

# Jennifer Shaw: It All Belongs to Him

By Rebecca Ingram Powell

**I** thought I had the perfect life," says contemporary Christian recording artist Jennifer Shaw. "I had a job doing what I loved, I had a wonderful husband, two happy kids — things couldn't have been better."

## Seeking God's Treasure

Jennifer grew up in a Christian home where her musical giftings were identified early and always encouraged. Early on, she knew she wanted to be a classical music artist and vocal performer. Focused on her dreams, her rebellious heart viewed the Christian faith as a hindrance. "I have never liked anyone to tell me what to do," she admits, "and I believed I would never reach my career goals if I followed God and His rules for my life." So at the tender age of 15, Jennifer told God she was "done" and made a deliberate move away from Him.

Unlike many prodigals, Jennifer's decision did not result in catastrophe. In fact, in the five years that followed, Jennifer's career was well on its way. Musically, she was a classically-trained opera singer with great success in New York's theater venues. But in spite of her success, she felt empty.

"I thought, *Who has that feeling of fulfillment?*" she shares. "And my parents immediately came to mind. There was something about their lives that was so different and so true. So at that point, I gave in to the lordship of Christ, and I've never been the same."

Several years later, Jennifer and Nathan, her college sweetheart-turned-husband, moved their family of two young daughters from New York back home to Ohio, where she accepted the position of worship leader at Faith Covenant Church in Westerville. Although Jennifer thought she was to lead the congregation in traditional music, things turned upside-down when she was asked to form a band and move the service into a contemporary worship style.

"I was fighting it all the way," Jennifer says. "I didn't know anything about putting a band together, and besides, I'm classically trained. I was really concerned that it would ruin my voice." Jennifer knows now the Lord was teaching her a needed lesson. "Everything about your life, even the things you hold most dear, none of it is yours," she notes. "It is His. It's a God-given trust. I felt like God was saying, *Your music is mine. It's for My glory, not yours.*" As Jennifer's charmed life began to



unravel, she soon realized that God was teaching her not only about the things she held dear, but also the people she held dear. They belonged to Him too.

## Life Breaks Through

The Shaws were traveling home from a vacation when Jennifer began to feel uncomfortable. For some time, she and Nathan had been trying to conceive a third child. Her newly confirmed pregnancy was 12 weeks along. She waited until the next morning to go to the hospital. There, doctors discovered she was experiencing an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy and bleeding internally. She miscarried the baby and almost died as well.

### JENNIFER'S MUSIC

- *Love Broke Through* (2010) — Includes lyrics inspired by Jennifer's tour of Kenya and the UK, as well as original songs offering hope, comfort, and truth to every listener
- *Finding Beauty* (2007) — Features 11 new songs plus a bonus track, "A Christmas Song"
- *Be Still* (2006) — Jennifer's debut album, begun as a Christmas gift to her dying father
- Jennifer also has children's Scripture memory CDs available at [www.jennifershaw.com](http://www.jennifershaw.com).



Just a few months after they lost the baby, Jennifer's 55-year-old dad, Dave Chilcoat, was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). "I cannot overstate the devastation of that moment in my life," she explains. "I literally fell on the floor sobbing in front of the Lord." Reaching immediately for God's Word, Jennifer opened the Bible and her eyes fell on Psalm 42:5, "... for I will still praise Him." Knowing that God had spoken to the very depths of her soul, Jennifer got up and wrote her dad

a song she entitled "Be Still." She added it to a collection of contemporary songs she had written for the Faith Covenant band and gave it to him that Christmas. Incredibly, with no agent and no distribution, those songs found their way onto radio stations. "It was the only way that God could have convinced me that contemporary music is what He wanted me to do in ministry," Jennifer acknowledges.

## Finding Beauty

By January of the following year, Jennifer was expecting again. It was a difficult pregnancy. When son, Toby, arrived, Jennifer noticed right away that he was not a happy baby. She attributed his irritability to a series of extreme ear infections that caused him to be clinically deaf for the first year of his life.

"That deafness was misleading for us," Jennifer recalls. "I believed Toby wanted to be a calm, happy baby but that he couldn't be because of the pain in his ears." When Toby experienced delays in speech development, doctors blamed the deafness once again. Jennifer and Nathan, however, sensed a deeper problem. "Moving from nursing to solid foods was a key indicator," she recalls. "We couldn't get him to eat anything. Then he lost babbling skills, which can be a sign of autism."

It was a terribly difficult time. Jennifer readily admits that they would have sought a diagnosis more quickly if not for her dad's illness. She was helping her mom with her dad's care, trying to comfort and explain PawPaw's imminent death to daughters Rinnah and Rachel,



and terribly concerned with Toby's increasingly alarming behavior.

"He couldn't stand to be touched," Jennifer says. "He never played." Life had gotten so overwhelming for him that he was beginning to completely shut down. Life was overwhelming for Jennifer too, and she took her many concerns to the Lord in prayer.

About a month before her dad passed away, Jennifer ran into a woman who had a son with autism. The woman urged her to seek help for Toby without hesitation. "She told me not to wait, that there were tons of early intervention programs. Our meeting that day was a God-appointment."

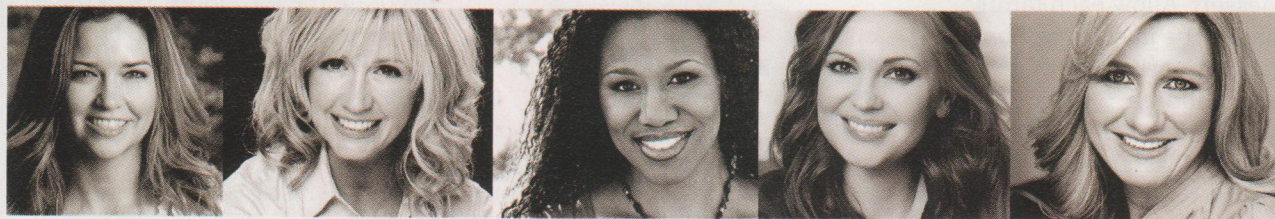


Despite the usual nine month wait to get into federally funded programs, God paved the way with immediate openings. "Twelve times we got an appointment because someone called and cancelled," Jennifer remarks. "We got through all of his testing in two weeks. God's hand was on it because no one else could have done that." Toby was diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder and treated with occupational therapy.

When Jennifer looks back on that rocky season of her life, she knows she was not alone. "You can't protect your family from everything. We have to give them into the keeping of the Lord," she says. ☺



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