

“Saved From Drowning”

By Cathy Love

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Readings:

Psalms 139 verses 7-12

Matthew 14 verses 22-33

Ephesians 2 verses 1-10

Most of you will know that I love researching the meaning behind the song. Today is one of those days. God lead me to this story about songs in an unusual way.

(As I spoke the following words, I moved across the front of the church.) Our granddaughter danced and earlier this year, she participated in a production number called Oceans. I watched the performance and heard the music several times. A production number is a dance which a large number of dancers participate in a themed dance. This dance has a melody of songs in it and the dancers come and go from the stage in a beautifully choreographed number. The talent of the person who selects the music and choreographs such a large number of dancers and knows exactly which dancer belongs where at each point of the dance and can adapt the dance to various stage sizes, amazes me.

Wow, did you see what just happened? I went off on this tangent about the dance and choreography and that is not what this message is about. I started out over there and wound up over here. God called me to talk about music but look how easily we all moved away from his message by an interesting set of facts. I went off on a tangent and took all of you with me.

Let's take a minute so I can regroup – ah here we are, the music stand, the x on the floor and the poor tech crew now knows where to find me. I promise to get to the message, but I do have to continue a bit with the dance performance. I was unable to attend an out-of-town competition which included the production but it was livestreamed so I was still able to watch online on my coffee break. A coworker – whose father was a Minister - watched with me and stated her surprise that two songs related to God and faith were included in the music. Although Courtney had played the songs for me and I had heard them many times, I had never really **heard** the words. We do that sometimes don't we? A few months ago, I talked about the song The Same Love and pointed out how many times God calls us and how many times we miss his calling. Didn't I just do the same thing? Hear the songs over and over and miss the meaning?

One song was Avril Lavigne's "Head Above Water". Now Avril Lavigne's music has been listed as pop punk, alternative rock, pop rock and post grunge. I don't even know what post grunge means. But let's see why I was intrigued by this song. The other song, Where Feet May Fail was written by three other composers and is a story for another day. Now this song will not appeal to everyone however, please pay attention to the words of the song and then I will explain the story.

Play the lyric video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v686vG5PSac>

So how did Avril get to this song from pop punk? The Christian Post says that Avril was born into a devout Christian household and sang in church choirs, local festivals and country fairs. She grew up in Napanee, Ontario. Her parents, to keep her in line with their strict Christian faith, are said to have carefully monitored her music selection. She was first noticed when she sang in a bookstore in 1999 and won a contest the same year to sing with Shania Twain. By the age of 16, she had quit school, with parental permission, and moved to New York signing a contract worth 1.25 million dollars. She was given the name Punk Princess for her choice of outfits and multicoloured hair. She was considered a successful performer.

Imagine the disdain of people who knew her background, knew her when she was young and knew of her initial faith. Imagine the judgement, the dismissal of her decisions, the people who gave up on her when she chose the path of pop punk over Christian music.

That is another part that spoke to me. She went off the path, but she came back to God. Although she became very wealthy, it wasn't enough to save her. God was the answer. Let's explore what happened to bring her to beseeching God to keep her head above water.

In 2014, she was diagnosed with a severe case of Lyme Disease and nearly died. Apparently, she saw multiple specialists before being diagnosed which is a true issue with Lyme disease.

She thought her life was over. She is quoted as saying "One night, I thought I was dying and I had accepted that I was going to die. My mom laid with me in bed and held me. I felt like I was drowning. Under my breath, I prayed, 'God please help to keep my head above the water.' In that moment, the songwriting of this album began."

Later, when she was starting to feel better, she hosted a party and met Travis Clark and invited him to finish the song with her. She put her story out to

the world with the statement “I hope that my words in this song (...) bring you hope, faith, light, and strength and that you also are able to keep your head above water.”

This song, in comparison to her past is described by Wikipedia as “an empowering pop rock and Christian rock ballad,” while Avril described it as a spiritual experience. She writes “Those were the worst years of my life as I went through both physical and emotional battles. I was able to turn that fight into music I’m really proud of. I wrote songs in my bed and on the couch and recorded there mostly as well. Words and lyrics that were so true to my experience came pouring out of me effortlessly.”

“I had accepted death and could feel my body shutting down. I felt like I was drowning. Like I was going under water and I just needed to come up for air. Like I was in a river being pulled in a current. Unable to breathe. Praying to God for Him to help me just keep my head above the water. To help me see through the stormy weather.”

Avril is also working to bring awareness to Lyme Disease through the Avril Lavigne Foundation which has released Head Above Water t-shirts to raise money to help people affected by Lyme disease who cannot afford treatment.

So once again God stepped into a life and was received. Avril is reaching an unimaginable number of people with her music and helping them through her foundation.

Many people will dismiss this song as not theologically relevant but it reaches people who don't sit in the pews at Church, who maybe have no basis in religion or have had no introduction to God, it has it's own ministry potential to save lives through the song, the Foundation and through the message.

We are called to be messengers of the word, to be ministers of the truth; to be missionaries. God doesn't tell us how to do it, he tells us what to do. I don't know if Avril has continued her faith journey through music because that is not what this message is about although this song remained on the Billboard Christian Singles chart top 10 for at least 2 months in late 2018 and had 57 million YouTube views in just three months. (Paper, Katherine Gillespie Jan 14, 2019)

We have all had those times in our lives when we felt like we were drowning, and I believe we have all said a similar prayer to God. Maybe not with these exact words but something similar. God is always there waiting for us.

Matthew Ruttan, A Pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Barrie in his July 8, 2024 email of The Up Devotional explains Psalm 139 verses 8 to 10 which we read earlier as ... 'god's presence is to be found in the dark places as well. He is with us in the valley of the shadow of death. When the darkness of night descends upon our minds. And when we feel lost in the deep, deep waters of our own regret or pain. When you feel far away from him, he is not far away from you. There is nowhere where you can go where he is not. His GPS never fails. He is never lost. He never loses track of you. Darkness to you is not darkness to him. His love is never drowned. When you question his proximity or care, remember that in Christ he is closer than our own skin. He is close with love, with forgiveness, with guidance, with power and with truth."

Powerful words of comfort in a very confusing and sometimes difficult world.

Let us pray the some of words of the song Head Above Water because even if we are not dealing with anything significant right now, someone is. Gracious God many times we have prayed something similar in the storms of life. We have begged you to help us, to carry us through these storms or feeling we are in the deepest waters and begging you to pull us up before we drown. Our

prayer may have been similar to these words, God keep my head above water, Don't let me drown, pull me up from down below I'm underneath the undertow, hold me close, I need you now, I need you most.

And I can't see in the stormy weather I can't seem to keep it all together, I can't swim the ocean like this forever, Come rescue me, I'll be waiting. For those around us needing this prayer, we offer it up for them, don't let them drown, let them feel your presence and love. May we remember darkness to us is not darkness to you. May we not be too quick to judge others when they turn from you as we pray for their return to your presence. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Goodmorningamerica.com by Andrea Tuccillo
Todtube – Michael Foust