

“American Pie” by Don McLean

Ecclesiastes 1:4-10 (NIV)

⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

The song “American Pie” was written in 1971 by Don McLean and it considered one of the most powerful and significant songs of the 20th Century. The song talks about the cultural changes that happened in the 50’s and 60’s. The hope and exuberance of the 50’s was replaced by the despair and turmoil of the 60’s.

Don McLean has never explained the song. Never. He’s said it’s up to us, in each generation, to understand it. So, let me ask, “what would Jesus say about this song?” One thing he’d say is there’s nothing new in this song because each generation must wrestle with how we’re going to handle crisis, disappointment, and grief.

“How to Make Your Life ‘Crisis Proof”

A. Do something good with bad news.

But February made me shiver
With every paper I'd deliver
Bad news on the doorstep
I couldn't take one more step

I can't remember if I cried
When I read about his widowed bride
But something touched me deep inside
The day the music died

On February 3, 1959 a small plane crashed on a snow covered Iowa cornfield, killing four passengers: the pilot, plus 3 rock-n-rollers, Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and Jay “Big Bopper” Richardson. Don McLean learned about the plane crash the next morning when he split open the newspapers he would deliver.

Ephesians 5:16-17, Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Look for opportunity that comes with bad news ... don’t react thoughtlessly ... but intentionally say “Lord, in the face of what I’m going through, what do you want me to do.”

In the face of bad news Don McLean would eventually write one of the best songs we’ve ever heard.

In the face of bad news you can _____ one of the best _____ ever!

B. Learn to say “good bye” grace-fully.

[Chorus]

So bye-bye, Miss American Pie
Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry
And them good old boys were drinkin' whiskey and rye
Singin' "This'll be the day that I die
This'll be the day that I die"

“Chevy to the levee” was an advertising phrase in the 50’s ... but the levee was dry. The “good ole boys” drinking were singing the line “This’ll be the day that I die” which is a rewording of the line “Cause that’ll be the day when I die” from the chorus of Buddy Holly's hit *That'll be the Day*. That Buddy Holly song is a “good bye” song.

There are so so many good-byes in life. For each and every “hello,” there’s a good-bye.

John 16:5-7, ⁵ “But now I am going away to the One who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. ⁶ Instead, you grieve because of what I’ve told you. ⁷ But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.

Every “good bye” is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to comfort us.

C. Hold on to your faith.

There's a lot of religious chatter in this song, which is the problem because faith is presented as "chatter" too easily discarded.

Faith is replaced with music in verse 1:

[Verse 1]

Did you write the book of love
And do you have faith in God above
If the Bible tells you so?
Now do you believe in rock and roll
Can music save your mortal soul
And can you teach me how to dance real slow?

Verses 2, 3, and 4 contain many, many references to the music of the 50's and 60's: Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Byrds, Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones, and Janice Joplin. Which is odd ... really, because even though "the music died" there was plenty of music and musicians in the song. In our generation we've seen the death of Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson ... but these artists are soon replaced with the next generation of singers.

I think a side-note of this song is that we often focus of what we lose instead of what we keep ... and faith is something we can keep, it's actually the only thing that lasts through the long nights of grief when saying goodbye is so hard.

This song is pretty dark and down. Not much hope going on. The song ends up with the singer going to a local record store for help (remember, he's said music has replaced his faith).

[Outro]

I met a girl who sang the blues
And I asked her for some happy news
But she just smiled and turned away
I went down to the sacred store
Where I'd heard the music years before
But the man there said the music wouldn't play

He wants to reconnect, with what he believed years before. Reconnect with what?
He desperately wants some "good news."

And in the streets, the children screamed
The lovers cried and the poets dreamed
But not a word was spoken
The church bells all were broken

And the three men I admire most
The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost
They caught the last train for the coast
The day the music died

Don McLean has said one reason he would never "explain" the song is that it's a song for every generation ... and he invites each generation to find meaning for its day. So, let me suggest an interpretation of this verse for today, for us, for Sunny Hills Church: this a call for the church to never compromise its message in the face of culture.

The singer wants hope. He's desperate for "happy." Music has let him down. The church has let him down. He thinks the three men he admires most, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" have left the scene.

But, they haven't. We're the church and we need to be hope for people who are tired of saying their "good-byes." One of the reasons our church exists is to be a safe place for people to reconnect with God after being let down by the church.

Matthew 5:13-16, "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world ... let your actions prompt others to praise God."

Hey ... Janice Joplin, give me a good word! Nothing.

Record store, lift me up! Nothing.

Church bells, ring one more time for me! Silence.

But, you, and I are the salt and light that can prompt people to reconnect with their faith! Praise the Lord!

And they were singin' bye-bye, Miss American Pie
Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry

And them good old boys were drinkin' whiskey and rye
Singin' "This'll be the day that I die
This'll be the day that I die"

[Chorus]

They were singin' bye-bye, Miss American Pie
Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry
Them good old boys were drinkin' whiskey and rye
And singin' "This'll be the day that I die"

... and you walk in, salt and light, you sit down next to them good old boys, and point them to the hope that goes beyond their good byes.

A closing prayer ... "Dear God, we recognize that life rolls on with or without us and that we continually face the challenges of saying good bye to people and ideas that mean the world to us. O Lord, we get knocked down and we get back up with Your help. We ask for Your strengthening Grace. Let ME be the salt and light that prompts another person to renewed faith in You. Use MY actions as a pointer to the hope and joy that's found in You. In Jesus' name, amen."