

FOREWORD BY KYLE IDLEMAN
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF NOT A FAN



THE SONG

EVEN THE WISEST OF MEN WAS A FOOL FOR LOVE

CHRIS FABRY

Based on the motion picture screenplay by Richard L. Ramsey



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TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Chris Fabry's website at www.chrisfabry.com.

Find out more about *The Song* at www.thesongmovie.com and www.cityonahillproductions.com.

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The Song

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The Song is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the authors' imaginations.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fabry, Chris, date.

The song / Chris Fabry.

pages cm

“Based on the motion picture screenplay by Richard L. Ramsey”

ISBN 978-1-4964-0333-9 (sc)

1. Country musicians—Fiction. 2. Christian fiction. 3. Love stories. I. Title.

PS3556.A26S66 2014

813'.54—dc23

2014040110

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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June Bug

Almost Heaven

Not in the Heart

Borders of the Heart

Every Waking Moment

A Marriage Carol

(with Dr. Gary Chapman)

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1

FOREWORD

AS A PASTOR, I have the opportunity to talk with people in various stages of romantic relationships. All too often I see them when they are confused and hurting. Much of this discord results from the flood of false messages we receive in today's culture about how to deal with issues of dating, sex, and marriage. So what is the truth? What does God have to say about these things? After all, he's the creator—the architect—of romantic love.

A few years ago I did a series based on the Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon, and I realized how relevant it is in today's world of discarded relationships. Song of Songs is written as poetry, and while that poetic nature makes it beautiful, it can be difficult for people to understand and to connect to their current issues—even for pastors. Some church leaders avoid this book because they are uncomfortable with its up-close-and-personal love story.

That's why our team developed *The Song*, a modern adaptation of Solomon's life through his writings in Song of Songs and the book of Ecclesiastes. We wanted to make Solomon's

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story accessible to a wide audience—to an audience that might never have read Scripture at all. *The Song* began as a movie and church resources, but to make it available to as many people in as many different ways as we could imagine, we developed it into a novel as well. My prayer is that God will use the story of *The Song* contained in this novel to provide wisdom on issues of committed love, true beauty, and finding satisfaction in relationships. I pray it will awaken love in thousands of marriages. This story offers both hope and this promise to readers: “*Don’t quit. Don’t give up. God can take the broken pieces and make them beautiful again. It’s what he does best.*”

I’m grateful for the partnership with Chris Fabry on this project. Chris understands the heart of *The Song*, and his treatment of Jed and Rose’s story will hit home with readers in an authentic way. You will have the chance to spend time with them in a longer, fuller way than we were able to show you on the screen. And you’ll meet some characters you didn’t see in the movie. You might just see yourself or your spouse in their struggles and victories.

I’m proud to have this novel as part of all of our efforts for this project. I hope you enjoy this story and that it refreshes your belief in God’s gift of love and romance in your relationship.

Kyle Idleman

Bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and
teaching pastor at Southeast Christian Church

PROLOGUE

JED KING'S EYES ROLLED BACK, his head strangely numb like someone had sapped all feeling from his body. He clawed at his wrist, trying to get the thing there off, and there was blood but very little pain. He leaned back, feeling his will to live ebb.

If this were a song, he thought, it wouldn't be worth singing.

His life was a song played in three-four time by someone who came before him. He was writing new verses to another man's tune. The chorus was familiar but led to a place he didn't want to go. And that place was here, slumped back, vision blurred, unable to move.

Someone shrieked and fell next to him. He heard a wail, a keening. What rhymed with *cry*? *Die. Fly. Good-bye?*

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It was Shelby, her long brown hair matted and her face without makeup. She didn't look a thing like the pictures taken for the magazines. Now she was frantic and undone instead of exuding that quiet confidence that had attracted him. This self-assured sensation on the violin was freaking out, but he couldn't respond. Couldn't do anything but listen to her scream.

"No, no, no!" she yelled, her voice bouncing off the walls in the bathroom. Where was this place? A hotel? He couldn't remember.

His life had been a constant search for the right word, the right line. A snippet of dialogue between two friends that became part of a chorus. Something his son had said in a moment of giddy clarity, a headline in the newspaper, a question asked by a fan standing in line. And words that would capture the forbidden desire he felt for *her*, for the woman who wasn't his wife.

But now there were no words. They wouldn't come because the feeling was gone. His breath became shallow and his lungs ached and he could only hear his own heartbeat and feel that big fist squeezing inside his chest. The pumping grew slower, tighter, as if his heart were seizing like an engine about to grind to a halt.

"What did you do?" Shelby screamed.

What had he done? A good question. What had he done with all the chances, all the choices he meant to make, with the life he meant to live and the love he promised? He had to write that down. *The love I promised*. But there was no reason to write anything down. It was over. He was over.

“Jed! Listen to me! Jed? You have to stay awake!”

Sure, stay awake, he thought. *Simple. Easy. For everyone but me.*

Shelby slapped him hard but he didn't feel it, just saw her hand hit him and pull back as the tears flowed. “Jed? Talk to me!”

He wanted to. He really did. But there are some things you can't do even if you desire them. There are some choices you can't take back. Words said that can't be unsaid. Rhymes left hanging at the end of sentences. The gap between a good lyric and just a thought that was never completed.

Shelby tried to sop up the river of blood with a white towel, but it was a losing battle. Jed's hands drew into themselves and gnarled like an animal's claws in the throes of death. He could see the posts online in his mind, people sharing the sad news with each other. *“RIP, Jed. What a shame. What a waste.”*

News cameras would capture the covered body being wheeled to the back of an ambulance with its lights off, a sign that hope was gone, life was over. The reel would play again and again until the news cycle was over and something else replaced it.

Meaningless. Meaningless. Everything is meaningless. I have seen everything done under the sun. All of it is meaningless.

“Jed! Jed! Say something!”

His eyelids fluttered like a butterfly unleashed from a cocoon, and something bubbled from his soul. A word took root and grew until it stretched to his parched lips and he spoke it in a whisper.

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“Rose.”

Shelby turned on the shower and the water cascaded, the faucet fully open. Jets pounded, washing his face and matting his hair against his head, and he didn't care if he lived or died or drowned or floated. He didn't care at all.

And then he was somewhere else, at a place in his memory as vivid as his reflection in the steel faucet. Standing in the pouring rain. Then came a flash of lightning and words washed over him.

Pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

He had spent his life trying to gather people who would validate his music. Agents and fans and followers who clung to him. Now he was alone because Shelby had retreated into another room.

He heard pounding and voices.

Two men appeared and lifted him by his arms from the shower as more screaming reverberated in the room. Two other men in uniform restrained Shelby and asked what she was on. Jed blacked out, then found himself rolling on a gurney toward the ambulance. But the lights were on. What did that mean? Was there still hope?

He blinked and he was inside with someone over him, working on him, looking into his eyes as if begging him to hang on. Funny. This must be what fans saw as they watched him perform. Looking into the face of someone performing his craft, doing the very thing he was born to do. Now Jed was the one looking up.

He blinked again and saw the fluorescent lights of the

hospital, the gurney racing through the ER. People in scrubs rushing toward him, sticking him, putting wires and tubes inside him. He wanted to speak, wanted to tell them how sorry he was to put them through this. He wanted to tell *her* how sorry he was. He wondered if he would ever have a chance to speak again, to say the words trapped inside.

Then, like a wave, it hit him. Reality washed over him like that time when, as a kid, he'd been standing in the ocean, not looking, and the tide pulled his feet out from under him. A wave hit him from behind and sent him sprawling, head over heels, into the surf. Out of control.

And then darkness.

The flat line of the heart monitor.

No dark tunnel. No piercing light or brilliant flowers or any of that. No music, no sound. No angels or demons. Nothing but darkness from which the words surfaced, white on black. His life in words. Everything he knew to be true.

I looked and saw all the evil that was taking place under the sun. I declared that the dead are happier than the living. But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

Jed King's life rolled back like a scroll and on it was the good and the bad, the mistakes, the triumphs, the gains and losses and all he tried to keep hidden. Darkness and light. The song he had been singing with every heartbeat.

Part One



CHAPTER I

HE WAS BORN JEDIDIAH KING and he tried to live up to the name. His father was David King, a vagabond country artist known for his hard drinking and living, at least for most of his career. Jed's father put everything into his music and sang as hard in the small honky-tonks he started out playing as the arenas that hosted him toward the end of his life onstage. He sang and tumbled his way into the hearts of fans worldwide. Men on tractors in the heartland sang along. Women in trailers and mansions echoed the words to "Can't Hold On." He was just a poor man frightened of his shadow, but he learned how to turn his fear into tunes with a message that cut a path and made a connection.

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David King gave his son two things other than his name—a love to build things with his hands and a desire to write songs with his heart. Jed had picked up the hammer and saw like his father long before he picked up the guitar. But once he found those six strings, there was no letting go.

He'd watched his father play the guitar since he was young. Watched the placement of his fingers on the strings and the way he strummed or picked. It was as if the instrument were an extension of the man, and every time his father grabbed that instrument, he came alive. He could be dead tired, nodding off on the couch, and then he'd see the guitar in the corner and make his way over and pick it up. His eyes danced as he worked on some new tune or reworked an old one.

Watching his dad's band work together as a team was a holy experience. Something about the process of creating music made Jed want the same.

A man at the music store in their town who didn't know Jed or his musical lineage had let him go into the back room and play the cherry-red Guild Starfire that hung on the wall. Not play it, actually, just hold it. The man told him everything about the guitar—the wood, the craftsmanship, what made it the best. And then he picked up the guitar and began a riff Jed could hardly believe. The guy played with his ear down on the side of the instrument, listening to its inner workings, and he played from memory a song that took Jed's breath away.

“How do you learn to play it like that?”

“Take lessons. Learn the chords and runs.” He held up the

guitar. “But music doesn’t come from here. You can’t learn that from anybody on the planet. Music comes from here.” He tapped his chest. “It’s something you either have or you don’t. Not having it is bad. But having it and not using it is worse.”

He showed Jed G, C, and D, then gave him a chord chart from behind the counter and told him to come back in a week. Jed went straight home and found his father’s guitar, the one someone special had given him with the crown emblem carved on it. He had written some of his biggest songs on it and said it brought him luck.

Jed picked it up and spread his fingers into the G position, though he found it easier to put the ring finger on the first string instead of the pinkie. He played and it sounded close, but he wasn’t pressing hard enough. Then he moved to C and it took him several seconds just to get his fingers down on the right strings and the right frets. How could players possibly change as fast as they did?

He moved to D, just three fingers and strumming four strings, but that was the hardest. He’d seen players move all the way up the neck of the guitar and put their fingers over the strings in a bar chord. Or they played the lead way up the neck one or two strings at a time. But how?

“I wondered if you’d ever pick it up,” his father said behind him.

He walked in with those big cowboy boots clacking across the hardwood. Jed swallowed hard and held the guitar out in an apology.

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“I saw you the other day when we were working outside. Putting your thumb across the strings. You interested?”

Jed nodded.

“Where’d you learn the chords?” his father said.

“Guy down at the music store showed me.”

His father’s beard had grown a little longer and his hair was wavy as he sat on the bed. He wore a T-shirt with a pocket, not the normal stage getup people associated with him, and this felt good, natural, to Jed.

“Did he tell you to use that ring finger for the G?”

“No, he said to use the pinkie.”

“Good man. He’s right.”

“But it’s easier to use the ring finger for me.”

His father smiled. “That’s how I play it too. Sometimes I work the pinkie in and use the ring to play the second string right there. Try that.”

When Jed couldn’t get it, his father took the guitar and showed him—not impatiently, but like a man who tinkers with cars might twist the radiator cap and say, “Lefty loosey, righty tighty.”

“Can you show me some more?” Jed said.

“Sure.”

The next morning Jed woke up to find a Guild guitar at the foot of his bed. He was playing it when his dad came downstairs to the breakfast table. “Fellow at the music store said you took a real shine to the hollow body he had down there. This one doesn’t need an amp. You like it?”

Jed could hardly contain the grin. “I love it.”

His father wiped the sleep out of his eyes and coughed, then poured milk on some cereal. “No pressure with that. I’m not giving you the guitar to make you follow in your old man’s footsteps. There’s a lot of places these feet have gone I hope you never go.”

“Like where?”

“We’ll have that conversation. What I mean is, I’m not expecting you to make a career out of this. Unless you want to. You understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You’d be good, you know.”

“Sir?”

“You’d be good at singing. I’ve heard you.”

“Yes, sir.”

That was all it took and Jed was off and running. Funny how a few words over a bowl of cereal could change a boy’s life. Funny how a well-tuned guitar could too.