

EPI

Vineyard Community Church

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,
It is now the season of Advent, a time to reflect and wait expectantly for our Savior to come. As we remember his first arrival, in the form of a helpless infant, we also look to his second coming. Just as Jesus worked tirelessly during his time on earth to bring salvation and healing to all people, we must follow his example. If you've been here the past few Sundays, then the mission of A Church That Rescues is familiar to you. Rescuing people, both in the church and outside of it, is an integral part of our CHRISTianity. Our desire to be like Christ

cannot remain an internal goal – it must extend from within us to others, for this is the example Jesus gave us. I pray during this unusual time of year, when busyness and materialism creep alongside reverence and charity, that you consider how Jesus would want to see his followers observe the holiday that bears his name. I pray that you seek out your mission and pursue it with Christ-like urgency. And, as always, I pray that the words on the following pages serve to inspire, bless, and encourage you.

Allison Gonzalez, Editor

Erin Collins

God Ruined My Life, For the Better

Reflections on Foster Parenting

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” - Isaiah 6:5

The decision to be a foster parent didn't happen quickly for me. As with most big decisions, the idea incubated for a long time, quiet and under the weight of everything else I pile upon my shoulders. God influences me and changes my circumstances such that it's only after the

fact that I realize that he completely rearranges what I spend years agonizing over. The short story version of how I came to the edge where he asked me to jump is this: I felt strongly that I needed to not pursue graduate studies in music the summer after I graduated from college in 2003. This is also the same time that I started coming to VCC, incidentally. The only job I could find was teaching high school students with special needs in a poor town in Northwest Georgia. The entire year broke me. I lived alone in the shadow of a mountain in a town where I knew approximately two people. My students

Vineyard Community Church

Visitors' Center

Welcome to Vineyard Community Church, we're so glad you're here! Our mission is to know and fearlessly make known the love of God to the ends of the earth.

Here are a few ways in which we work to fulfill this mission: Community Groups, Kid's Community, Prayer Ministry, The Storehouse Food Pantry, and mission trips and financial support of Arms of Love Children's Home in Nicaragua.

If you want to learn more about VCC, our ministry programs, or how to get plugged

in, pick up a Test Drive Card from the Information Area or the Community Group wall. Or, you can find more information about the church here:

www.vcommunity.org

770-565-1505

2692 A25 Sandy Plains Rd.

Sunday Services are at 10:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

were painfully poor, such that most of them didn't get to eat during the weekends. I had students lose parents, houses to meth lab explosions, and of course there is the despair of cognitive disabilities in the face of limited resources and no opportunities in the surrounding community. After that year, I moved back to the Marietta area and continued teaching students with special needs and began to plug in to the church.

During this time, I had visions of a school/home for children that included an entire community of support. I dreamt of ropes courses, artists in residence, house moms and dads, a garden, etc. I talked about it to people at church and scoped out land in the mountains. I was 22 years old. During the next few years, VCC ventured into a sermon series and prayer ministry entitled "Reviving the Soul". I have notebooks full of detailed and prophetic dreams that God gave me during this time. I had vivid dreams about rescuing orphans, finding parents for

children, baptizing children, bringing children out of violent and dangerous situations. During one particular prayer service, God spoke to me and told me that he would make me a mother to many. He told me that I was to love the children that no one else wanted, and that my children would not necessarily be from my own womb. I saw a vision of myself holding hands with a little girl who was missing an arm, and we were talking and laughing, making our way into a garden to work. I haven't met that little girl yet, but I look forward to the day when we can hold hands, laugh, and work the garden soil together.

In the years since, I have been abroad several times. VCC supported me as I went to Chiang Mai and Muang Nga, Thailand to scope out children's homes. I knew that we didn't need to reinvent how to run a children's home. I've gone several times to the Arms of Love Children's Home in Jinotepe, Nicaragua, with others from VCC, and have fallen in love with the

children and staff. I know that I will return there, and continue with the ministry that VCC engages in.

During these trips, I would hear God's still small voice asking me about the children at home. What about them? What about the children that aren't wanted, loved, fed and cared for in your very own community? It's a very fair question. How can I spend so much time, energy and resources ministering to children abroad and not do the same in my own community. I knew that it was time for me to do something about it. I talked to my parents about it, went to a bunch of trainings with a faith-based organization and asked for a meeting with Thomas P. and Bradley H. I remember in my meeting that I spent a good majority of it crying on the couch of Thomas' office while he and Bradley patiently waited for me to say what I had to say. They ultimately gave me their blessing as the leadership of the church in my new calling to foster. I remember that Bradley asked me what I was afraid of. There were two



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things that I was afraid of (and still am afraid of). I said I was afraid that I would be doing this all alone as a young single woman, but that I was even more afraid of not obeying God. I knew that if I didn't follow the path that he laid out for me that I would not be living the life that he had for me. It would be the difference between merely existing and being fully alive, being the person that God created me to be.

Foster parenting as a single woman isn't just hard, it is far beyond hard. It is the best and the worst thing that has ever happened to me. God has broken my heart and used that brokenness to pour out his love on his children. I have lost friends, fallen out of favor, hurt my family, been exhausted, deeply depressed, broke and experienced incredible pain and loss. But, I have also fallen hopelessly in love with some beautiful children, been called "Mommy" (and felt pieces of myself fall into place), laughed until I cried, prayed with my babies, restrained them from hurting themselves, potty-trained, fed, cooked, cleaned, washed, disciplined, learned to do hair with braids and beads, have held and

cried with them in the middle of the night while they called out for their birth mothers. I have been screamed at by one who told me I didn't love her enough. From the day they first arrive on my doorstep with a few possessions in trash bags to the day they leave, and I end up in a heap on the kitchen floor, I have loved them deeply. I have fought for them in the face of bureaucracy, and seemingly endless hurdles of paperwork. I have even had the opportunity to build a relationship with one of my kids' birth mothers, and was able to mentor her and show her unconditional love. Throughout all of this, I know that I was never alone. Jesus did all of the heavy lifting, though I have missed my church community at times. There were times when I needed you and you weren't there. I share blame in that for not asking for help, and I'm sorry that I said your "no" for you by not asking, or by saying that everything was fine and projecting that I had everything under control. That was definitely not the case, and Jesus and I are working on that.

The past two years has brought seven foster children in and out of

my home. They have changed me, for better or worse (and I guess that depends on who you ask). I will be different forever, and sometimes I think that I will always feel a little bit broken by the experience. And that's okay, because I serve a good God, a God who calls us to care for the broken, and to love the unloved. God calls us to do these things within the context of community. I believe that VCC is at a crossroads of sorts, that God is calling us out as a community to care for his children not only abroad, but right here in our neighborhood. We are to be his hands and feet, to work beside him as mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. Our God puts the lonely in families, and within the body of Christ, there are no orphans, because we belong to each other. If we ignore his call to care for his children, it may mean the difference between merely existing and being a body of believers that is fully alive. God wants to ruin your life, for the better. Let Him. Give Him your yes.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' " - Isaiah 6:8

Amy Reece

Communion

You were, then, unknown
Memory finds your form projecting against the heart walls,
But it is a fleeting hand shadow dissipating in the overhead room light.
We carried ourselves- fragile young chicks -
Faces to the sun
Arms east to west
Runners stance ready.

What comedic timing then
When we received the
Texts of your arrival in
Improv fashion.

"Who, what, where?" The cry!
The mother of many began feathering the nest
But with what eyes you greeted us.
Fear had taken hold on the irises turning brown black.
Meal after meal refused
"I don't like it."
"Fine, it'll be there till you get hungry."
Eventually, you came to the table,
But then you had to leave.

Lisa Stafford

Christmas Compassion

God is the embodiment of love, the personification of compassion and kindness. In the greatest act of compassion, “God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other” (1 John 4:9-11 – NLT). The sacrifice of Jesus is the purest and most profound expression of love and compassion. Christmas is a time when Christians everywhere reflect on the life of Jesus, and the impact His presence on earth has had on mankind. His awesome sacrifice and compassion models for us, thousands of years later, the love, light, and compassion we need to reflect into the world. At Christmas time and every day of the year, we are called to be representatives of God, ambassadors

of His great love (2 Corinthians 5:20 – NLT). We are a part of the body of Christ, and members of a church that has the mission of being “A CHURCH THAT RESCUES.” So much of the world is torn, broken, and in dire need of rescue. As Psalms 9:18 (NLT) exhorts “...the needy will not be ignored forever; the hopes of the poor will not always be crushed.” In whatever way we are called to be agents of rescue, we need to act with courage, boldness, and above all compassion. This Christmas season, there are opportunities throughout our community to reach out to others and be agents of rescue:

Holiday volunteer opportunities at Atlanta Food Bank - (Opportunity to volunteer with the Atlanta Food Bank distributing blankets, coats, meals, and toys.)
<http://www.acfb.org/volunteer/seasonal.shtml>

Volunteer opportunities at Covenant House (The Covenant house is a shelter which helps homeless youth.)
<http://www.covenanthouse.org/action/grassroots>

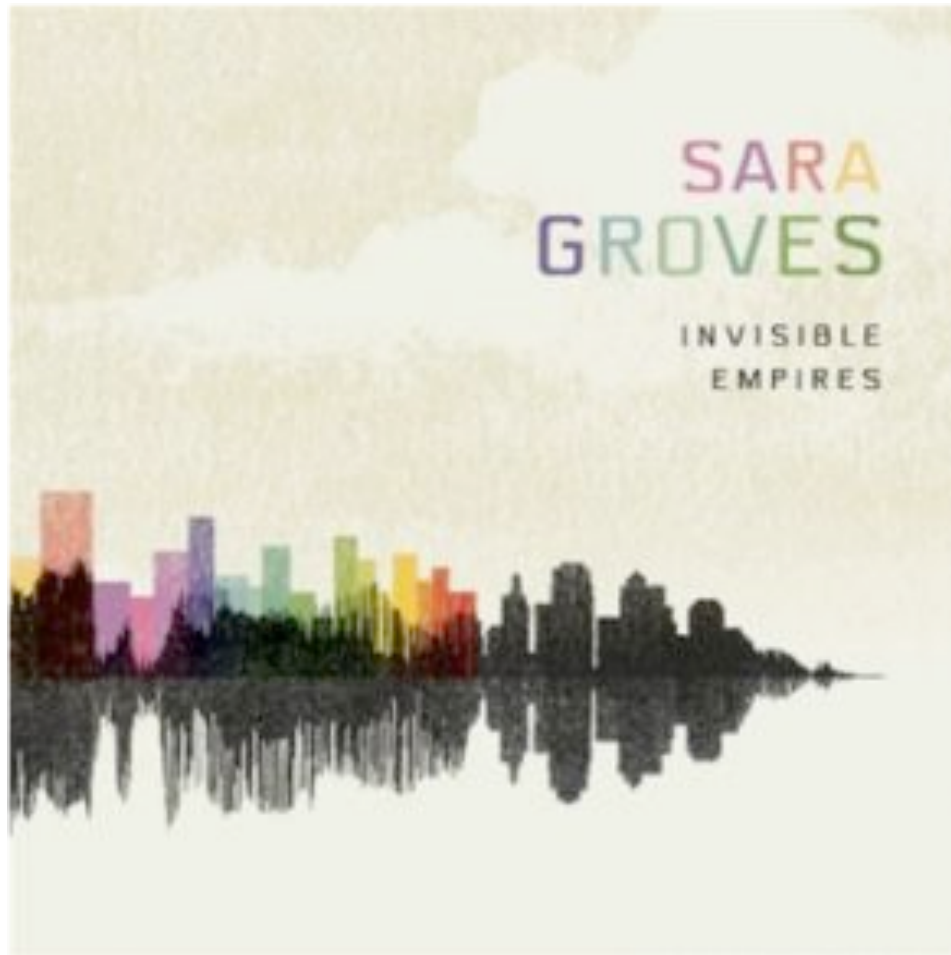
Holiday Gift List 2011 (opportunity to donate toys for patients at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta)
<http://www.choa.org/Support-Childrens/Volunteering/Hospital-Volunteers/Ways-to-Volunteer/Donations-and-Activities/Gift-List>

Georgia Homeless Shelters (Georgia homeless shelters are in need of volunteers and donations during the Christmas season.)
<http://www.lifetogo.mobi/georgiahomelessshelters.html>

The Storehouse Food Panty at VCC (More information about the food list and volunteer opportunities can be found at VCC or online.)
<http://www.vcommunity.org/give/>



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Allison Gonzalez

Album Review: *Invisible Empires* - Sara Groves

To be fair, this is less an album review than a shameless endorsement. Anyone who has spent any significant amount of time with me over the past two months has probably heard me rave about the new Sara Groves record. In case you haven't, read on! I am a relatively new fan, having received a free download last winter of her album *O Holy Night Tour: Live The Prison Show*, which was recorded at a women's prison in Illinois. It was pretty amazing, and, needless to say, it left quite an impression.

Fast forward a year: the free download unwittingly landed me on the Sara Groves e-mail alert list, which normally would annoy me, but in this case turned out to be serendipitous. When she announced

the upcoming release of *Invisible Empires*, all the e-mail folks (me included) were offered the chance to pre-order and get an early release digital copy and sundry other Sara Groves merchandise thrown in to sweeten the deal. Not usually one to buy an un-reviewed album from an artist I didn't know much about, I felt strangely compelled to place the order. An initial listen to the digital copy (hooray for instant gratification!) proved that I had made the right choice.

While I personally enjoy the subdued musical style that dominates the record – piano, violin, soft percussion, gentle harmonies – what really holds my attention is the writing. As someone who is trying to improve my songwriting craft, I am

in awe of Sara's ability to express complex spiritual truth with lyrical simplicity. Whether she's writing about social media, bio-ethics, ending human slavery, or the state of the modern woman (all covered in this album -- don't be scared!), Sara Groves ultimately succeeds in artfully expressing the heart of the matter, yet still producing songs you want to sing along to.

There really are no underdog tracks on this album, in my opinion (for the record, I'm reviewing the limited edition copy that includes two bonus tracks and a bonus commentary disc – I know...fancy!). From the opening, "Miracle," which describes the phenomenon of heart change, to the final track, "Finite," that captures a bittersweet picture of

modern womanhood, *Invisible Empires* has some resonant truth to offer any listener.

One track that stands out in title and content is “Scientists in Japan,” so I will address it briefly for anyone like me who, upon first hearing it, wondered: “What??” After attending a bio-ethics conference that broached the topic of how the rapid pace of technological developments, particularly in science and medicine, may provoke issues of morality and God’s will, Sara wanted to write about this challenging subject. The aim of the song is to simply encourage believers to engage in a thoughtful dialogue on the issue.

Now that the provocative song has been squared away, I’d like to

highlight a few of the standout tracks that exemplify the superb songwriting skill I mentioned before. “Precious Again” – This track tugs on my heartstrings every time I hear it, mostly because as a mom of two small kids, I am so caught up in the chaos of the moment that I forget to recognize the beauty all around me. Sara sings, “New tender mercies and infinite graces/ Woven like threads in the cloth of my days/Deep wells of glory behind common faces/ Where is the wonder?” and I am convicted over and over. How often I forget and how quickly I lose the sense of wonder that my children so naturally possess.

“Eyes on the Prize” – I must admit that at first I did not like this song. Musically, it just seemed odd because it began with an acapella rendition

of a traditional spiritual, “Gospel Plow,” which was revived for use during the Civil Rights movement. In light of Sara’s long-term involvement with the International Justice Mission and my involvement with Ask Me About the Children, the song began to take on a new meaning. Written as an encouragement to those working tirelessly on the monumental task of ending human slavery, the chorus “The way is slow/ And we’ve so far to go/ Keep your eyes on the prize/ Hold on” has the makings of an anthem.

To wrap it up, I love this album, and I think you will, too. My recommendation: go buy *Invisible Empires* for yourself or as a Christmas gift for the discerning music fan on your gift list, and enjoy!

Israel Papevies

Album Review: *Invisible Empires* - Sara Groves

"Hold on tight,
You're doing something right."
I see the walls fall all around,
I hear the screams and sounds,
I feel your pain
the unstoppable train.
but I will never know
how deep it goes
physically, emotionally, spiritually...
spiritually. it's a battlefield.

"Hold on tight,
You're doing something right."
It's a war.
You're agitating the enemy,
He's jumping into action.
Theres discord in the symphony,
Creating a spiritual reaction.

"Hold on tight,
You're doing something right."
We are the bullseye
And the question is no longer why
but how long will you fight
how long can you put up with the plight
Your tribulations are are all around
You're laying on the ground
But He's watching you, you're on His list
So just keep going, persist,
It will end soon, so
"Hold on tight,
'Cause you're doing something right"

Isaiah Hunter

A Church that Rescues

A church that rescues...

A church that prays, a church that gives,
A church that lays foundation, a church that lives
The life of Christ...A church that rescues.

Well I have question: what exactly does that mean?
"A Church That Rescues"; what does it entail?
To rescue another? How can we do that when,
If it comes to rescuing ourselves, we fail.

Yes, we FAIL at rescuing ourselves.
If you don't believe we do,
Then sit back, relax, and I'll explain it to you.

Look: all of humanity is separated from God by our sins.
In short, we're lost in the dark.
And the only way to renew that connection
Is to somehow climb our way back to perfection.

See God made us perfect back in the garden of Eden
In the glory and splendor of his own incredible image.
We had everything....and yet, somehow, we still wanted more

We wanted to explore the extent of our knowledge,
Oblivious to the fact that we were already flawless.
We wanted to know what God knew, and in deception
We proceeded to foolishly give up our perfection

Since then we've been struggling, and fighting,
And warring, and climbing to get back to what we had;
We make rules, and regulations, and structures, we're fools
See, there's only one way to get back to God, and that one way...is sacrifice.

And not any sacrifice mind you, I'm talking about a perfect sacrifice.
So I want you to go out and look around.
Come back and tell me when a perfect person is found.
And you if manage to do that, then we move on to step two:
Convincing that person to sacrifice their perfect life...for you.

Since the only person who could fit that criteria is obviously God,
God sent himself as a human to earth, lived a perfect life,
Then gave it up as a sacrifice!

See to save is to help those who need help,
What God did is help who shouldn't have received help
He rescued all of us from our own self destruction
And still there are those of us who simply refuse to love him...

Or better yet, who don't know that we should,
Who don't know who he is, who don't know that he's good.
Who don't know about this God who strives
To show all of us love, and change all of our lives

But there, right there, is where we come in
As A Church That Rescues there's a mission we've been given:
To proclaim, to shout, to tell, to spread
This incredible message about this man who has bled for all us,
And to talk about his life; how healed the sick, and how the blind gained sight,

And step two is to proceed to show them; to demonstrate his love
So that they themselves can know him.
To bless others in the same way that he's blessed you...
That's what it means to be A Church That Rescues.

Vineyard Community Church

Announcements

Wedding

Christene and Scott Robertson - November 19



Birth

Emma Love Mawer - November 22, 8 lbs 10 oz



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Credits

EPI is a bi-monthly publication of Vineyard Community Church in Marietta, Georgia. For more information about the church:

www.vcommunity.org
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Sunday Services are at 10 am and 11:30 am.

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