

Why I listen to K-LOVE Radio

By [Katherine Willis Pershey](#)

July 31, 2014

I got "saved" at a Carman concert when I was 12. It wasn't the first time. But it was the first time I asked Jesus into my heart *publicly*, at an altar call. My friends and I became disciples overnight.

I wasn't, however, a disciple of Jesus—at least not directly. If I was discipled to anyone in middle school, it was to the pop stars of the [contemporary Christian music](#) scene. My friends and I traded cassette tapes and begged our parents and youth group leaders to take us to concerts. In my circle, DC Talk and Amy Grant were demigods. We loved Michael W. Smith's "Friends" song (obviously). One of the biggest fights I ever had with my parents was over their refusal to let me listen to Christian heavy metal. (My father, a professional jazz musician, has his limits.) I settled for Petra, though they always struck me as a terrifically watered-down alternative to Bride.

And then, as if on cue, I soured on the whole scene: the faith, the church, and most definitely the music. My chief critique of Christianity was that it was shallow, an unsurprising conclusion given that my personal piety amounted to pushing "play" on my boombox. I dubbed They Might Be Giants over Michael W. Smith's "Friends."

In college, I found myself rediscovering the faith and the church. But I still had absolutely zero interest in CCM music.

Still, music maintained a fairly central role in my spiritual life. I sang first in a gospel ensemble, and later a bluegrass gospel band, and finally the staid church choirs of the congregations I served. Furthermore, I happily discovered bands like Over the Rhine and the Innocence Mission, whose lyrics are saturated with great theology and are blessedly free of insipid praise choruses.

But man cannot live on Christ-haunted Americana alone (or something like that). I've always had a thing for commercial radio—it's a car thing—and I've cycled through sundry stages on my radio presets. There was the R&B era, the country period, and the summers of Ke\$ha and Lady Gaga. (There is something about Midwestern

humidity that demands a catchy hook.)

Then recently, I did something surprising. I—a liberal mainline pastor with an iPod full of highbrow music—became an avid listener of [\(Positive, Encouraging\) K-LOVE](#). I returned to CCM.

Robin Thicke gets the blame and/or credit for my newest radio habit. Last summer, when "Blurred Lines" was garnering equal amounts of radio play and feminist outrage, I was in a pickle. I *loved* that song. I mean, yes, it's terrible. It's an unapologetic apologetic for rape culture, and I was supposed to hate it. And yet every time that telltale intro kicked in, I knew I wanted it.

But I didn't *want* to want it. And when my small children started singing along, I knew that it was time for me to come to Jesus. Again.

It started innocently enough. I tuned in to Moody Radio's weekend shows, and soon I found myself on a Wednesday wishing that Chris Fabry would stop talking so that I could hear some music.

By now, I know all the popular CCM songs, to my poor Dylan-fan husband's great consternation. I can sing along with Jamie Grace (*This feeling can't be wrong/ I'm about to get my worship on*) and The Afters (*I've seen joy and I've seen pain/ On my knees, I call Your name*) and TobyMac (*Speak Life, speak Life/ To the deadest darkest night*).

One of my favorites is the Newsboys hit "We Believe." It's currently at the top of the K-LOVE chart. This amuses me, because the last CCM concert I attended was the Newsboys. That was in the early nineties.

By that time, I was done. I thought that CCM was a joke, that Christianity was a ruse, that youth group was lame, and that God was nonexistent and/or kind of a jerk. I suffered through the concert solely because it was my ticket to hanging out with a boy I liked. And now here I am, some 20 years later, reverently humming along: *Let our faith be more than anthems/ Greater than the songs we sing/ And in our weakness and temptations/ We believe, we believe.*

It's not quite as catchy as "What rhymes with hug me?" But now that I've stopped letting Robin Thicke drug me with his intoxicating yet inexcusable refrains, I have a much clearer head. I've realized that I don't *want* crappy pop music that fills my car

with debauchery.

What I want is crappy pop music that fills my car with Jesus.