

RYAN Stevenson

It's impossible to fully appreciate life apart from mortality. Likewise, it's impossible to comprehend grace apart from our shortcomings. On his full-length Gotee Records debut, *Fresh Start*, GRAMMY®-nominated singer/songwriter Ryan Stevenson declares he has a firm grasp on both. Produced by Bryan Fowler (TobyMac) and Chuck Butler (Jamie Grace), the album is a candid and hopeful glimpse at the heart of a man living in the midst of Christ's unmerited affection and grace.

"He gives us a clean slate," says Ryan. "He lets us start over unconditionally. Every day, He gives us a fresh start."

The highly anticipated project comes on the heels of a slew of awards few artists achieve in their entire career, much less before their first release. With two #1 singles (one as an artist and one as a co-writer), a GRAMMY® nomination, ASCAP honors and major tour bills with the likes of TobyMac, Newsboys and Matt Maher, among others, Ryan has already distinguished himself as a rare talent whose unique perspective guides his honest lyrics and sonic sensibilities.

Initially, his songwriting abilities caught the ear of one of Christian music's most influential artists, TobyMac. The multi-Platinum-selling co-founder of Gotee Records discovered the power of Ryan's pen through "Speak Life," a track he co-wrote with Ryan and Jamie Moore. The song became a multi-week radio smash for Toby in 2012 and was nominated for a GRAMMY® Award, ultimately paving the way for a life-changing invitation for Ryan to join the Gotee family.

In addition to Toby's recording of "Speak Life"—Ryan's own acoustic rendition of the song was part of his 2014 Gotee EP, *Holding Nothing Back*—the mentor and friend has continued to champion Ryan's talents, giving him a platform on several of his blockbuster tours. He also lent his voice to Ryan's recent #1 hit, "Not Forgotten," a cornerstone of the long-awaited album, *Fresh Start*.

Track-by-track, *Fresh Start* unveils Ryan's story and his purpose, acoustic guitar-driven roots and driving pop beats propelling the transparency of his testimony. "My heart is so about revival," he shares. "I hope and pray this record, these songs and my testimony can lead people to be awakened and have an encounter with God."

The deeply personal "From The Ground Up (Bonanza)" is a musical visit—complete with laid-back snaps and whistles—home to the dairy farm where Ryan grew up in southern Oregon. Cows, early mornings, dirty hands and diligence were the making of a childhood that prepared him for a life he could never have imagined, while giving him strength to stand firm in life's battles and trust in God's presence.

"We're all just people and we all face storms," says Ryan. "Even when it feels like we are lost at sea for months at a time, we're never forgotten. God is inside every storm we face."

That confidence inspired "Eye of the Storm," or as he says, "the hymn of the record." An ode to the tangible evidence of God at work in the midst of darkness, the gospel-tinged songs features GabeReal of Diverse City. A fitting album closer, it also brings to mind one of the most powerful and life-altering moments Ryan ever experienced.

As a child, he always held a fascination with the medical field. Following college, he earned his paramedic license, never dreaming that life as a paramedic could have led him straight back to his true passion—music. "As soon as I started the paramedic phase of life the Lord began conditioning me, opening up my eyes to the reality and fragility of humanity," says Ryan. "That job totally changed me. But about six years in, it started wearing on me. I knew I needed to figure out a way to make my living through music. I prayed for God to show me how or to help me let go of my clenching grip of these dreams."



Help came like a bolt of lightning—literally. Just a few weeks after that prayer, Ryan’s paramedic team was called to reach a woman who had been struck by lightning. “She was badly burned. No pulse, no breathing...I knew she wasn’t going to make it,” he says. “We loaded her to head to the hospital and I started CPR and revived her on the way.”

As if that wasn’t miracle enough, the woman, Lara, reconnected with Ryan a year after the accident and a friendship was born. Ryan told her about his love for music and, while not a believer herself, Lara provided the funds for his first project.

It began to look like the clouds were clearing and the storm was subsiding, but things changed when the first record deal he signed fell through. “I was devastated,” Ryan remembers. “It was a pinnacle moment in my life. My mom had just died of bone cancer and my wife had miscarried our twins. I fell apart. But that day, I had a massive encounter with the Holy Spirit. I was sitting on a dock at a lake and could hear this still, small voice saying, *‘I’m so glad we’re here today. Don’t you remember what you prayed for? You’ve been praying to see My heart. I’m trying to show you. I’m not causing all these things to happen, but I can cause all of them to work together for good. I haven’t forgotten about you.’* In that moment, I knew I wasn’t supposed to quit.”

“When I was going through the really dark days, Brennan Manning’s *The Ragamuffin Gospel* and William P. Young’s *The Shack* impacted me,” he continues. “I was in a season of stripping blinders off my eyes and hammering down this notion of grace that Manning puts out there—the idea of embracing the fact that I’m accepted and there’s nothing I can do about it.”

The realization of this truth led Ryan to pen another pivotal song for *Fresh Start*: “All Yours.” The album’s second single features an infectious, guitar driven pop hook, its sing-along chorus conveying the freedom found in giving everything up to Christ. “Scripture says His power works best when we’re weak,” Ryan explains. “In spite of my humanity and my frail, weak emotional make-up, this song became a declaration from a grateful heart. Because God is so good, I don’t want to grieve Him. I want to be all His.”

While soaking up Manning’s wisdom, yet another song was born, “Dare You To Trust My Love.” “In one of his sermons, Manning asks what if Jesus were to walk in a room and sit down with you in your dirtiest, most disgusting experience and ask, *‘Do you believe that I love you? I dare you to. I dare you to trust the fact that there are no skeletons in your closet or secret sins you’re hiding that could ever deter My love for you,’*” Ryan shares. “Learning to believe what Jesus says about us rather than what the enemy says is the heart of that song and my hope for everyone who hears it.”

The ups and downs of his own journey—while painful at times—have proven to be critical seasons for Ryan’s growth, and for the message infused throughout his music. “Scripture says His mercies are new every morning,” Ryan concludes. “You can never run or fall too far. He’s not going to change if you mess up. He’s not going to get mad. He is Love and His Love is relentless.”

For Ryan Stevenson, what was lost has been found. What was broken has been redeemed. And what looked like a dead end has become a *Fresh Start*.

