

Anthony Evans – *Real Life / Real Worship*

Written By: Mark Geil

For singer/songwriter/worship leader **Anthony Evans**, things were right with the world. Life was hectic, to be sure, but it was good. A decade in music meant his calendar was full with dates at churches, concerts, and major conferences. His passionate, versatile voice was sought after for recording work in multiple Christian music formats. His growing catalog of worship albums consistently pointed the church to a God worthy of praise. Yes, his world was busy, but good, before a series of events brought Evans a life-changing realization: his world had grown insular. Confined. Small.

The expansion of Anthony Evans' world started when he appeared on Season 2 of the hit NBC singing competition show *The Voice*. Picked by Christina Aguilera to join her team, Evans' run on the show was highlighted by a "battle round" performance that many still view as one of the greatest vocal moments of the series. As he advanced on the show, supervising director of casting for NBC asked him, "Why are you 30 years old and I've never heard of you?"

The question resonated with Evans in a way that evoked not pride, but humility. "That was the first time I've had somebody 'broader' than Christian music say something that made me think, *Anthony, your ability was not just made for inside the 4 walls of a church.*"

As it turns out, *The Voice* was just the beginning. After his run on the show ended, he got a call from L.A. producer Adam Anders asking him to come back to Los Angeles for a few months to record guide vocals for CeeLo Green. Three months turned into two years as Evans worked with the likes of Celine Dion and Mariah Carey and was eventually hired to return to *The Voice* as a talent producer. As he split time between his hometown of Dallas and the far-outside-the-Bible-belt environs of L.A., Evans realized the limitations in his capacity to connect with people outside of the church.

"L.A. is gritty. My friends there might say, 'What are you talking about when you say, 'Lamb that was slain'? You sound like you're in a cult.'" This new world instilled in Evans two important things: a desire to communicate more effectively with a broader audience, and a realization that there is a vast common ground of shared experiences to catalyze that communication.

Drawing from these experiences, Evans' newest album, *Real Life / Real Worship* emerges from the truth that genuine worship can often be better understood through genuine life experiences. "Being out in L.A. has made me think more progressively. I want to make sure I'm not compromising my message or my faith, but I also want to speak in terms that connect with people who don't necessarily live in a church. Half this record is about real life, things everyone goes through, Christian or not. And sometimes it takes that real life to understand the meaning of real worship."

One surprising thing Evans found in L.A. was that truth can come from unconventional and unexpected sources. "You never know what could open up your eyes" is the opening declaration of "I Found You," a song dedicated to a group of new friends who have shown Evans grace, compassion, and, yes, sometimes convicting truth. "One in particular is the polar opposite of me – I am not sure he would feel comfortable going to church– but we would have conversations, and I promise you, he would be speaking truth to me like we were at church. This song is about people who have, in unconventional ways, pointed me to God."

"I Found You" is evidence of an extraordinary new sound for Evans. The song was written as a fairly gentle ballad, but in the hands of producer Max Stark, it has become layers of loops and EDM fit for a club, which

matches the Real Life connection in the lyric. Stark is a young product of the Musicians Institute in Hollywood, and Evans was initially hesitant to work with him. "I found Max through a connection from *The Voice*," Evans recalls. "I had second thoughts. I didn't know how it would end up, so I hired Max to work on only one song. He completely smashed that song, and it quickly went to 10 songs!"

Evans notes Stark's work on "Somebody to Call Home" as his favorite musical moment on the album. The song was another moment of reflection for Evans, realizing that he's spent 10 years working on a career, but he hasn't worked on building a home. "That is me being completely emo! It's my honest, real life emotions when it comes to having my own family. At the end of your life, you can't call a bunch of records 'home'."

The honesty and passion continue in "What Could Have Been," a song about finally determining to voice the words you've always been afraid to say to someone. When fear keeps a heart hidden, and words of love are never spoken, the feeling of regret that follows is a pain known by so many.

A line in the song's chorus – *Gotta let go of fear and take a chance* – actually speaks to part of Evans' L.A. story as well. As this bigger, more "worldly" universe swirled around him, Evans began to face fear and doubt. "I felt like God was in my corner," he recalls, "but I started to wonder what people were going to think of me, which caused me to wonder if this really was God's will for me. Sometimes our fear that God will judge us if we make the wrong decision, or hold back His love, keeps us from making decisions that are not wrong." Today, Evans speaks with confidence: "I would love the whole dynamic of how this happened to inspire people to step into new opportunities, to think outside the box, to not be fearful, because on the other side of that fear could be an experience that changes your life."

Part of that confidence comes from the promises found in God's word to which Evans has been able to cling through all the transition. His favorite verse, Philippians 1:6, is expressed in the joyous first single, "Never Fail." "That promise has sustained me because I am an emotional artist. I go up and down, and there are moments when I feel like life has got me, like there's no way God can work all these things together. What I have to realize is that my emotions don't have intellect. As profound and as real as they feel, they can't think. So when I have those days when I feel abandoned and like God isn't there, I have to bounce those emotions off the truth, just to get my equilibrium right. That verse is my equilibrium. This is His promise, and He doesn't break His promises."

For Christians, real life begets real worship when we live that life comprehending that God will never fail us, and that He is greater than our circumstances. When God expanded Anthony Evans' world by 1,200 miles and infinitely more emotions and experiences, He knew that worship would follow. The result is a record that Evans is more eager to share with the world than any he's made before. And this time around, that world is a whole lot bigger.