

Since the release of her full-length solo debut, *As Sure As the Sun*, in 2014, singer/songwriter Ellie Holcomb has been walking an unexpected path, one of suffering and loss but also peace and joy. She has come to the edge of the rushing river of confusion and experienced a God who made a way where there seemed to be no way.

And it is from that place—of finding God in the dark and unexpected—that Holcomb wrote and recorded *Red Sea Road* (Full Heart Music), set to release Jan 27th, 2017.

“I think my first record was probably more *help my unbelief*,” says Holcomb. “But I think this one would be more *I’m surprised and delighted to say that God is faithful*...I know that’s true more than I did a year or two ago.”

Loss, disappointment, and fear of the unknown have marked Holcomb’s journey of grappling with and believing in God’s faithfulness.

“It’s been a year in general of just aching with the people that we love and walking through a lot of brokenness,” says Holcomb. “A lot of life lived and lost.” But the suffering has created a collection of songs rich in lyrics, powerful in melody, and equal parts honest and hopeful.

Holcomb says, “This record feels more declarative because I have just needed to sing the truth into the dark.” It *sounds* more declarative too. From triumphant anthems to contemplative, piano-driven melodies to upbeat and catchy ones, each song on *Red Sea Road* is connected by a common thread of bold and much-needed truth.

As Holcomb began writing for the album—before she knew it would be an album—she thought, “I don’t know if this is for anybody else, but I need to sing these songs. I need to sing these for my own soul.” It’s what David did in the Psalms, she says. “He bosses his soul around in song.”

She wrote this idea into the chorus of the title song on the album, “Red Sea Road”: *We will sing to our souls / We won’t bury our hope / Where He leads us to go there’s a red sea road / When we can’t see the way, He will part the waves / And we’ll never walk alone down a red sea road.*

She wrote “Red Sea Road” for several close friends who suffered tragic losses in their families, yet clung to hope in Christ in the midst of it. As she worked on the song with longtime co-writers Christa Wells and Nicole Witt, Wells recalled something author Ann Voskamp had written on her blog: “...we believe that an unseen Hope makes a Red Sea Road where there seems to be no way.”

Holcomb says that phrase captured the essence of what she was trying to say through this song. During trying times, just like the Israelites experienced with the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them, our temptation is to throw our hands up in despair. “What I was seeing in all of this,” she explains, “is that He was drawing near and making a way for us to carry on when we felt like we couldn’t carry on any longer.”

She saw this steadfastness and hope in her friend’s families, and she saw it in another family: her own.

Right before they began recording *Red Sea Road*, Holcomb's dad, and producer on the album, Brown Bannister, went to the doctor for a regular appointment. That routine check-up turned into an unexpected cancer diagnosis.

"We were about to start recording and this blow happens to our family," recalls Holcomb. But her parents' response to the diagnosis surprised and encouraged her: "It was so strange because I remember my mom and dad had a lot of peace. They were like, 'We're going to choose to praise God, and at the end of the day, no matter what happens, healing is ahead. Whether it's this side of glory or the next, we have hope. We have hope because of Jesus.'"

Watching their peace and trust in God allowed her to feel peace too, she says. *The circumstances were not good, and yet, we sensed God's nearness and felt peace when it made no sense to feel that way. It was a powerful season that marked my heart forever.* The whole experience brought new meaning and depth to the instruction found in Philippians 4:4-5: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."

Drawing from this truth, she wrote the words to the album's first single, "Find You Here," a soft yet powerful song that talks about the surprising places we find God: *Here in the middle of the lonely night / Here in the middle of the losing fight / You're here in the middle of the deep regret / Here when the healing hasn't happened yet.*

The day Bannister went in for surgery, Holcomb was recording "Find You Here" in the studio with Ben Shive, co-producer on the album. She brought a copy of the scratch vocal to the hospital, and she and her mom and dad listened to it together that night.

Today, Bannister is cancer free. "I know that's not the end of every cancer story," says Holcomb. "But it was a really sweet gift to our family to get to listen to that song as we were walking through that scary & unknown season together. It was such a reminder for us that Jesus draws near to the brokenhearted. My prayer is that 'Find You Here' would help bring peace to anyone walking through a season that is overwhelming or heartbreaking."

Along with Jesus drawing near, Holcomb says another theme on this album is the promise that He will. *He'll bind up the brokenhearted / He'll set captives free from darkness / He'll breath hope into the hopeless...* so ring the lyrics on the aptly titled "He Will."

Holcomb began writing "He Will" when she got sick in the middle of a radio tour. She had been meditating on Isaiah 61—"He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners...to comfort all who mourn...to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes"—so instead of focusing on how bad she felt while on the road, she says she focused on God's promises.

"It was such a beautiful trip. I felt so bad but ended up just seeing God carry and support me so much...This whole record has been God reminding me that He's faithful even when you're sick.

Even when things don't turn out like you thought they would, He will bring healing and hope. He will be who He says He is."

Although music is a natural outpouring for Holcomb, and she has the accolades to back up her talent—*As Sure As the Sun* landed her a Dove Award for New Artist of the Year and a nomination for Best Pop/Contemporary Album—this growing artist calls herself "a very reluctant musician." Having had two kids since starting her last album, she knows the pull of creating and touring while also being a mom and a wife.

"I know this job often takes you away from home," she says. "Even though I love this, I feel called to this, and I feel alive when I'm doing it, it's still hard to leave my kids. At the end of the day, though, I just want to be faithful to the work God has called me into, whether that's being a mom, writing a song, or traveling to perform."

For *Red Sea Road*, Holcomb learned that she can write music anywhere, anytime, even with two small children at her feet. She wrote during nap times and at night, but if inspiration struck during waking hours for her kids, she would simply pull out her phone and start recording. Sometimes it was while cooking dinner, sometimes it was when she was pushing Emmylou, her daughter, on the swing.

"There's been a lot of, 'Hey, here's life. I'm going to write this song and you're going to be crawling around at my feet and dancing as I'm writing it.'" Maybe the writing process wasn't perfect, she says, but "it was beautiful."

When it comes to her music career, Holcomb has never held on too tightly: "I want to say yes if He's calling me to this. And I want to say yes if He's calling me away from this. So I just hold this thing with really open hands. Right after I released my first record, people were already asking, 'When's your next record?'"

Her response? "I don't know what's next, but it's more Jesus and it's more of God's Word and more of me asking Him to help me believe that His promises are true on the days that I struggle to believe."

And that's exactly what *Red Sea Road* turned out to be. Only, it's not just an album helping Ellie Holcomb to believe. It's an album that will sing light into the dark of anyone's life who is listening. It will remind us all that Jesus is near and no matter what path feels impossible right now, He will make a way where there seems to be no way. Because unseen hope makes a red sea road.