. Priscilla saw Elvis as her own personal Jesus figure – wrapped up in saving and falling in love and caring for her. Gore said, “*It's a song about being a Jesus for somebody else; someone to give you hope and care.*”

That's, in part, why our Broadway friend submitted this song for the series. He had heard a pastor once describe going to a Depeche Mode concert and how the entire crowd was just in the spirit with this song and thinking, “*This is how church should be.*” But beyond the energy, our Broadway friend said, “*It's pretty straightforward – this idea of being a personal Jesus for someone else.*”

How might you care for someone else like Jesus? There's the old adage that says, "*You may be the only Jesus someone ever meets. You may be the only Bible someone ever reads.*" It puts some weight on Jesus followers to represent well the love of Christ in the world. Our friend also recently watched the new Elvis movie and was intrigued by the connection to this song's original inspiration as well. "*Your own personal Jesus. Reach out and touch faith.*"

The band knew something about the hearts of people – hungry for a tangible faith, something within reach that they could touch, see, make sense of. To promote the song, the band's producer placed some personal ads in local newspapers with the words, "*YOUR OWN PERSONAL JESUS*" and a London phone number. When you called the number, the phone would answer and play the band's new track. It was a clever gimmick but also fed right into the song's lyric: "*Feeling unknown and you're all alone. Flesh and bone by the telephone; lift up the receiver; I'll make you a believer.*"

We seem to want a faith close enough to touch, to get our hands on, to be just a simple phone call away. I was drawn to disciple Thomas, known by the nickname "*Doubting*" for all of history, as one who lived this tangible hope after Jesus died. He wouldn't take anyone's word, even from his colleagues and friends, that Jesus was raised unless he could touch him for himself.

I wrestled with this heading into this week. I'm moved by the quest for the collective salvation of all people; this sense that God cares for, reaches to, saves all people. My concern *is* for the whole, not simply my own salvation. But this idea, my own personal Jesus... my own saving... my own chance to embrace the heart of God in Christ is resurfacing for me... not to negate the greater concern for the collective good, the collective healing, the collective salvation, but the reminder that I'm only as good in that effort as I am when I'm in touch with that personal Jesus myself.

It's why the flight attendant always says, "*Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting those around you.*" It's not a selfish approach – it's the essential approach so that more might be helped, healed, saved. I'm not saying neglect your neighbor – that's always our call to love and serve – but I *am* saying, don't become so depleted that you've got nothing left to help those around you.

Thomas was depleted. One of his best friends and a man he'd given up everything to follow had been brutally killed. He had all the feels of grief and trauma – anger, sadness, apathy. To make matters worse, he's been away from the other disciples for a few days. Maybe he was working. Maybe he needed to get back to his family. Maybe he just couldn't stand to be around it all anymore and needed some space to sift through this unfathomable disappointment. Whatever the case, he's missed Jesus

showing up and while his brothers are saying, “*Jesus rose fo sho. I touched him,*” he’s like, “*You all are delirious.*”

It’s like people keep telling me Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs keeps showing up at Club Carwashes around town. I haven’t seen him yet. Sometimes we’re just grumpy because we keep missing out. But I think Thomas is hurt, and he’s taking out his hurt on everybody else. Maybe you’ve seen the quote going around that says, “*If you don’t heal what hurt you, you’ll bleed on people who didn’t cut you.*” Hurt people, hurt people. If that’s not a word about the society we’re living in right now, I’m not sure what is.

We’re depleted. Just like Thomas. We’re in our third year of global trauma. We just have to name it. Anytime you take people through high stress situations with no ending in sight and you take away their normal and the things they enjoy and count on, it’s traumatic. And so, we’re trying to live on our reserves – we’re running on fumes. We’re depleted. Even good things deplete us; birth of a child; a wedding; they tap into your reserves. But we’re living in a mess and telling everyone to keep smiling because we’re good now, right? We’re trying to live like “*We’re back! We’re fine!*” but we’re running on severe levels of depletion.

Author and counselor, John Eldridge<sup>2</sup>, suggests that even the healthiest among us may be functioning on about 40% of our best with nothing in the reserves. To be real honest, we weren’t really running on 100% heading into the pandemic. People were burning out already. Our achievement culture said if you’re not achieving, you’re failing and so we just kept pulling on our reserves and then... crises. What happens when we’re functioning at 40% or whatever number if you’re an overachiever or something? We lean on those around us and need them to bring 100% because we don’t have it right now.

You wonder why your marriage or your relationships with your family are really hard right now? You’re depleted and subconsciously expecting them to overcompensate and bring their best to the relationship and they are needing the same from you. You need your colleagues to cover your depleted state? They’re depleted, too. Your church needs you and you need your church. Do you see how this becomes a formula for desperation, exhaustion, and isolation?

Humanity is not well, and the signs of trauma are everywhere. Creative people are struggling to be creative. Sign of trauma. You have a lack of grace for people who fail you or even people who irritate you like the person who doesn’t put up the shopping

---

<sup>2</sup> The information that follows flows from John’s interview on the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast.  
<https://careynieuwhof.com/episode504/>



cart right in the parking lot. You could move right on before. Now, you've got to let him know what an idiot he is. Too close to home yet?

What about short-term memory loss? Sign of trauma. You pick up your phone to text someone and you can't remember who you were going to text. Your colleague says, "Hey, did you forget about that email you were gonna send me?" and you're all, "Please remind me what that was about?"

People are exhausted and going to bed earlier. Just done. Or you're relieved when the thing gets cancelled you were supposed to go to when you used to be disappointed when things cancelled. You have a diminished desire for human contact. When you do go out, you have less to offer. All classic signs of trauma. Trauma fragments the brain and our attention. And trauma has a cascading effect. You don't just walk away from intensity and uncertainty and just bounce back. More people are traveling this summer than ever – revenge vacation as it is called – but people are coming home still depleted. A week at the beach – while helpful – doesn't heal the fullness of trauma.

So, Thomas says, "Yeah. I'm out. Unless I can touch Jesus again. I'm done." And then, it gets really personal for Thomas. Jesus shows up and this time Thomas was there, too. (*Travis Kelce does come to the carwashes!*)



But you know how you feel in the group when you've been the doubter, the cynic, the grumpy friend, the negative voice... you can't just snap out of it. But this is personal. Jesus calls Thomas over to him... just what he said he needed... to reach out, touch faith. "Feel the nail holes. Feel my side." Sometimes we need to be that close to the wounds to get it... to see it... to claim our part in it and to ultimately be part of the healing. Thomas needs it. He needs this personal union with Jesus in order to press forward in any productive way... and he can't connect with those around him until he's got this union.

This union. Do you have it? How tight is your personal union with Jesus? If you can cultivate quiet, you will find this union. The greatest barrier to union is not people talking others out of the existence of God but rather the noise of the world that suffocates the union. We'll give 7, 10, 15, 20 hours a week to a political newsfeed but can't sit in the quiet for three minutes listening for God. No wonder we feel so galvanized by our union to politics. Jesus prays in John 17, "God, help them experience the same union that you and I share." And this union is real nourishment that is flowing from the presence of God into my life. It's not about knowledge or conviction or information or doctrine. It's nourishment of God into my trauma, into my

dreams, my planning, my hopes. Being saved by a personal Jesus means to be inhabited by Christ.

That third verse of “*Personal Jesus*” sings into this need: “*Things on your chest you need to confess? I will deliver. You know I’m a forgiver.*” And here it is. This is union and we need it, friends. It’s not just a nice thing to have. We need it.

Maybe this is why this song has been covered successfully so many times. Marilyn Manson, a known atheist, released a cover of this song. Def Leppard was enamored with this song; warmed up with it before every show and then covered it because there was just something to it. Johnny Cash, days before his death, recorded a cover of this song saying, “*I hear it as a gospel song. I don’t know that the writer ever meant it to be that, but that’s what it is.*” That’s the sacred hope in this secular tune.

You depleted? You running on fumes? You trying to save everyone and everything around you, and you just can’t get it done? Turn yourself over to Jesus. It’s okay. You may be a personal Jesus to someone else. You may be that presence that connects someone else to the love you’ve come to know in Jesus but do not neglect your own need for Jesus. Reach out. Touch faith.

If you’ve ever been to an AA meeting or love someone who has or read up on it because you’ve heard they have a personal and authentic approach to finding union with God... you know the 12 steps are really grounded in Christian principles and practices. Today, I leave you with the first three steps as it fits this call to get personal... to get real with Jesus.

- 1. I’ve got a problem and my life is unmanageable.*
- 2. I believe a higher power can restore my brokenness.*
- 3. I turn my will and my life over to God.*

That’s it. I need help. I can’t deliver myself. Jesus, I believe you can. I turn my will over to yours. I am praying today especially for your own personal Jesus connection. I’m praying especially for the battles you are in the middle of but you’re not talking about. I’m aching for the restoration of the reserves we’ve been depleted of. And so, you can be your best self for others, won’t you reach out to Jesus. Reach out and touch faith.

## **A SONG OF FOCUS**

### **“You Are There”**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. How can I trust what I cannot see  
or hear or touch? Are you near to me?

I call out your name, but how can I know  
if you hear or you care?

I turn, reach out, and find you are there!  
You never left my side. I never left your care.  
My Lord, I have learned to always lift this prayer:  
not that you'll be with me, but that I'll be aware.

2. People reject me. They turn me away.  
Will you be with me? I need you today.  
Lord, will you speak clearly so I can know  
if you're there when I pray?

I turn, reach out, and find you are there!  
You never left my side. I never left your care.  
My Lord, I have learned to always lift this prayer:  
not that you'll be with me, but that I'll be aware.

**BROAD HEARTS    BROAD MINDS    BROAD REACH**