



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Sharing the Gospel Through Music

**Guest(s):** Steele Crosswhite

**Air Date:** December 18, 2024

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, hello and welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh sitting in for Dr. Dobson here today, and the program you're about to hear is a broadcast that is included in our 2024 Best of Broadcast Collection. Now, you can reserve a copy of this six-CD set or get the digital download when you go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). We'll thank you for your gift of any amount in support of our ministry by sending you a copy of the Best of Broadcast Collection when you request it. And again, remember, we have a special matching grant in place right now thanks to some generous members of our Family Talk listening family, and every gift you give between now and December 31st will be doubled. So go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and make your best tax deductible donation there or call us at 877-732-6825.

Now on today's broadcast, we are joined by Steele Crosswhite, worship leader and pastor at the Rock Church in Salt Lake City. Through his leadership at the Rock Music Ministry, Steele brings unique insights into how music shapes our spiritual journey. Steele, welcome to the Family Talk broadcast. Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, send their warm regards.

**Steele Crosswhite:** I cannot thank Dr. Dobson and Shirley enough. I am so blessed and so honored to be on this program. I listen to their content. I've read so many of Dr. Dobson's books. I turn to the website and all of the content in the interview regularly for my family, for my own faith. And so to be here today is a bit surreal. It really is an answer to prayer, and in some ways I'm shaking my head, I just can't believe it. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, we're glad to have you here because it's always fascinating to find out how the journey begins, where God takes you on the road, and of course, yours had a couple of ups and downs just like that.

**Steele Crosswhite:** Oh, sure have. Sure have.

Roger Marsh: I'm sure that they're well worth our time. First and foremost, let's talk about your faith foundation before we get into the music side.

Steele Croswhite: Absolutely.

Roger Marsh: When did you come to faith? Did you grow up in a Christian home?

Steele Croswhite: I did not grow up in a Christian home per se. I was 12 years old when I became a Christian at a Lutheran church in Salt Lake City, Utah. There was not a lot of non-denominational type churches.

Roger Marsh: It was the Lutheran church in Salt Lake City.

Steele Croswhite: It was the Lutheran church.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I'll bet.

Steele Croswhite: I became a Christian at the age of 12. My parents became Christians around that time, but they were at a later age, and we attended that church fairly faithfully for about four years until I was about 16. And then from 16 to about 23, 24 years old, my journey was not following the Lord. It is very different. Today, however, Jesus is the passion and the compass of my life.

Roger Marsh: I love it.

Steele Croswhite: It means more to me than anything or anybody.

Roger Marsh: So Steele, when did your music career officially begin?

Steele Croswhite: Depending on which career we're talking about. Yes, sir.

Roger Marsh: Okay, that's fair.

Steele Croswhite: So as far as my background with music, it started really at a young age. I was singing in talent shows at the age of five and performing in front of people by the age of 12. My dad was a musician himself and would like to play guitar, and he put me in front of audiences where I would sing and wear Elvis-shaped sunglasses, if you will, heart-shaped sunglasses.

Roger Marsh: Fun.

Steele Croswhite: Singing Elvis tunes. But music really started to grip me around the age of 15, 16, which is about the time I stopped going to church.

Roger Marsh: That's interesting.

Steele Croswite: Yeah, music really became the idol of my life. I can say that now with a lot of clarity.

Roger Marsh: Sure, sure.

Steele Croswite: And it was secular music. It was not Christian music by any means. It was rock and roll, straight up rock and roll, and my professional music career really began around that time, probably 15, 16. And certainly by the time I was 17, we were playing with my band in secular clubs and theaters all across the country.

Roger Marsh: And lots of people were paying money to hear you perform?

Steele Croswite: Yeah. The story is that by the time I was about 20 years old, we were starting to pick up a lot of notoriety regionally, and my dad, being my best friend at the time, was also our manager. He had some background in music, and I can look at that now and see that he was really trying to guide a rocket I think.

Well, we had an opportunity to play a showcase in Las Vegas, Nevada, and a showcase being for your audience, I'm sure they know, but it's kind of like a big talent show for all the big bands, and we were invited to go to that showcase as a buzz band is what they called it back then where the band had started picking up fans regionally in different states and such. And we were scheduled to play at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, a really great actually club and slot for us to play. The night before we were scheduled to play, my dad suddenly died of an abdominal aortic aneurysm.

Roger Marsh: Oh my goodness.

Steele Croswite: We had gone there about five days early too, but this is before Facebook and social media where you'd hand out flyers to come to your show, and so we had papered the town. My dad had had a number of meetings talking about our band and what our band could do for the industry, if you will. And he had made a name for our band at that showcase. And even he had made a name for himself. He was a pretty gregarious guy.

And when he had passed away suddenly, that news filtered through the showcase, and we had decided to play the show the next day even though he had passed away, kind of like a tribute honor moment, if you will. And the club filled up, it was stacked from front to back, and the next thing you know, it was a bit like a movie where people were offering us management deals and record company deals. And so to answer your question about folks paying money to come and see us, that definitely started to happen at a very fast rate by that time.

Roger Marsh: It certainly did. I don't want to run past your dad because I know he played a huge role in your life. And when you said aortic aneurysm, I went, wait, I got one of those too, have a nine-inch scar right here from ascending one, and it's a

silent killer. And so this is my little public service announcement for heart health and taking care of those things because your dad was probably in great shape.

Steele Croswhite: He wasn't in great shape, but it was a silent killer. He wasn't the healthiest person around, that's for sure, but we weren't prepared for it. There was no sign ahead of it. There was no warning, there was no testing.

Roger Marsh: There is no warning sign. It just stops.

Steele Croswhite: It was suddenly he was there, and he was functioning just fine and larger than life and then suddenly not.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, if I hadn't gone for a routine physical for a life insurance policy, and they did an EKG, and I failed it, and they said, "Go see a cardiologist." And they did x-rays and all of a sudden said, "Wow, your aortic valve is bicuspid, and it's in stenosis and it's about to stop working, and you have this aneurysm, and if you don't have surgery in three weeks, you won't make it."

Steele Croswhite: Oh my goodness.

Roger Marsh: But I'm fortunate because I wouldn't have known. I was just trying for a life insurance policy. So I mean, I can feel where you are in terms of that saying, "Okay, dad's not in peak physical condition, but this just came out of nowhere."

Steele Croswhite: Out of nowhere.

Roger Marsh: That must have really been a jolt to you because since music was your God, and your dad was your manager, and that's wild.

Steele Croswhite: To this day, it's probably the most significant life change and jolt that I've ever had. And looking back at it now, I think it was the catalyst to what led to my dependence upon the Lord. I'll give you a bit more of the story. There, after the show that we played directly after my father had passed away, when I mentioned it was a bit like a movie, it really was kind of like that. I was 20 years old, maybe 21. We had all these opportunities to meet with these people that I'd only heard about or read about, record company executives and management companies and so forth.

And we ended up moving forward with a record company that had lots of money and lots of distribution for our band, and we had signed with them, and we had a great relationship with them really. We were kind of a startup band for them, but they had national distribution and really thick, deep wallets, and they were able to put us on some really great shows, really big arena type rock shows. So we were out on tour with a number of bands that are still playing today. We'd done some recording in Indiana at John Mellencamp's studio, and we released that album, and the songs went number one, and there we were just living a life, a lot of success.

But when you talk about who brought me back inside of that time, there was about three years of a lot of darkness, a lot of sadness and immorality, a lot of drunkenness, a lot of bad decisions because I was not following the Lord. I had lost my dad. I had been, in some ways, shot to this level of accomplishment and had a ton of things handed to me.

I had come off a tour, I had been out for about five months, I think, five or six months, and my sister who had never stopped following the Lord, she is the person, the catalyst who led to me becoming saved and my whole family becoming saved. Way back when, she never stopped following the Lord. And she had found this new church. I had come off the road, and I was about a hundred pounds heavier. I had been drinking straight for three years. I was addicted to all kinds of things. And she saw me, and she said, only like a sister could, "You just look terrible. You look absolutely terrible. You need to come to church."

I thought, "I'm not coming to church. I'm going to be struck by lightning." She said to me, "Well, no, this is not a church like we grew up in. This church is it meets at night, and you can come as you are, and in fact you can smoke out front, and you can eat nachos when we're done, and I'll buy you a beer when they've finished." And I thought, "Well, you'll buy me some beers, I'll eat some nachos, and I can smoke out front. Okay, I'll come to your church."

Roger Marsh: Now, you could have done the beer at the Lutheran church.

Steele Croswhite: Yeah, I probably could have.

But I went, I ended up going to this evening church called The Rock is what it was called, and it was one of those divine appointments where I had walked in, and it was in a little rec room. I mean, it was real small at that time. There was mirrors on the side of the wall where people work out and such, and it was very modest. There was a band that was playing worship music, and of course I had only had experience with Christian music in more of a traditional setting, right?

Roger Marsh: Sure. Pipe Organ, choir, that type of thing.

Steele Croswhite: A lot more like that. And so when I walked in, it was like, "Wow, this is different." I had not heard music like this, and necessarily, I'm sure it was around, but when the drummer who was playing, when he got up, it was the pastor of the church, and he came over, and he started talking about the grace and the love of Jesus, and that message, that encounter, God using my sister, and that evening, it changed my life forever. It's like a light switch went off in my heart.

Roger Marsh: That's a miracle.

Steele Croswhite: I realized I needed the Lord, and I needed to change.

Roger Marsh: And He knew everything you'd done.

Steele Croswhite: Every single thing.

Roger Marsh: He'd been with you every step of the way.

Steele Croswhite: Every way.

Roger Marsh: Calling for you. And I can only imagine the euphoria of, "Hey, we're traveling. We've got top 10 songs with all these bands." I mean, these are major artists, and you guys are right there with them. And then you come off the road and realize, "Hey, wait a minute, this is my highest high and lowest low all at the same time."

Steele Croswhite: Yes.

Roger Marsh: And that's where Jesus met you.

Steele Croswhite: And that is exactly where He met me. And I remember feeling like I had about three months before I was supposed to go on another tour. There was a great band. They're still around. It was a favorite of mine at the time called The Black Crows.

Roger Marsh: Oh, yeah.

Steele Croswhite: I was going to go out with The Black Crows on a theater tour. It was going to be me and their singer and his brother, their guitar player, on a theater acoustic tour. And I was going to go out with them, and that would've been a dream. But I remember during that three months of time, God radically began to change my life where I knew, I was hanging around with my sister who had all these friends that I thought were nerds. Her closest friend is now my wife, and she's the best part of me. She really is. But I was hanging around with all these people that just loved each other. I mean, they did. They were playing cards. I was like, "Where's the alcohol? Where's the booze?" It's like, "No, we're playing board games." And I was so changed by their simple love of each other and love of the Lord.

And then I started meeting with that pastor I spoke about, his name is Bill, and he would start talking to me about Jesus and a deeper understanding of grace in the Bible. I remember thinking, "If I go back out on the road," I don't know if this was the Lord or not, I can only assume it is, but I remember having a deep sense, "If you go out again, you're going to die. "

Roger Marsh: You're asking for it.

Steele Croswhite: This is it. So by so many different miraculous things that got orchestrated, I was able to get out of my record deal, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I

had no desire to be a Christian singer/songwriter. I had no idea that that was the plan for me.

Roger Marsh: You didn't have a frame of reference for that.

Steele Croswhite: None at all. All I knew is I can't go out. And so I stayed, and that is what I've been doing for 20 years now.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Steele Croswhite: Yeah.

Roger Marsh: Getting out of those contracts, I mean, that's God.

Steele Croswhite: It was.

Roger Marsh: The fact that you could have been on the hook for lots of money.

Steele Croswhite: Oh yeah.

Roger Marsh: And lots of, "You owe us to three albums and two tours and whatever." It's a miracle. Was it really that difficult?

Steele Croswhite: To leave?

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Steele Croswhite: I'd be a liar if I said no. It was difficult, and sometimes it can still be. A lot of my friends that I was playing with ended up becoming mega stars, really just mega stars. The people that I was playing and recording with and performing with were the top best musicians in the world, really. So in one sense, it's very hard like all of us as believers to leave a part of our life behind that we know is going to lead to something different. We might have a skill for it, we might even have a passion for it, but it may not be God's best. And so in the sense of leaving behind my pride or my flesh, that was hard. But in the sense of being able to walk in, and I can only say it like this, in the freedom of being known by God, there's nothing like it. And so in that sense, I'm just running after Him. That's all I want to do is run after Him.

Roger Marsh: I love it. So at some point somebody has to tell Pastor Bill, unless you were the one to tell him, "This Steele guy, he's a pretty good musician." Were you willing to just keep that under wraps and say, "This is my church home. I'm going to grow on my faith. I'll sweep the floor. I don't want to be the worship leader?"

Steele Croswhite: Yeah. I was willing to do all of those things.

Roger Marsh: How long did you stay out of music there?

Steele Croswhite: Oh, quite a while. So my sister, however, who was going to this church.

Roger Marsh: There comes that sister again.

Steele Croswhite: Yeah. She would talk to Bill, and Bill knew that I was a musician. I kind of walked the walk, if you will, and talked to the talk. But she was kind of like, "You need to play at the church." "No, I don't want to do that." And then Bill eventually after several months, was like, "Hey, would you like to play a song at the church?"

Roger Marsh: Yeah, just one song. You don't have to join the group.

Steele Croswhite: It was nothing like, "Yeah, I'm going to give you the ministry."

Roger Marsh: They teach you that in seminary.

Steele Croswhite: Sure, yeah. But he was very gracious, very, very willing to take a risk on me. And it really was that. And he's still like that today. He has a lot of faith in the Lord's hand in other people's lives. And so it wasn't right away. I didn't stop playing music in one band and suddenly start playing in a worship band. There was a lot of changes that needed to happen in my heart, understanding what it meant to authentically worship, understanding how to lead worship, all those things came with time. Now of course, it's my day-to-day life, but at that time it wasn't right away, and it was a slower build.

Roger Marsh: The church is the Rock Church in Salt Lake City, and the music group is called The Rock Music.

Steele Croswhite: Yes.

Roger Marsh: How did it make that change, that shift?

Steele Croswhite: Yeah, that's such a great question. So in 2000, and I can't remember if it's 2003 or 4, so it's quite some time ago, Bill had asked me to write a worship album. I had never done that. He said, "Hey, well, the church will give you money. We want you to go in and use your gift and talent." And by this time, I was following the Lord wholeheartedly, and so I went in, and I recorded this album, and it's a work of God. I had 10, 12 songs on it, and they were worship tunes. And he said, "This is great. The church loves it. Let's record another one." And so then I recorded another one in 2005.

After 2005, I had the thought of like, "You know what's awesome, is if we could have the best bands in the world known for loving Jesus Christ come out of a local church. Wouldn't that be amazing if it wasn't about going out on the road and leaving the church to use your gift?" Because so many people do that, and they go, "Oh, the church has no place for my style. The church has no place for my song. The church has no place for my music or whatever art it may be, and



so we're going to leave the church to chase it." And my heart was, "Well, what if the church is the thing that fosters it?"

And how can we be a part of making the best bands in the world? Help them write their own music, help them record their own music, help them be under the authority and protection of God-honoring leadership so that they don't have to go away and find all of the trappings that are there in the name of Jesus, but instead can stay inside the church.

And so starting in about 2006, God started miraculously bringing more musicians and more people that loved God, and they were writing their own songs. And then we would help them in the recording studio, and then there'd be more musicians and more songs and all kinds of styles, not just one brand of music.

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Steele Croswhite: It could be rock and roll for Jesus inside the church. It could be alt country, which we've done before. It can be indie rock. It can be straight up like the Christian contemporary, whatever, as long as they're using their gift, and they're doing it under the umbrella of the local church and for Jesus, we are all for that. And that's what we're leading today. That's been about not quite 20 years now, but we've had dozens of bands and dozens of musicians, and still today, dozens of bands and musicians that are loving and recording and leading the church on weekend services, but also recording and releasing their own music.

Roger Marsh: I think that's wonderful to hear, especially the different styles, because if it got too corporate, then all of a sudden it's like, "Here's our style. Let's find more musicians who fit the style." Instead of saying, "Look, God created all of us differently. Loves us equally, but not the same." You guys understand that, and you of all people understand how that works too. There's a new album out.

Steele Croswhite: Yes. We just released an EP called "The Future is Sure." That came out. And we're so blessed by that. There's a number of songs on there that are original songs from me, and we have some more singles being released, and we can't wait for our folks to hear that. They're all songs about Jesus, all from our own musicians, and we're very blessed by it.

Roger Marsh: What kind of pushback have you gotten, either from within the industry, or are there are people looking at your model and saying, "Hey, this is different than what we're doing right now?"

Steele Croswhite: Oh man, that is a great question. I appreciate that you say that you like that uniqueness of each individual artist having an individual sound. I appreciate that too because we feel like that's something that God has given them. Under one church are all these different styles of music and talents, we're not all the same.

But that can be hard for the music industry sometimes to understand because they're used to representing, this is not bad or good, it just is what it is.

Roger Marsh:

It just is.

Steele Croswhite:

That they're used to representing a certain style of music from one, if you will, church or one brand or whatever that may be, and when we are speaking to folks, we're not representing just one. We're representing all of them and their various different styles. And so that can be a challenge. I wouldn't say it's a pushback. It's a challenge for folks to say, "Listen, at the end of the day, our greatest desire is not to be famous, it is not to be worldwide big, it's to honor Jesus through our local church." We want more people to know about it because we think what God is doing in Utah is amazing, but we can't become something that we're not. So we have to stay right where God's given us this vision, and that's where we are today.

Roger Marsh:

Steele, you guys are in Salt Lake City.

Steele Croswhite:

Yes, sir.

Roger Marsh:

And that's not usually a hotbed for Christian music or really Christian anything.

Steele Croswhite:

At all. Yes.

Roger Marsh:

Talk about, I would imagine you have quite an impact on one particular group.

Steele Croswhite:

Particular group of people. Yeah. Utah is less than 3% evangelical Bible-believing Christian.

Roger Marsh:

Wow.

Steele Croswhite:

It is largely, you've heard of the Mormon faith or the Latter-day Saints, the LDS faith. And so a giant part of our music ministry and a giant part of our church ministry has been to tell our Mormon friends and neighbors about the grace and the love and the forgiveness and perfect atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. There's quite a disconnect in their faith that we love them, we appreciate them as our neighbors and our friends and many of our family members, but the understanding of the gospel of grace is very different. And so a large part of our church is opening up the doors to these folks that have been so burdened by legalism or by feeling separated from God and feeling like they need to work that ladder back up where we say, "Wait, wait, wait. Jesus Christ came down to us and He paid for all of us." And to watch that transformation, that full understanding of grace, love, forgiveness, and eternity, it is a joy. It is one of the reasons we remain in Utah, if not the reason, is to be reaching out to our Mormon friends and neighbors.

Roger Marsh: Yes. That's awesome. Okay. How has the music industry, how has your experience with the Rock Music, how has it transformed you in the faith journey?

Steele Crosswhite: It deepens my faith journey. God is so kind to give us the Word of God. He's so kind to give us honest men and women in the Word of God that pour their hearts out to the Lord, and nothing gives me more joy than to be able to know that inside of our church, there is a culture where I can write, and we, many of our musicians, can write honest songs like David would write, songs about failure or songs about fear, and also straight up, God, you are wonderful worship songs. And the church has so embraced our ability to do that so that when we write a song that might be more introspective, it's still received as worship because it is, and that has been a wonderful joy of our life to know that we have a church and a collective of musicians that encourage that kind of transparency and honesty in music. And when we can do that, it deepens our faith.

Roger Marsh: Where can we find you?

Steele Crosswhite: Yeah, so on all of the platforms, we are called The Rock Music. You can find us, of course, on Spotify, Instagram, and all the various streaming platforms. We also have a website, [therockmusic.org](http://therockmusic.org), and all of our music is there for free. You can listen to it. There's charts there. Of course, Spotify is an easy way to see all of our albums. Over the last 20 years, I think we've released 25 different works of art, so that's where I'd start.

Roger Marsh: I like the way you described those. That's great.

Steele Crosswhite: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Because hopefully they are, I mean, that's the goal, right? Hope to bring glory to God through your art form. Well, Steele Crosswhite, it's been great to get to know you. God bless you.

Steele Crosswhite: God bless you, brother.

Roger Marsh: And the ministry team, and we're so grateful for the time today.

Steele Crosswhite: Thank you so much for this honor, really.

Roger Marsh: Well, Steele Crosswhite's story shows us how God can transform any talent into something meaningful for his kingdom when we surrender it to him. I'm grateful to have had this conversation with Steele Crosswhite of The Rock Music ministry and to learn more about his ministry and music, you can visit us at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

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Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today, and I invite you back again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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