

# Life Story of Keith Green - Part 1

by Melody Green

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*The sermon recounts the life of Keith Green, highlighting his musical talent, spiritual search, and lasting impact on a generation.*

**Duration:** 1:00:35

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:15-22

**Topics:** "Keith Green"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker shares a personal experience of attending a music event with her husband Keith. They were hoping to make it big in the music industry but faced challenges and fears. They attended a Christian fellowship meeting where they were introduced to a gentle speaker named Ken Gullickson. Despite the small crowd, Keith performed a heartfelt song that resonated with the audience. The speaker emphasizes that it was not perfection but the sincerity and passion in Keith's music that drew people in.

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## Transcript

Sparrow Press presents No Compromise, the life story of Keith Green. Once upon a time in a generation steeped in emptiness and spiritual darkness, a boy was born with a great gift. Trained as a musician, he had a unique ability, some would say genius, to put spiritual truth into the language of the common people of his time.

His biographical writings record the intensity of his struggles, his early odyssey into the pathways that promised so much but led nowhere. These records chronicle the search of a young man seemingly out of step with his age, who was not afraid to risk everything for what he had found to be real and right. In his intensity, he questioned everything and everyone that appeared to hold the key to life.

Once he found that answer, nothing could turn him from it, and he began a lifelong crusade to see his world likewise transformed. No one who knew him would deny that he offended many. He especially shocked the religious establishment in his zeal to bring compassion, honesty, and reality back to the church.

He was blunt, he was funny, he could be tactless and even crude. He steadfastly refused to accept the spiritual status quo, quietly mocking hypocrisy with laughter while bearing his own fears and struggles through tears. Many of his songs are simply sermons set to music, prophetic pieces in harmony that set

standards for a generation.

He was cut off by some and almost canonized by others, but he was impossible to ignore. His life and work affected literally millions around the world. Gone from us now, he impacted his generation like a spiritual age bomb, and the reverberations of his courage and commitment will be felt for generations to come.

Most people today know him by his music only. Not everyone can write a song that still will be sung five centuries after his death. We remember him today as the man who launched the reformation, the musician with a hunger to know God and make him known by faith, the man called Martin Luther.

This of course is not his story, but in another century and another culture it might have been. Keith loved Jesus. He did what he could in the few intense years I was privileged to know him.

You will catch a glimpse of that love in this, his story. He was my friend and I miss him. It was after 2 a.m., but the streets of Hollywood were still awake with activity.

Four drag queens swept by us, followed by a couple wearing disco outfits, all headed inside the Blah Blah Cafe for a late night breakfast. The Blah was just down Ventura Boulevard from the Queen Mary, and Keith's audience was always seasoned with gays and straights alike. Keith had been performing at the Blah, as it was affectionately called by its regulars, for almost a year.

It was a small showcase nightclub that spotlighted showbiz hopefuls, and was frequented by talent scouts from big record companies. Keith was one of those hopefuls. Tonight he'd given it his all one more time, and now we were leaving, still undiscovered.

On our way out we spotted a figure looming towards us out of the dark. It was Harmony. Harmony looked like a gruff mountain man with his scraggly hair and beard.

Here we were in 1974, but this guy was caught in a 60s time warp. All he talked about was peace, love, and living off the land. Hey, how's it going, Keith called.

Inevitably, most of our conversations drifted towards spiritual experiences these days. Recently, we'd been looking into Jesus Christ. We weren't Christians.

Church was a dead institution to us. But Jesus did seem to be a spiritual master of some sort, and we had a degree of respect for his life and teachings. Keith and Harmony immediately began talking about the supernatural.

It was a typical conversation for people who were into drugs and the mystical, which were a lot of the people we knew. I'd been reading about Jesus lately, Keith was saying. He was a pretty radical person.

Harmony's eyes brightened, then slowly a strange look came over his face. His eyes got misty and distant. Very calmly he said, I am Jesus Christ.

Keith reacted like he'd been stung by a scorpion. Without missing a beat, he shot back, beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, that inwardly are ravenous wolves. I recognized the quote as something Jesus had said, but what happened next was really hard to believe.

Harmony's eyes grew wide, then they narrowed to slits, furrows creased across his forehead, and his eyebrows knit together. A sneer came over his unusually mild face, and his upper lip curled back, exposing his yellow smoke-stained teeth. Leaning toward Keith, his teeth bared, he let out a growl that started in his throat, like that of a wolf, and ended with a horrible hissing sound of a snake.

It happened in only seconds, then Harmony's face relaxed, but his eyes looked confused, embarrassed. The hiss seemed to hang in the still night air. My skin was still tingling from the shock, and Keith had obviously been rocked by it too.

He looked from Harmony to me with wide eyes. It was like someone or something took control of Harmony, using him for its own purposes, then just as quickly discarded him, leaving him in confused embarrassment. We quickly excused ourselves and left to drive home.

The weird experience with Harmony highlighted that there was indeed a very real spiritual realm, a realm full of power and possibly even danger. Had we heard a voice from that other side speaking through Harmony, or was it just the voice of the age? After all, a lot of people were saying, you are your own god, there's no right or wrong. But we wondered, is there a dark side and a light side to spiritual energy? Keith and I had both been caught up in a search to find our spiritual identities.

We were looking for truth, whatever it was, and our search had taken us both on many strange paths, from Buddhism to stuff like astral projection, and of course, drugs. We were both convinced the truth was out there somewhere, and when we found it, it would fill an empty spot in our hearts and make our lives really worth living. Until then, every day held the potential of being the day of the great revelation.

At the time of our weird encounter with Harmony, however, we'd been slipping a bit and losing hope, even dabbling with drugs again, which we'd sworn off but kept falling back into. The following Wednesday, Keith last said at the Blah ended at 1 a.m., but we stayed until Albie the owner closed the doors three hours later. Albie took pride in running a successful club and rubbing shoulders with the almost elite of Hollywood's underside.

He'd become a friend and a mentor to Keith, which is why his sudden ultimatum threw Keith for a loop. Albie said, I'm sorry Keith, but you've got two weeks to pack him in or I'll have to replace you with another act. You've got to draw more people.

I've got a club to run, salaries to pay. I just can't afford to keep losing money on you. Keith went home that night deeply depressed.

Even the quaalude he took couldn't touch the real hurt, the whispers of failure. After Albie's ultimatum, Keith sprang into immediate action and spent all week phoning anyone and everyone he knew. He almost begged them to come, telling them about his new songs and how he wanted to see them and how he was going to lose his job unless the place was packed.

I felt embarrassed for him, and even worse, when he insisted I call my friends as well. But we were in a real bind. Money was tight.

We'd already sold my red Triumph sports car and my prized Martin D35 guitar, but the word for us in 1974 was survival. We walked into the Blah the following week at around 830. When packed, the Blah could hold about 65 people seated on chrome and vinyl chairs.

Right now, those chairs were mostly empty. Keith and I sat silently in the back of the skinny little club, watching each other watch the door. Married for only eight months, we made quite a pair.

Me in my Indian print skirt and long straight hair, and Keith wearing blue jeans and a new flowered cowboy shirt, his freshly cut hair hanging well below his shoulders. I loved the way Keith looked. His clear blue eyes and fair skin gave him a childlike air, and now that he'd shaved off his beard, the fact that he was just 20 years old was plain to see.

Slowly, in twos and threes, people started arriving. Chairs scraped against the cement floor, one cigarette after another was lit, and the noise level began to rise. Still, there weren't enough people, and we knew it.

We've got a little more time, I said, trying to conceal my own fears. There is no more time. This is it.

Keith shoved back his chair with disappointment written all over him. Even though the odds were against him, I knew he'd give it his all. He made his way to the stage and started doodling on the battered upright piano, but few people in the scant crowd paid any attention.

He finally launched into Life Goes On, a song he'd written with his new friend, Randy Stonehill. Keith pounded the keys in a way that sent terror into the heart of every piano teacher. I often held my breath hoping he wouldn't miss a note, but even when he did, it didn't matter.

It wasn't perfection that drew you to Keith's music, or to him for that matter. It was heart. A few more tables were filling up, and to my relief, some people were clapping along.

Still, I was paying more attention to the door than to Keith. He kicked into a Joni Mitchell song, Free Man in Paris, the story of a record company exec on vacation in Paris who was tired of cranking out hit artists or, as the song went, stoking the Star Maker machinery behind the popular song. Keith had become all too familiar with the Star Maker machinery.

In particular, our whole life revolved around Keith's drive to make it big in the music business. He'd already pitched himself to every major label in town. His fear of not succeeding was overshadowed only by the fear of getting involved with the wrong people, and there were some people whose help we didn't want.

Like the guy last September who just bubbled over with, I can make you a star, noises. But as Keith confided to his daily journal, there was, as usual, a string attached, and Keith said no to working with him. On stage, Keith continued with the next few songs, squinting through the glaring stage light, keeping a check on the crowd.

More people filtered in, some faithful friends, Keith's parents, our poker playing buddies, even a few industry friends. He finished to an enthusiastic round of applause. The place was packed.

As he made his way over to the table, his usually springy steps were even springier. Not only were we high on the moment, our friend Harriet had come, bearing gifts. Keith lifted the lid of the shoebox and his eyes brightened.

Brownies? Harriet smiled and said, my own special recipe, homegrown if you know what I mean. You put grass in them, Keith said? The best. As the marijuana-laced brownies hit bottom, things began to look even more up.

Keith was obviously soaring with the moment. Somehow though, my thoughts were pulled to our future. I just knew Keith was supposed to be up in front of a lot of people.

He felt he had a message to offer the world, an important message from his spiritual search. But what? And even if Keith made it in music, would we make it as a couple? We like to talk a lot about living in harmony with the universe, but we sure had our share of arguments. There were lots of contradictions in our lives.

In areas like honesty and integrity, Keith had the highest standards. We didn't cheat on our taxes, but sometimes we'd take illegal drugs. Was there a difference? It was hard to live with so many unanswered questions.

It was as if something was tugging at us, pulling us into uncharted waters. Something that would change our lives forever. In the days following our victory at the Blah, my mind wandered over the many strands that wove together inside this man I'd married.

I thought about the sensitive inner man who was determined to find spiritual answers. Yet there was another side of him, the little boy who always wanted to be in show business. That side explained so much about who Keith was now.

I lost my gum to another guy now, cause he's a real go-getter. And all the time he's been telling lies now, and on her heels instead of. A go-go, a go-go-getter now.

A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go-go-getter now.

He said he'll give her a diamond ring now, ever since he met her. But in his heart it doesn't mean a thing now, cause he's a real go-getter. A go-go, a go-go-getter now.

A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go-go-getter now.

There's one thing that I really like now, I'm not a go-go-getter. I'm gonna go and get her back now, to prove I'm a whole lot better. A go-go, a go-go-getter now.

A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go-go-getter now.

A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go, a go-go-getter now. A go-go, a go-go-getter now.

A go-go-go-getter now. Keith was third-generation show business. His maternal grandfather was a successful composer, screenwriter, and a pioneer in the music industry.

The same love of music was passed on to Keith's mother. Right out of high school, she started singing popular music with the big bands, and she was offered a contract to sing with Benny Goodman, but turned it down to marry Keith's dad when he was still a handsome baseball rookie on the New York Giants farm team. By the time he was nine months old, Keith could hum Rockabye Baby on perfect pitch.

When he was three, he could sing harmony to his mom's alto, and at five, he could play anything he heard on the ukulele. He was seven when his parents bought him his first piano, and he made his first television commercial the same year. By now, he was also writing songs.

When he played at Hoot Night at the Troubadour Nightclub in Hollywood, the audience gave him a standing ovation. In 1962, when Keith was eight years old, he made his live theater debut as a little street urchin in Arthur Laurent's romantic comedy, *The Time of the Cuckoo*. Two years later, Keith moved on to legitimate theater, playing Kurt Von Trapp opposite Janet Blair's Maria in *The Sound of Music*.

In January 1965, upon the release of Keith's first 45 single, *Cheese and Crackers*, *Teen Scene* magazine called Keith the youngest new face on the Hollywood scene. Keith's dad started to represent him as an artist, and things began to take off. One executive at Capitol Records wanted to sign Keith to a recording contract, but his superiors felt Keith was too young.

No one as young as Keith, including the Osmonds or the Jackson 5, was even recording yet. His dad moved on to Decca Records, where Keith was signed to a five-year contract. At the age of 11, Keith published his first song, *The Way I Used to Be*, and became the youngest member of ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers.

Keith's dad was a musician, and Keith's mom was a singer. *The Way I Used to Be* After an appearance on a local morning television show, Keith and his dad returned home to find a message waiting for them from none other than Col. Tom Parker, Elvis Presley's longtime manager.

Col. Parker told them, if I wasn't tied up full-time with Elvis, I'd take Keith on, but you call me if you ever need any help. Keith must have read with growing excitement as *Time* magazine reported, Decca Records has a pre-pubescent dreamboat named Keith Green.

He has already written 50 rock and roll songs, which he croons in a voice trembling with conviction. Keith and his family just knew his career was about to take off. Like a rocket on a launching pad, all systems were go.

But then, although Keith's record release from Decca made the top ten in Hawaii, the major national breakthrough didn't materialize. A short time later, Donny Osmond came on the scene capturing the preteen and teenage listeners that Decca had envisioned for Keith. His dreams came crashing down.

Success had somehow passed him by. Life goes on and the world goes round. One day you're up, the next day you're down.

Don't count on good luck. Married on Christmas Day in 1973, we were three months away from celebrating our first anniversary. I found it hard to believe I was actually married and living in the suburbs with a backyard full of fruit trees.

We had plenty of time and space to write music, but for Keith it seemed like there was no time. He was always in motion, always searching. It didn't make it any easier that the promise of a record deal always lingered out there.

We were constantly running all over town to meet with someone in the business. Keith would go to see CBS publishers often. He always brought our dog Libra up the elevator and right into the executive offices.

In spite of the clumps of hair Libra left on the shag carpeting, CBS really liked Keith's music. So much in fact that they offered him a position as a staff writer at \$250 a week. It was a great deal.

Besides the money, there were no office hours. He just needed to give them 18 acceptable songs in 12 months. Since we were starting to write songs together, if CBS only signed him, they wouldn't own any of my share.

This would benefit us financially and would have been 100% ethical. But Keith didn't want to be tempted by money. He said, I'd rather make less money and have a clear conscience.

I don't want to struggle trying to figure out my motives every time we write together. I'm not going to ask them to pay you anything. I only want your name added to the contract.

So CBS got two writers for the price of one. But as much as Keith was caught up in the world of music, there was still another part of him caught up in what seemed to be a lifelong spiritual search. Spiritual roots ran deep in Keith's family.

His grandfather had been a Christian scientist for 60 years. Keith's mom was raised in Christian science. And when Keith's parents married, his dad followed suit.

Keith was raised in a good moral atmosphere. And he was basically a good kid. Maybe it was a disappointment of having his dream with Decca vanish into thin air.

Or maybe he was just sucked into the 1960s revolutionary spirit of Southern California. But Keith grew dissatisfied with himself and the life he was living. By the time he was 15, he was growing more and more restless, argumentative, and less tolerant.

The California scene was promising something more to life than Keith was experiencing at home. And he wasted no time pursuing it. In July of 1969, Keith withdrew his savings and financed a getaway with two older friends.

He started keeping a record of his thoughts and activities in a journal that would become his lifelong friend. The great runaway lasted four days. On that trip, Keith had his first taste of manual labor, which he hated, and a taste of life on the road, which he loved.

In the next few years, Keith would run away from home two more times. Once he was thrown in jail as a runaway, and having no writing paper, scratched new song lyrics onto the cell wall with the heel of his shoe. Everywhere Keith looked, people were basically saying, forget the system.

Women had burned their bras and men had burned their draft cards. Someone even burned an American flag. Nothing was sacred.

It seemed like seekers everywhere were united in a common theology that dressed itself in bare feet, Indian beads, incense, and Eastern music. His search led him to Box Canyon, a desolate place in the mountains on the fringe of Los Angeles County. A popular place to film Westerns, it had gained notoriety as the hideout of the infamous Charles Manson and his hippie family.

Keith started doing concerts in Box Canyon at a place called the Fountain of the World, a mansion-like building resembling a small medieval monastery. Over the main entrance was a sign that said, He who enters here walks on holy ground. It was at the Fountain of the World that Keith's questions about life began to pile up on each other.

Why couldn't everyone live in harmony? Where was the love and the unity? It seemed like everyone had given up on high ideals and instead were looking through the fragmented prism of windowpane LSD. Keith's friends were finding their answers over the radio and in the rosy glow of the hash pipe. And Keith's own life had its share of contradictions.

He had become a vegetarian to purify his body and then rationalized using peyote and other drugs to trigger his spiritual experiences. And on top of that, he teased his friends about taking vitamins to enhance their health. While Keith was learning a lot about himself and life, being on his own had its ups and downs.

He was ecstatic about receiving a three-minute standing ovation after a concert at a coffee house, but was forced to buy boots from the Salvation Army because his shoes had holes in them. He didn't have a car and didn't know where he was going to sleep from one night to the next. At the beginning of December, Keith went to a Sunday morning Christian Science Church service.

It underscored what he surmised from his own studies, that there's no literal hell and that only certain parts of the Bible are the inspired Word of God. Afterward, he somehow ended up at a Christian coffee house. The evening exploded into a heated debate.

Keith was irritated by being confronted by the fundamental Christian belief that although God created us, a redemptive process was needed to enter a relationship with the Creator. That thought was new to Keith and he didn't like it. Keith believed if he could only have perfect thoughts, he would experience God's perfection in body, mind and spirit.

The other thing that bothered him was the belief that the whole Bible was the inspired Word of God. Everyone knew it was written by men and men make mistakes. Anyway, if God was a loving Father, full of mercy and peace, how could he punish any of his children? These Jesus freaks, as Keith called them, had challenged his thinking that failed to convince him.

In his journal, he wrote, Went to a Jesus freak coffee house and they tried to lay a trip on me about believing the whole Bible, word for word, even the part that says God kills my brother and I just don't believe that, not my wonderful Father. I'm still trusting my brother Jesus Christ and Father God who are one together and one with me and we're one with everyone. But it's easier to say that the universe and everything in it is one.

Peace through unity. In the summer of 1972, Keith drove all the way to Colorado to participate in an event called the New World Family Gathering that was supposed to usher in the new age. But there was no sense of family at this family gathering.

Instead, he found a mindless, prolonged party with people high on everything imaginable. It was not the spiritual event Keith had hoped for. When he returned to California, he had one more thing to scratch off his list of potential truths.

Over the past several months, he'd been on a reading marathon examining the works of Hess, Young, Heinlein, Castaneda, Gibran, Baba Ram Dass and the Bible. Interesting food for thought, but nothing was totally satisfying. And then, a startling event shook Keith at a deep level.

His 19th birthday was near the end of October and he planned a special celebration. One final mescaline trip with a close friend, Bill, a record company executive. Keith, who had been trying to quit drugs, felt this trip would be his very last.

As they sat in Bill's car on a high cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Bill told them that he'd made an appointment that night to meet with people from another planet. It sounded crazy, but after three hits of mescaline, anything could be true. Come off it, Keith said.

Don't mess with me. It's true, said Bill. They're meeting us in a few minutes and they want to take you back with them in their spacecraft.

They talked back and forth like that for some time and Keith started to panic. What if it was true? He'd read about people who'd met aliens. His heart was pounding so hard it felt like it might burst from his chest.

The negative energy was real and very frightening. Dark forces were reaching for him, pushing him close to the edge of a black and empty place. He fought to keep from falling in.

When the trip was over, Keith did some heavy soul searching. He had a very strong sense that the eastern mystical occult paths he'd been walking might be leading him in the wrong direction. The spiritual darkness he'd felt that night was an unfriendly presence that he never wanted to experience again.

But he was still uncertain about where to turn. There did seem to be a common thread running through all the teachings Keith had studied. The person of Jesus Christ.

Everybody seemed to say that at the very least Jesus was a good guy. Some said he was the son of God. Others said he was a prophet.

Others said he was an ascended spiritual master. Even Buddha thought Jesus was okay. Everyone said something different but it was all positive.

And to top it off Jesus even said good things about himself. He said he was the only way to God. Keith had been running scared since his birthday mescaline trip.

He doubted everything and everybody. Jesus seemed like a safe bet so Keith decided to deal with Jesus directly. Not through any man or any organization.

He wouldn't call himself a Christian because he didn't want to be one. He thought Christians were rejects, losers. Besides it seemed that in order to be one you needed to have a barber in the family and sleep in a suit and tie.

Keith was not ready for that but he was ready to deal with Jesus one on one and that's exactly what he did. He opened his heart to Jesus without knowing who he was or what it might lead to. He only knew he had a deep need.

In December 1972 he wrote in his journal Jesus you are hereby officially welcomed into me. Now only action will reveal your effect on me. Keith was doing all he knew how to do trying to get closer to God.

Still he was groping. God is a concept he wrote. Everything is getting numb.

I'm so numb. I need to feel again. I'm only almost dead.

Perhaps to show God that he really meant business Keith decided he wanted to start wearing a cross. He went into a little second hand shop where a small silver cross caught his eye. It's over 150 years old the shopkeeper told him worn by a monk in an Ecuadorian monastery.

Keith could barely see a faint raised outline of Jesus. The monk had rubbed it every time he prayed and it was rubbed almost flat at the top. The cross had a certain mystique to it a sense of spiritual history.

Someone who really loved Jesus had worn it. Keith hoped that same intensity of devotion might rub off on him. He had 14 dollars of poker winnings in his pocket from the night before and he paid the man and left the store with a determination to make an even deeper commitment.

It seemed everyone had some guru or spiritual teacher they were following. Keith decided he would be comfortable making Jesus his spiritual master and slipped the cross around his neck. As he drove he found himself praying to a God he didn't know.

It wasn't a tidy little religious prayer like the cross it was rough and uneven a prayer of desperation. He had reached the bottom of his list. If Jesus didn't come through he didn't know what he would do.

Tears gathered and spilled down his cheeks. In between broken sobs he choked out a prayer oh Jesus Jesus if you're real if you are who you say you are please prove it to me. I need you.

I need something. Show me the way. Prove that you're real and I'll serve you forever.

End of part one. It was December of 1974 our first anniversary was coming up on Christmas day and I wanted to do something special for Keith. When I first met Keith in early 1973 he was just beginning to pray to this man Jesus.

He had told me Jesus is my master. Keith was wearing this antique cross around his neck not exactly a bold statement of faith more like holding up a candle of hope against the darkness. Since Christmas was supposed to celebrate Jesus's birthday and since apart from music trying to decide who Jesus was was all Keith talked about a Bible seemed like a perfect surprise.

The only Bible I ever owned was a Gideon Bible I took from a hotel room once. I never bought one. There was a Christian bookstore next to a vegetarian restaurant Keith and I liked.

With the clerk's patient help I picked out a small leather King James edition took it home wrapped the box and hid it. On Christmas Eve I waited for the right moment to give Keith his Bible but first we had some packing to do for a trip to Canada the next night. Within minutes the peaceful atmosphere changed and we were having one of our all too familiar disagreements.

Keith said something I didn't like. I shot something back. He picked up a shirt I was packing for him and threw it at me.

I saw red. I got so angry I grabbed a pair of scissors and threw them all the way across the room. We kept arguing and I got so angry that without thinking I pulled off my wedding ring and threw it straight at Keith.

He just stared. I felt terrible. Some way to celebrate our first wedding anniversary.

Afterward we were both really sorry and embarrassed. Late that evening I brought out the gift box I'd been hiding and gave it to Keith expectantly. He unwrapped the box and opened the Bible.

His eyes were shining with happiness. We sat there together on the floor because Keith wanted to read to me out loud from the new Bible. I found myself wondering why two people who loved each other and wanted to live good lives just couldn't seem to do it.

Keith could get me so upset. He sparked those feelings in a lot of people. You either loved him or got mad at him.

Sometimes both. There weren't many grays in Keith's world. There was black or white, good or bad.

And even though Keith could drive me to the brink, there was something about being with him that made me face tough questions about myself, made me comb back through my life and try to figure out what I believed and why. He seemed to have a compass while I was unsure of my direction. Unlike Keith's close-knit family, which was always pulling together to help him build his career, whenever I thought of my family I was left with a kind of hollow feeling.

It was Keith's influence on me after a difficult and painful past that was pushing me further away from the dangerous places where I had been wandering. Have you noticed lately that your soul has been getting out of your control, your emotions, your thoughts, your will? Don't you wish you could control your will and you could do whatever God tells you? Don't you wish you could control your mind and think the thoughts that are pleasing to God? Don't you wish that your emotions would be under the control of the spirit? You'd be a happy person, wouldn't you, if your will and your emotions and your thoughts were under the control of the spirit? In perseverance, you will possess your soul. The day I met Keith Green, the last thing I wanted was a serious relationship.

Near the end of January, 1973, Keith showed up at Matrix Image, the videotape production company where I worked in the San Fernando Valley. His dad and his grandfather were with him. They were looking into the possibility of combining Keith's music with some of the new video effects we were producing.

As I gave them the tour, Keith stayed right on my heels, telling me more about himself than I really cared to know. Then, about a week later, he called me at work and asked if I would like to meet him for lunch. I stalled him, but Keith was cheerfully persistent.

I was a bit surprised at myself for saying I would go. I changed my mind several times before lunchtime arrived, but I met him as planned. He'd made sandwiches, and we went to Chatsworth Park for a picnic.

He brought along his guitar, and as we sat on the grass he played me a song he'd just finished. As he sang, he voiced some of the same questions I'd been struggling with, like, is death the answer or just a door? I'd never heard anyone anywhere like Keith Green. But it wasn't just his music.

It was all of him, the energy and sincerity, the sheer power of his performance. About three weeks later, during another lunchtime get-together, Keith walked me to my car as I got ready to head back to work. We stood there for a moment.

My car door was open, and I was just about to get in when he stepped closer and kissed me. I didn't resist. I liked the way he kissed, and I kissed him back.

On Easter Sunday, Keith was to pick me up to go to the Renaissance Fair in Ventura County. I'd warned him I wanted to take things slowly. But when Easter arrived, so did Keith, hours before the time we had agreed on.

His early knock woke me up, and I stumbled to the door in a daze. I was so excited I just couldn't wait any longer, he said sheepishly. I sighed and let him in while I went off to get ready.

I mean, what girl in her right mind could stay mad after an explanation like that? At the fair, Keith and I walked around for hours, buying organic food and looking at everyone in their medieval outfits. There were minstrels, jugglers, palm readers, and artisans selling every kind of homemade item you could think of. The smell of incense and food mingled in a pleasant way, and you could smell the perfumed oils--strawberry, sandalwood, and patchouli--floating on the breeze.

We sat on the grass in the warm sun and talked all afternoon. There was something about Keith that was different from anyone I'd ever known. He was a true seeker, a deep thinker, and even though he was quite serious about life, he had a wild sense of humor that I really enjoyed.

The difference in our ages bothered me a bit, but at least his life experience and perspective on things helped close the seven-and-a-half year gap between us. He was young and full of potential and hoped for the future, but said he often felt old and senile at nineteen. And at just twenty-six I knew what he meant.

Within a month, in May of nineteen seventy-four, Keith had moved into my apartment. This is powerful, don't you understand? There's thousands of us here that love Jesus, and we've got to love one another and create that power and love that he gives us in the spirit. He wants us to find where can we hear more about Jesus? When can we worship him more? How can we lift him higher? Not becoming just another love and flower-powered generation of Jesus freaks.

He wants us to be real, and he wants us to be shining lights of him. Because the word Christian means little Christ. We're supposed to be little Jesuses running around.

One really beautiful spring morning, Keith convinced me that I should play hooky from work. He wanted to take a long drive, so he picked the route, the back roads of Simi Valley that led up the coast to Santa Barbara. On our way, we came upon a little antique store and stopped.

Inside, Keith spotted a large silver cross with a turquoise stone in the center. Look at this great cross now, let's get it for you. I felt awkward.

It's really pretty, I said, but I've never worn a cross before. Keith persisted, oh, come on, we've been looking into Jesus. That was true, but wearing a cross was another story.

Because of my Jewish upbringing, something inside me rejected the idea. On the other hand, I did like what I was learning about Jesus. I thought about it for a minute.

At least nobody was hanging on it. The cross didn't have a chain, so I slipped it into my pocket. I knew Keith wanted to share his faith with me, and after all, I was hungry for something too.

If Jesus held the answers, I was open, though it was a bit alien to me. Later, as we drove, I took the cross out and turned it over. On the back, it said, Jerusalem.

At least it was from Israel, which was some consolation for this Jewish girl. As I found out more about Keith over the next few months, I saw that he was capable of making deep commitments. This was interesting since everyone around us had such hang- loose, whatever- will-be attitudes.

When he cared about a person, it was more than pretty words. He wanted to show it. It was at a rather wild party one night in the summer that Keith and I wandered off to talk about where we were at in our relationship.

He said, Mel, I've been wondering if it's really right for us to be living together. I couldn't believe it. What did he mean really right? We love each other, don't we? I said.

That's just the point. If we really love each other, maybe we should have a deeper commitment. I found myself staring, wondering where this conversation was leading.

I'd never heard anyone talk like this before, and I was getting a little nervous. What I'm trying to say, Keith continued, is maybe we should be thinking about marriage. I'm not sure we should be living together without being married.

Of course, we need to get engaged first, so maybe we could get engaged to be engaged as a trial period. Then, if it doesn't work out, we won't have to break our engagement. This was crazy and a little wonderful, but Keith never did things the way anyone else did.

Finally, we did decide to be engaged to be engaged. We also made plans to get officially engaged on Keith's 20th birthday in October. We set our wedding date for the 25th of December, Christmas Day, in honor of Jesus.

We also started to live with another major decision we'd made. I'm thinking maybe we should go celibate until we get married, Keith said one day to my surprise. I'd been reading some things in the Bible and I'm beginning to think that sex outside of marriage is wrong.

But we're living in the same house, sleeping in the same bed, I protested. Yeah, but we can do it, he said confidently. As I suspected, it was easier said than done.

In early December, Keith came to me, led me by the hand over to the piano and said, stand there where I can see you. I want you to listen to something. He sat down and just started singing.

You want to love with me? Love with me then. I only ask that you still be my friend. As I listened to him sing, I got so caught up in the soaring melody that it took me a minute to realize that the song was for me.

My throat tightened, but I didn't know what to do. And I found myself starting to blink back a few tears. It was a bit overwhelming having a song written for me, especially one as beautiful as Love With Me.

You want to love with me? Love with me then. I only ask that you still be my friend. For there are many whose friendships are known.

They loved each other really long. And the day called their way to silence. Ten stars for me do not need to have a soul.

The beauty of that moment helped offset the terrible arguments we were having, stemming from what I was beginning to think was a silly rule. Keith's idea about staying celibate until we got married. That was a difficult time for us.

We had the right idea, but it wasn't easy to live up to our own convictions. Fortunately, our wedding day arrived quickly. We awoke early on Christmas morning and dressed in our favorite Goodwill finds.

I wore a green turtleneck sweater and a long yellow cotton skirt. And Keith wore his Levi's and a nubby beige sweater. Keith and I were both nervously quiet as we drove down to the little brown church.

The dim lighting made the old wooden pews look warm and inviting as we stood in front and set our vows before the minister. It was a quick and simple ceremony and within minutes we were married. And Keith made sure it was in the name of Jesus.

Keith's best friend Todd Fishkind was our only witness. Shortly after Keith and I were married, we began to get close to some people who were also into music. Only now it was Christian music.

Recently, we'd even acquired a new roommate who was sleeping on our fold-out couch. Keith's friend Randy Stonehill, who Keith had met about a year and a half earlier at the Blah Blah. Since then, they'd had a blast writing songs and singing together.

Randy had even recorded a whole album of rock and roll Christian songs, an idea that was totally new to us. Keith and Randy had their share of energized spiritual debates. Randy didn't think Keith was quite there as a Christian.

I remember, and Keith always wore a cross around his neck and he said that he thought that Jesus was a great teacher. And I'd have to say at that point, well, okay, Keith, if you think he's a great teacher, then you really need to stop and listen to exactly what he's saying. I mean, you can't just take the teachings that you're comfortable with and then ignore the ones that you don't like.

And Keith would say, but see, I believe Jesus is God's son and I'm trying to live by his teachings. I mean, doesn't that make me a Christian? And I'd say, no, no, no, see, it's not a matter of just trying to follow Christ's teachings. We don't even have the power to do that, really, until we have a personal relationship with him.

Round and round the question would go. They developed a deep but rocky friendship, revolving around their mutual love of music and their crazy personalities. It was inevitable that they would end up doing some concerts together.

As a result of Keith's friendship with Randy, a few more Christian concerts were opening up. We made plans to go to Northern California with him. We thought we were going so Keith could do a guest set at Randy's concert.

But we were about to meet someone who would have a lasting impact on our whole lives. Keith and Melody and I were driving up to Modesto, California to do this concert, and I told them that there was a guy who was going to be playing with us that night that would really blow him away, and his name was Barry McGuire. And Keith got all excited, you know, and he said, you mean THE Barry McGuire? And Melody said, the guy that sang Eve of Destruction? And a smile, and just said, yep, that's the guy.

The Eve of Destruction was an anti-war song from the 60s. It hit the top of the music charts all over America, and we remembered it well enough to sing it in the car as we drove. It was hard to believe this guy was a Christian now, and we were eager to see what he'd be like.

There were a few hundred people there when we arrived. After Randy's set and Keith's, we settled back into our seats anxious to hear Barry. When he stepped out onto the stage to sing, we were immediately struck by his presence.

He looked like he might ride to church on a Harley Davidson motorcycle. But when he spoke, I was amazed at his meekness. He sang and talked about God in a way we'd never heard.

We were impressed with the one song called Bullfrogs and Butterflies. It sounded like a children's song. He explained it before he sang.

I wrote Bullfrogs and Butterflies because I wanted my children to have an understanding of what it means to become a new creation in Christ. They were just little bitty kids at the time learning how to talk, and I wanted them to know that they were born to be born again. And I was trying to figure out, now, what could I use in nature that would describe becoming a new creation? And I thought about, oh, yeah, tadpoles and caterpillars, and they become Bullfrogs and Butterflies.

And I wanted my children to know that just like them, we need to be born spiritually, to be born within before we can really know God. Barry made knowing God sound simple. His mannerisms were so warm and easygoing that we were glued to every word he sang or spoke.

When he finished, we followed him back into the dressing room with hopes of talking to him before he had to leave. Up close, he was kind and gentle. We were impressed by the singing star who was now following Jesus in such a humble and sacrificial way.

We were back in the dressing room and we got to talking. And the thing I got to share with Keith was so super because this is what had set me free, that I had discovered that Jesus had paid my karmic debt. You know, we were into karma a lot back in the old days.

And when I came across a reality that I didn't have to be reincarnated time after time after time to try and undo something that was undoable in the first place, that Jesus had actually taken upon himself my debt and set me free from it so I could in truth be born again and not have a second chance because that indicates a failure the first time around. But in Christ, it's a new beginning. There is no before.

It's brand new. Could Jesus really wipe away all your sins so you don't have to pay for them later? Keith concluded that he was more open than ever to the idea of Jesus being able to cut your karma. And after hearing Barry McGuire, I had to admit that the idea of getting a clean slate and being born again spiritually was starting to look like it might really be possible.

After that evening, Keith and I knew that Barry had something we wanted. Look out your window See the earth Where did it come from? Who gave it birth? Where did it come from? Where will it go? Where will it go? Don't you wish you had the answers? Well, I know The Vineyard Christian Fellowship met in a fashionable part of town. There were no halls or churches in sight, just palm trees, manicured lawns, four car garages, iron gate security systems, and an occasional uniformed nanny pushing a baby stroller.

We parked in front of a large yellow house that sat in a huge yard filled with flowers and trees. Inside, about 35 people were sitting on couches, chairs, or on the thickly carpeted floor. We quietly found a spot, smiled a bit guardedly, and waited for the meeting to start.

It was not our typical Friday night. A young man went to the front of the room and sat by the fireplace. He introduced himself as Ken Gullickson.

He started speaking, and his gentle manner immediately put me at ease. As we sat on the floor, Ken led the group in some songs we'd never heard before. Not knowing any of the words, we just listened.

Father, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

The words just flowed over me. People broke into gentle harmonies that seemed to weave in and out of each other. I felt a strange sense of peace start to wash over me.

I closed my eyes and felt myself relaxing. Jesus, I adore you. Lay my life before you.

Ken Gullickson closed the time of singing with a simple prayer and started talking about God. I'd never heard anybody talk like that before. It sounded so down-to-earth.

He made Jesus sound like his best friend. He said being in a relationship with God would change our lives, that we could become new people by asking Jesus to forgive our sins and welcoming him into our hearts. The best part was that he made it seem like getting to know God, really know him, was a real possibility.

Ken spoke for about 40 minutes, and when he was through, he asked everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes. He asked, is there anyone here who wants to ask Jesus into your heart, to really give your whole life over to him? When you ask Jesus to forgive your sins, to come into your life, you become a brand new person. It's like being born again.

Having a second chance, only it's not a physical rebirth. It's a spiritual one. You could almost hear hearts beating.

Then he said, Just raise your hand if you want to receive Jesus. I felt Keith stir, and I peeked out of the corner of one eye. To my surprise and dismay, I saw his hand raised high into the air.

Now I felt even more pressure to do the same thing, but I couldn't get my arm to move. One part of me wanted to jump up and shout, Jesus, I want you. Please forgive me.

But another part of me was sitting back, observing the whole scene and saying, No way am I doing this. After a minute or so, Ken prayed right out loud for everyone who had raised their hand, and then asked them to repeat some things after him. I so much wanted that prayer to be for me, so I said it in my heart, but I hadn't raised my hand.

The moment was over. I'd missed my chance. The following week was one of the longest I'd ever spent.

As I stood in line at the market and ran around town with Keith, I kept thinking, I want to go back to the vineyard. I hope he asks us to raise our hands again. I hope it's not too late for me.

My mind seemed stuck, and I could think of nothing else. Friday seemed to drag on endlessly. Finally, that night, when we walked into that big yellow house, the excitement in my heart was at an all-time high.

We sat on the floor again, and when the singing started, I could hardly wait for all the preliminaries to be over. Ken spoke again, and then, at last, he got to the hand-raising part. To my surprise, I hesitated.

I thought, this is crazy. I've been waiting all week. And for the next few moments, I went through an inner battle.

Something inside of me did not want to be a Christian. Other hands were raised, but I was thinking, maybe I'll just raise my hand next week. Just then, a gentle voice broke into my personal war zone.

I believe there's another person here who needs to receive the Lord tonight, Ken said patiently. I knew he was talking about me. Then I thought, that's impossible.

How could he know? The room was completely quiet. Something was tugging at me to open my heart totally to Jesus, but something else wanted me to keep my hands down. I thought, if I don't raise my hand right now, nobody's going to do it for me.

I need to choose sides. Quietly, I slipped my hand high into the air. Ken immediately prayed for all of us who were receiving the Lord that night, and a rush of peace filled my heart.

Hear the bells ringing, they're singing that you can be born again. Hear the bells ringing, they're singing Christ is risen from the dead. As we continued going to the vineyard, Ken Gullickson helped answer our questions.

Keith was always pressing for answers to questions. He was never satisfied with simple answers, especially as they related to God. He was a very spiritual man, though human, and pressing at the same time.

One night, for example, he said that he knew I believed that Jesus was God, but he wondered what that made the Father if there was only one God. How could Jesus be God? How could the Father be God at the same time? I tried to explain to him that what he was struggling with was what we call the Trinity. Trinity meaning three persons, one God.

As a matter of fact, in Colossians, when it talks about Jesus, it says, in him, in Jesus, all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. But as I shared with Keith, I tried to shed some light on it by using a very simple analogy. H<sub>2</sub>O can be water, it can be steam, it can be ice.

God is Father, Son, and Spirit. The analogy, of course, breaks down because you can't have a puddle of water and an ice cube at the same time, but God is all three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time. Nobody had ever said it to us quite so simply.

Joy to the world He is risen, Alleluia He's risen, Alleluia He's risen, Alleluia Alleluia Throughout the summer of 1975, Keith turned down every concert offer that came his way and confined himself to his upright piano at home. It had been nearly three months since Keith had totally laid aside performing due to a lack of conviction on his part that the Lord wanted him to continue now that he was a Christian. It was an agonizing decision, but Keith didn't want to assume that just because he was good at it, God wanted him to continue.

Besides, he told me, I want people to love me because they see Jesus in me, not because I can blow them away with my music. About that time, Keith had been asked to perform at a benefit for the Hollywood Free Theater, made up of Christian actors who met together to encourage each other in the Lord and to work on their acting skills. Keith felt torn.

He wasn't trying to slip out of his commitment to lay his music down, but he did have a desire to help raise money for this group of Christians. Finally, he felt it was okay to at least ask the Lord about it. He prayed a lot because he didn't want his own desires to get in the way of hearing from God.

After seeking the Lord, Keith told me, I believe God is giving me the go-ahead to accept this invitation. He didn't tell me to pick up my music again. This is a one-time thing.

After that, I'm going back to my commitment. The benefit was to be held in the heart of Beverly Hills at a very inn night spot called The Daisy. The place was packed when we arrived, but not with the usual crowd.

We saw many familiar faces from the vineyard, Randy Stonehill, Larry Norman, Jerry Hauser, and a Christian recording artist named Jamie Owens. And then there were the famous faces we were seeing up close for the first time, Pat Boone, Dale Evans, and Julie Harris. Keith usually had nerves of steel, but I knew he felt a lot of pressure that night.

He wanted his performance to bring glory to the Lord, and only to the Lord. When Keith's turn came at last, he walked up to the bright spotlight and sat down at the piano. He looked out at the audience and softly began playing the prelude to The Prodigal Son.

This song I'm about to sing is my song, he said. This is your song. It's for everyone who has ever left the loving arms of their Heavenly Father to go out on their own.

I was a prodigal son, he explained, but I'm not running anymore. I came home covered with mud and dirt from the world, and my Father in Heaven picked me up, washed me off, and sat me on his lap. People sat down their soft drinks and turned their attention to the stage.

I sensed at once that something was happening up there with Keith. This wasn't just a performance. It was as if, through Keith, God was portraying his heart to us, a father's heart that longed for his children to come home.

When Keith came to the part where the now broken prodigal son returns home, there was such a trembling cry in his voice, my throat tightened. At the table next to me, a woman had tears running down her face. People all over this beautiful ballroom were dabbing their tears.

Keith broke into the last movement, where the Father, with joy, forgives his son and calls for a celebration. When the song ended, there was a moment of stunned silence. Then the whole room exploded in applause and cheers.

But Keith got up from the piano at once and quietly made his way back to our table, barely looking up. I wasn't sure how to respond when everyone was so excited, he said, shaking his head. I was elated.

Keith, you were incredible. I really saw the Lord in you in a more powerful way tonight. He said, I felt the Lord in a new way too.

He hesitated for a moment. Mel, I think the Lord gave me back my music while I was playing tonight. I was in the middle of the song and I just felt a peace and assurance that I was right in the center of God's will, doing exactly what He created me to do.

It's hard to believe, but I think God really wants me to play for Him and for His glory, but only for His glory. This was the go-ahead from the Lord Keith had been waiting for, but it would be another three months before he really started running with it.

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