

Joel Engle's Story

As a young boy growing up in San Francisco, Joel Engle never knew his father. Joel's mother raised him as best she knew how, managing to provide by working a nine to five job at an oil company. Tragedy struck when Joel found his mother lying on the kitchen floor after suffering a stroke and was the one to call 911. Soon after she passed away leaving an eleven year old Joel in the care of his elderly grandparents. Just three years later there was even more upheaval when Joel's grandfather passed away and his grandmother went to live in a retirement home. "Life was basically miserable and I was constantly afraid," reflects Joel. "I was consumed with thoughts of what was going to happen to me. I felt alone, unloved, and unhappy." At the age of fourteen, there was no other option for a distraught Joel but to check himself into the local Baptist Children's Home.

While living at the children's home, one thing that was consistent was Joel's involvement in a youth choir at church as well as choir at school. "I loved music more than any other activity," says Joel. "When I sang something inside me came alive and I could express myself in such a powerful way. I also had a burning desire to write songs and began taking piano lessons from a lady at church, but was absolutely horrible and I hated it."

At the age of 16, Joel met some close friends of his house parents by the name of Dale and Nadine Engle. A bond was formed and soon after, he ended up not only moving in to live with them, but also became part of the family by taking their last name as his. It was a landmark year for Joel, including his realization that Christ was the only one that would never leave him. From then on with his hope firmly planted, there was no looking back.

In fact, Joel, who had dreaded those piano lessons so much, found himself staring at an old, brown upright piano in his new room at the Engle household. "I just stared at it because I couldn't play anything much except for the infamous 'Chopsticks,'" Joel laments. "My older brother Gregg would come home from college where he was music major and play all of these cool songs that he'd written at school. He tried to show me some stuff, but it just never translated to my own abilities. Once after Gregg left for school, God began to speak to me. I longed to use my talents for Him. I prayed 'God if you will give me the ability to play the piano, I will never sing a song or write a song that doesn't glorify your name!'" Joel's boldness and surrender was rewarded. Within a week's time Joel found himself at the piano, playing like he known the music his whole life long.

And so the story continued with a renewed passion. Joel went on to study music and theology on scholarship at Oklahoma Baptist University. While there, he met and eventually married his wife Valerie. After college, he toured with Dawson McAllister student conferences for 3 years, playing in front of crowds upward of 500,000 per year. Then in 1997, Joel and wife Val who shared his heart for ministry, started Spin360, a modern worship resource that provides worship leaders with songs, chord charts, sheet music, and other tools (currently over 9,000 churches worldwide utilize Spin360). Joel's piano and vocal talents were also simultaneously being put to good use with a constant slew of camp dates, conferences, and outreach opportunities with the Billy Graham Association, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Student Life.

All the while, Joel was making his own independent album releases to go hand-in-hand with the ministry dates he was active in. "I had to go through a huge healing process over my growing up years," says Joel. "The songs I was writing became natural expressions of how God delivered me from the wounds of the past. There are so many Christians today who live in pain secretly that I want to give hope to by showing how God healed me."

Made For Worship, Joel's label debut on Doxology Records, embraces the hope of Christ and the essential principle that worship is, and by Joel's standard should be, the heart and soul of the Christian faith walk. "This album has the spirit of worship woven within the lyrics, arrangements, and delivery." He adds "What I most want to convey through this album though is that worship is so much more than just a musical experience. Worship is loving your wife with Christ's love. Worship is playing with your daughter in the backyard when you could be playing golf. Worship is being completely honest and vulnerable with other believers on a consistent basis."

Joel's songwriting and artist sensibilities were so compelling that they brought music industry veteran Darrell A. Harris (Newsboys, Twila Paris, Phillips, Craig & Dean) out of retirement and back into the recording studio. As the chief A&R guru in the making of Made For Worship, Harris recalls the tugging at his emotions when he first heard Joel's music. "When Joel sat down at our small piano, his memorable melodies and Ewan McGregor-like voice immediately engaged my ear. His lyrics were scriptural, worship-oriented and profoundly personal as they told stories and painted pictures. Both the young man and his Christ-centered songs moved me to tears, and I was hooked."

For Joel Engle, worship isn't something he does; rather worship is something he aims to live. And with one listen to the songs of Made For Worship, there is no denying the testament of God's grace and power to overcome whatever adversity life brings. It is because of that grace and power that Joel has lived, and it is the reason why he worships today.