

# Mark Altrogge and Steve & Vikki Cook

## **BEFORE AND AFTER – THE EVOLUTION OF A SONG**

### **I. Introduction**

It's a myth that the Holy Spirit inspires songs like he inspired the Bible - word for word, even the melody and chords are inspired.

### **II. Getting Started**

- A. Sometimes I start with the music, most of the time with a nugget or initial idea.
- B. Jot down lots of notes/ideas with no thought of writing.
- C. Do a word search on Bible software. Print out all the related Scriptures.
- D. Start with a title.
- E. Write out several lines then begin to play around with your instrument. Ask myself - what is this song about in one sentence. The chorus must be the high point.

### **III. Be Diligent.**

- A. Write and rewrite. Experiment.
- B. Change keys, meter, speed.
- C. Try a completely new melody.
- D. Songwriting is a challenge like putting together a jigsaw puzzle or preparing a sermon.
- E. Sometimes it just takes completely rewriting a whole major section, a verse or a chorus.

### **IV. Pursue Input from Others**

- A. We want to be open to input and co-writing because we want to write the best songs we can for God's glory. It doesn't matter if the song comes out exactly like we originally wrote it; we want the song to serve the church and glorify God.

## B. Learning from PIXAR

1. "My strategy has always been: be wrong as fast as we can," says Andrew Stanton, Director of *Finding Nemo* and *WALL-E*, "Which basically means, we're gonna screw up, let's just admit that. Let's not be afraid of that."
2. So, for instance, Pixar does not begin new movies with a script. Far from it. Film ideas begin on rough storyboards until they work through thousands of problems throughout the process...
3. People at Pixar describe storyboards as the "hand-drawn comic book version" of a movie, a blueprint for the characters and actions. Storyboards are three-by-eight inch sheets of white paper upon which Pixar's story artists sketch ideas. Pixar used 27,565 storyboards on *A Bug's Life*, 43,536 for *Finding Nemo*, 69,562 for *Ratatouille*, and 98,173 for *WALL-E*.
4. "Every time we show a film for the first time, it [stinks]," Catmull will say. People then email their comments to the director to explain what they liked, what they didn't, and why, and substantial changes are made.
5. Directors say that Pixar's films will [stink] virtually until the last stage of production--problems are constantly identified and fixed.
6. What we see is not effortless genius. Through tireless iteration, toil, and (often) sleepless nights, the films start to come together.
7. Pixar's culture is defined by a pursuit of excellence and quality. Being able to go from [stink] to [nonstink] when developing a new film is a process of ongoing prototyping, a process that facilitates experimentation by the animators as it allows for a rigorous and continual scrutiny of the work in progress...
8. Finding ways to fail quickly, to invest less emotion and less time in any particular idea or prototype or piece of work, is a consistent feature of the work methods of successful creators. Despite the myths, it's hard work.

C. Write a lot of song vs. a few songs. Develop a "shotgun mentality."

D. Why submit it to others? They hear with fresh ears. We get used to a song and can't hear if it's good or bad. Most of the time (not all) "the editor is always right." Especially if 2 or more don't particularly like a song,

## V. Co-writing

A. Write a song and finish it to the best of your ability then send to others for input.

B. Write some ideas and send to others, like a verse or a chorus.

- C. Write one verse and one chorus.
- D. Write words and send to someone to write music.
- E. Write together on the spot.
- F. Sovereign Grace Songwriter retreats

**VI. Questions to ask of a song in the creative process**

- A. Can it be better?
- B. Can you come up with a more creative lyric? Get rid of cliches.
- C. Can you find any better words to use?
- D. Are the lyrics poetic?
- E. Are the lyrics doctrinally sound? Every single word?
- F. Does every line relate to the theme of the song? To the title of the song?
- G. Is the title fitting? Good? Does it express what the song is all about?
- H. Do the lyrics make sense?
- I. Would it be stronger if you had rhymes?
- J. Does it follow a consistent form?
- K. Are there any lyrical hooks?
- L. Can you make it any more concise? Can you cut anything out?
- M. Is the music catchy, memorable, or fun to sing? Does it move you?
- N. Does it have any musical hooks?
- O. Is it easy to sing? Are there any strange or difficult intervals?
- P. Does the bridge take you into the chorus quickly and effectively or is it too long or too wordy? --Don't bore us, get to the chorus.
- Q. Does the chorus take off appropriately?

## VII. Examples

### A. To Live Is Christ

1. And Those Who Sleep (5.28.10)
2. Those Who Fall Asleep (6.13.10)
3. Those Who Fall Asleep (w Sczebel) (7.13.10)
4. Those Who Fall Asleep (w Sczebel) (8.25.10)
5. Those Who Fall Asleep (8.30.10, 10:30 pm)
6. Dawn Will Come (9.4.10)
7. Jesus You Have Conquered (9.7.10)
8. Jesus You Have Triumphed (9.22.10, 8:39 am)
9. Before You Gave Us Life and Breath (9.22.10, 10:32 pm)
10. To Live Is Christ (11.16.10)
11. To Live Is Christ (w Kauflin) (11.17.10)
12. To Live Is Christ (12.14.10, 9:48 pm)
13. To Live Is Christ (12.14.10, 9:49 pm)
14. To Live Is Christ (w Kauflin) (12.15.10)

### B. You Have Been Raised

1. O Hope of the Sinner (6.26.10)
2. Because You Have Risen (7.13.10)
3. You Have Been Raised (w Bob K) (7.27.10)
4. You Have Been Raised (w Bob K) (8.25.10)
5. You Have Been Raised (w Bob K, Ken Boer)