

# ELIZABETHTOWN



## ELIZABETHTOWN A Musical Bible Study Guide

By Craig Detweiler

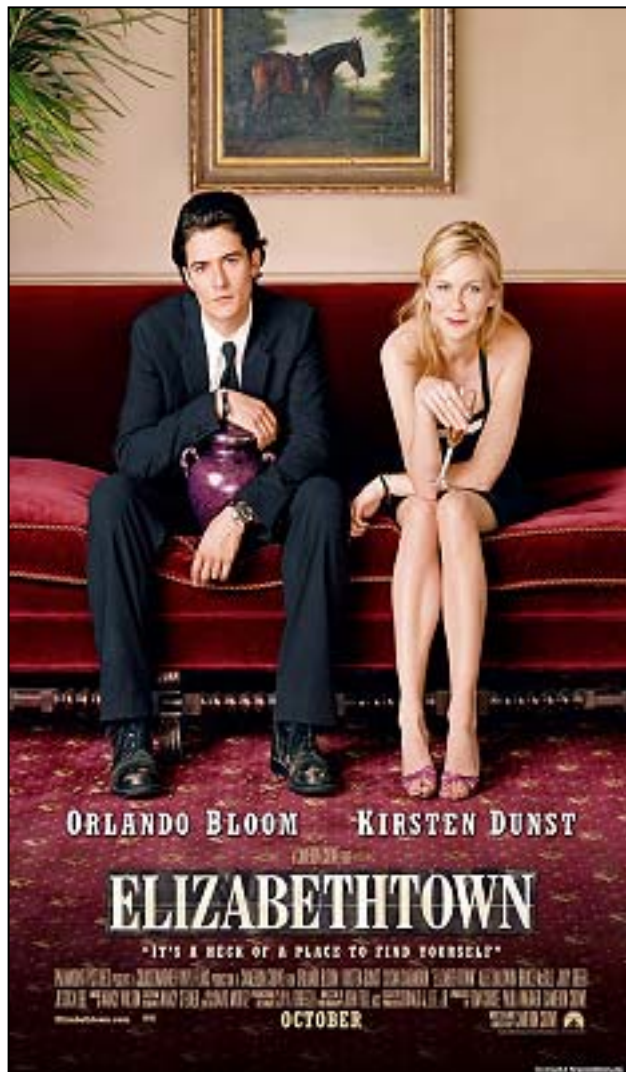
### Music, Movies & Meaning: What Is the Soundtrack to Your Life?

**Images © 2005 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved.**

No other uses are permitted without the prior written consent of owner. Use of the material in violation of the foregoing may result in civil and/or criminal penalties. Credits and dates are subject to change. For more information, please visit their official site.

What's on your playlist? While an iPod tracks your "Top 25 Most Played" songs, what it's also doing is taking your musical pulse and offering insight into your emotional state. Lots of punk rock on there? Could be feeling a bit frustrated lately. A country music medley? May have just suffered a break-up. Downloading the best of Jimmy Buffet? Maybe you're ready for that trip to Cabo. Whether we're aware of it or not, music forms a soundtrack to our lives, a window into our souls.

The outstanding and eclectic soundtrack to the new film  *Elizabethtown*  will undeniably be in heavy rotation on iTunes lists across the country. It features vintage rockers like Tom Petty and Elton John, as well as cool, upcoming artists like Ryan Adams and My Morning Jacket.  *Elizabethtown*  follows the story of Drew Baylor (Orlando Bloom), a man down on his luck, as he journeys to his roots in small-town Kentucky to bury his father. Drew finds new life in his interactions with his colorful extended family, and in his unexpected romance with Claire (Kirsten Dunst), a quirky and persistent airline stewardess. As their relationship evolves, so do the songs accompanying these characters in  *Elizabethtown* .



While watching a film, it's impossible not to connect the characters' journey to personal ones. This certainly holds true to issues of faith, as well. Invariably, cinematic scenes and images resonate with our own walk and remind us of certain Bible verses that seem more relevant than ever. In a way, movies act as prisms for us. What appears on the screen – forgiveness, sin, happiness, sadness, hope, redemption – harkens to similar moments in our own lives.

The stirring soundtrack of  *Elizabethtown*  can be seen as a reflection of the Psalms. The Psalms in the Bible serve as a guide to worship. This poetic prayer book contains the full range of human emotions. Songs of weeping and sorrow, like Psalm 22, are followed by

songs of comfort and strength, like Psalm 23. Some Psalms are reserved for special occasions, like a wedding in Psalm 45 or the coronation of a king in Psalm 72. These Psalms are to be sung or played loudly, with horns, drums, choirs. Psalm 51 is a quiet, introspective song, more suitable for solo acoustic guitar. Psalms also express anger, confusion and grief, like the rant for revenge against Babylon in Psalm 139. Whatever you're experiencing, whether it's doubt, loneliness, thankfulness, or triumph, there is a Psalm for you.

Recently, *Elizabethtown* writer/director Cameron Crowe discussed his song selections for this combination Bible Study/Listening Guide. The guide is designed for individuals or small groups reflecting upon the film as a week's worth of daily devotions or as one longer, extended group Bible Study/Sunday school lesson. And throughout it, Crowe explains how these songs complement and deepen an understanding of the film and how a study of the music in *Elizabethtown* can lead to a greater appreciation for the music God has put in our lives. Most importantly, this guide asks you to consider: what is the soundtrack to your life?

### **ELIZABETHTOWN LINKS**

[@HollywoodJesus.com](http://HollywoodJesus.com)

[Overview](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown\\_overview.htm](http://hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown_overview.htm)

[Reviews and Blogs](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown\\_review.htm](http://hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown_review.htm)

[Cast and Crew](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown\\_cast.htm](http://hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown_cast.htm)

[Photo Pages](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/movie/elizabethtown/photos1.html](http://hollywoodjesus.com/movie/elizabethtown/photos1.html)

[Trailers, Clips, DVDs, Books, Soundtrack](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown\\_trailer.htm](http://hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown_trailer.htm)

[Production Notes](#)

[hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown\\_about.htm](http://hollywoodjesus.com/elizabethtown_about.htm)

## 1. GETTING STARTED



PLAY: “In Your Eyes” by Peter Gabriel

Filmmaker Cameron Crowe has crafted some of the finest cinematic soundtracks. With his background as a teenage reporter for Rolling Stone magazine, Crowe has been an eyewitness to some of rock’s most memorable moments. As a writer and director, he has created beloved movies like *Jerry Maguire* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. His sweet, funny and poignant films contain some of cinema’s most memorable moments. Consider *Say Anything*, when Lloyd Dobler holds up a jam box, blasting Peter Gabriel’s “In Your Eyes.” Or *Almost Famous*, when the slow, steady and triumphant reunion occurs when Elton John’s “Tiny Dancer” roars from on the band’s tour bus. Music elevates these scenes to a higher plane, uniting the audience and the actors in a transcendent moment of sheer joy.

PLAY: “Tiny Dancer” by Elton John

DISCUSS: What is your favorite musical moment from a movie?

## 2. INSPIRATION



*Elizabethtown* is about Drew Baylor, a successful shoe designer, who is forced to step back and reassess his life when his father dies in Kentucky. There, Drew must get back to his roots to discover what matters most. Since many of Crowe's films are rooted in intense, personal stories, I asked him where the inspiration for

*Elizabethtown* came from. Said Crowe, "I was listening to a lot of Patty Griffin, Tom Petty and Ryan Adams when I got the inspiration for the movie. Songs can bolster you up and give you a different view of the world, usually a lot more eloquently than a movie can. The whole movie we've done starts with the music."

PLAY: "Long Ride Home" by Patty Griffin. It talks about time to listen, reflect and think on the long ride home.

READ: Psalm 104. It celebrates the creative side of God, echoing Genesis 1. Nature provides the perfect backdrop for gaining perspective, for seeing God's extravagant creativity. Reflect on the glory of the stars, the earth, the mountains, the animals, the sea.

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul.  
O LORD my God, you are very great;  
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

<sup>2</sup> He wraps himself in light as with a garment;  
he stretches out the heavens like a tent

<sup>3</sup> and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.  
He makes the clouds his chariot  
and rides on the wings of the wind.

<sup>4</sup> He makes winds his messengers, <sup>[a]</sup>  
flames of fire his servants.

<sup>5</sup> He set the earth on its foundations;  
it can never be moved.

<sup>6</sup> You covered it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.

<sup>7</sup> But at your rebuke the waters fled,  
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;

<sup>8</sup> they flowed over the mountains,  
they went down into the valleys,  
to the place you assigned for them.

<sup>9</sup> You set a boundary they cannot cross;  
never again will they cover the earth.

<sup>10</sup> He makes springs pour water into the ravines;  
it flows between the mountains.

<sup>11</sup> They give water to all the beasts of the field;  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

<sup>12</sup> The birds of the air nest by the waters;  
they sing among the branches.

<sup>13</sup> He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;  
the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

<sup>14</sup> He makes grass grow for the cattle,  
and plants for man to cultivate—  
bringing forth food from the earth:

<sup>15</sup> wine that gladdens the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine,  
and bread that sustains his heart.

<sup>16</sup> The trees of the LORD are well watered,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

<sup>17</sup> There the birds make their nests;  
the stork has its home in the pine trees.

<sup>18</sup> The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
the crags are a refuge for the coney. <sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The moon marks off the seasons,  
and the sun knows when to go down.

<sup>20</sup> You bring darkness, it becomes night,  
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.

<sup>21</sup> The lions roar for their prey  
and seek their food from God.

<sup>22</sup> The sun rises, and they steal away;  
they return and lie down in their dens.

<sup>23</sup> Then man goes out to his work,  
to his labor until evening.

<sup>24</sup> How many are your works, O LORD!  
In wisdom you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

<sup>25</sup> There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
teeming with creatures beyond number—  
living things both large and small.

<sup>26</sup> There the ships go to and fro,  
and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

<sup>27</sup> These all look to you  
to give them their food at the proper time.

<sup>28</sup> When you give it to them,  
they gather it up;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.

<sup>29</sup> When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.

<sup>30</sup> When you send your Spirit,  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.

<sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

<sup>32</sup> he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

<sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

<sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
as I rejoice in the LORD.

<sup>35</sup> But may sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked be no more.  
Praise the LORD, O my soul.  
Praise the LORD. <sup>[c]</sup>

**DISCUSS:** What aspects of God's creations inspire you? What music inspires you? What singers make you more creative? What bands help you to think better and inspire you to be and do more?

### 3. AUTHENTICITY



*Elizabethtown* opens with a surprising musical choice, “Jesus Was A Cross Maker.” This haunting song about a “sweet silver angel” compliments images of a helicopter coming in for a landing at a shoe company’s headquarters. I asked Crowe why he choose this almost forgotten song from the hippie Jesus freak-era of the

early 1970s. “I always loved it,” Crowe responds. “It is evocative of Judee Sill, a great singer who’s been forgotten. This was her classic. The Hollies [a British pop band] covered it. This is their caffeinated, poppy version. I liked the contrast of something authentic being said in an almost inauthentic way. Just like our lead character, Drew Baylor. Things with Drew will get deeper and the songs will get even truer.”

PLAY: “Jesus Was A Cross Maker” by Judee Sill and then the cover version by The Hollies.

READ: Psalm 139. It is a prayer, asking God to search us and know us and reveal the aspects of our lives that may be inauthentic. Efforts to hide our true selves from God are futile because wherever we go, God’s Spirit is already there. In fact, no one knows us better than God, the one who created us.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me  
and you know me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you know it completely, O LORD.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in—behind and before;  
you have laid your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, <sup>[a]</sup> you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

<sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to <sup>[b]</sup> me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand.  
When I awake,  
I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup> If only you would slay the wicked, O God!  
Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!

<sup>20</sup> They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.

<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,  
and abhor those who rise up against you?

<sup>22</sup> I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

DISCUSS: What are the differences between the original song and the remake? How do you discern what is authentic from what is synthetic in music and in life? What is something about *you* that's original? What is inauthentic about you? How can you change that? How do you strive for authenticity in your own life?

#### 4. OUTLOOK



*Elizabethtown* is a love story. The entrance of the love interest is such an important part of romantic comedies, and Claire enters onscreen to the sounds of Tom Petty and the Heartbreaker's song, "It Will All Work Out." Crowe explained how he chose what song should introduce Claire. "I remember that the song stood out from 80s

album from Tom Petty [Let Me Up 'I've Had Enough]. 'It Will All Work Out' is the personal philosophy of Claire's character [a stewardess who never gives up]. Kirsten auditioned to that song and as soon as she entered, we knew she was perfect for the part."

PLAY: "It Will All Work Out" by Tom Petty

READ: Psalm 32 offers a strong personal philosophy: "Blessed is the person whose sins are covered, in whose spirit is no deceit." How will things all work out? Verse 5 suggests, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin." How will things work out for you? According the Psalmist, "God is my hiding place, you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." How will God instruct and teach you in the way you should go?

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is he  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man  
whose sin the LORD does not count against him  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night  
your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.  
Selah

<sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD"—  
and you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.  
Selah

<sup>6</sup> Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely when the mighty waters rise,  
they will not reach him.

<sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.  
Selah

<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you and watch over you.

<sup>9</sup> Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.

<sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the LORD's unfailing love  
surrounds the man who trusts in him.

<sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;  
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

DISCUSS: If your life were a movie, what entrance music would you want? Does the music you've chosen truly match up to your life, or is it an idealized version? If it doesn't, how can you change that?

## 5. BREAKTHROUGH

*Elizabethtown* is set against the backdrop of Drew Baylor's colossal failure. His new idea for a shoe loses his company millions of dollars. When he is at his darkest point – contemplating suicide – a song breaks into his life in an unexpected way. This tune on his cell phone literally saves his life, The Temptations "I Can't Get Next To You."



Explained Crowe, "[The song] is like the voice of life calling – a little theme that when you want to give up, life presents an opportunity to keep going. The song says, 'I can turn the grey sky blue.' It is a knocking; and if you answer, another life will begin, And if you don't... With Kurt Cobain [the lead singer of Nirvana, who committed suicide], how sad that he died alone. I think of him by himself, 'You're high, you're sad.' But tomorrow, you may wake up and hear a Cheap Trick song that might convince you, don't give up. And suddenly there's a fresh start, another life."

PLAY: "Come As You Are" by Nirvana; here it as a heartfelt prayer, a cry for help. Then, play "I Can't Get Next To You" by The Temptations.

READ: Psalm 13 – first while listening to "Come As You Are" and then "I Can't Get Next To You." The Psalms go to some pretty dark places of doubt and depression. Psalm 13 deals with when we feel alone and abandoned, as if God is nowhere to be found. It demonstrates that God can handle our greatest questions.

<sup>1</sup> How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and every day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

<sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;

<sup>4</sup> my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

<sup>5</sup> But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.

<sup>6</sup> I will sing to the LORD,  
for he has been good to me.

DISCUSS: Did the meaning of this Psalm change based on the accompanying music? Is there a song or lyric that has broken into your life and given you hope to carry on?

## 6. LEGACY



*Elizabethtown* takes Drew Baylor back to Kentucky to attend his father Mitch’s funeral. Along the way, he reconnects with his roots, meets Claire and discovers what matters most to him. The central anthem in the film is Elton John’s “My Father’s Gun.” Elton’s music plays a key role in both *Almost Famous* and in *Elizabethtown*. “I love

those early 1970s Elton John albums,” Crowe explains. “And I realize they haven’t been totally discovered or overplayed. Tumbleweed Connection – that was his *Elizabethtown* ... his look at Americana. He and his lyricist, Bernie Taupin, had just come from England and they were deeply in love with the American culture, particularly the West. I just wanted to give a home to the song. ‘My Father’s Gun’ really worked with Orlando [as a British actor playing an American originally from the Deep South]. We cast the movie to music.”

PLAY: “My Father’s Gun” by Elton John

“My Father’s Gun” is a funeral song, and *Elizabethtown* culminates in a memorial service for Drew’s dad, Mitch. When asked what song Crowe would want played at his funeral, he responded, “I’m not planning for my funeral yet, but I always loved ‘Something Fine’ by Jackson Browne,” Crowe says. I also like, ‘It Will All Work Out’ by Tom Petty. I hope it will all work out.”

PLAY: “Something Fine” by Jackson Browne

READ: Psalm 26 is a prayer offered at the end of a life. It is an appeal for mercy. The Psalmist takes stock of all he has done. He has trusted in the Lord. Now, he asks God to ‘test me’ and ‘try me’, to ‘examine my heart and my mind.’ Are you prepared to be tested? What would God find in an examination of your heart and mind? How do we prepare for the end of our lives?

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O LORD,  
for I have led a blameless life;  
I have trusted in the LORD  
without wavering.

<sup>2</sup> Test me, O LORD, and try me,  
examine my heart and my mind;

<sup>3</sup> for your love is ever before me,  
and I walk continually in your truth.

<sup>4</sup> I do not sit with deceitful men,  
nor do I consort with hypocrites;

<sup>5</sup> I abhor the assembly of evildoers  
and refuse to sit with the wicked.

<sup>6</sup> I wash my hands in innocence,  
and go about your altar, O LORD,

<sup>7</sup> proclaiming aloud your praise  
and telling of all your wonderful deeds.

<sup>8</sup> I love the house where you live, O LORD,  
the place where your glory dwells.

<sup>9</sup> Do not take away my soul along with sinners,  
my life with bloodthirsty men,

<sup>10</sup> in whose hands are wicked schemes,  
whose right hands are full of bribes.

<sup>11</sup> But I lead a blameless life;  
redeem me and be merciful to me.

<sup>12</sup> My feet stand on level ground;  
in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.

**DISCUSS:** What song would you want played at your funeral? How would you want your life to be remembered and celebrated? What will people say about you at your funeral?

## 7. AWAKENING



Toward the end of the film, an amazing musical montage is the backdrop for Drew's road trip across America – featuring a “mix tape” of classic songs from Frank Sinatra, Bob Dylan, U2, Jeff Buckley and so many others given to Drew by Claire. Music serves as the literal soundtrack for Drew's journey. Explained Crowe, “In an

increasingly impersonal world where people don't send letters and end up talking to each other in technical ways like email, a mix has become one of the more personal communicative things you can do. I wanted that kind of personal ending. Claire gives a *mix map*, a gift from the heart and a guide to living in the world a little bit more than he has. At the start of the film, he's looking down and gazing at people's shoes as a way to figure out who they are. But her mix of music says, ‘Look up. Look around. Feel yourself as an authentic part of the world.’ It is a tour guide of the South with music – a fourth act to the movie ... the one I'm proudest of. I love it when you walk out a movie and you feel a little different ... a little more connected. Life is something to be appreciated and enjoyed.”

PLAY: “That's Life” by Frank Sinatra and “Pride in the Name of Love” by U2

READ: Psalm 30 is written out of the depths. It looks back on trials and temptations and thanks God for deliverance.

<sup>1</sup> I will exalt you, O LORD,  
for you lifted me out of the depths  
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

<sup>2</sup> O LORD my God, I called to you for help  
and you healed me.

<sup>3</sup> O LORD, you brought me up from the grave <sup>[b]</sup>;  
you spared me from going down into the pit.

<sup>4</sup> Sing to the LORD, you saints of his;  
praise his holy name.

<sup>5</sup> For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favor lasts a lifetime;

weeping may remain for a night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning.

<sup>6</sup> When I felt secure, I said,  
"I will never be shaken."

<sup>7</sup> O LORD, when you favored me,  
you made my mountain <sup>[c]</sup> stand firm;  
but when you hid your face,  
I was dismayed.

<sup>8</sup> To you, O LORD, I called;  
to the Lord I cried for mercy:

<sup>9</sup> "What gain is there in my destruction, <sup>[d]</sup>  
in my going down into the pit?  
Will the dust praise you?  
Will it proclaim your faithfulness?"

<sup>10</sup> Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me;  
O LORD, be my help."

<sup>11</sup> You turned my wailing into dancing;  
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

<sup>12</sup> that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

**DISCUSS:** Where did God show up at key points on your personal road map? When and where did your wailing turn to dancing? How can you express your thanks to God today? What is the soundtrack to your life?

The purpose of this guide was to awaken your ears and stir your hearts. Surely what we're listening to says much about where we are in life. Hopefully, you've been challenged to pay closer attention to the soundtrack of your life. May you continue to make the connections between God's enduring Word, the poetry of the Psalms and the songs of pop culture.

*Craig Detweiler is a screenwriter and author of "A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture." He chairs the film/TV/radio program at Biola University in La Mirada, California. He'd like to have the Flaming Lips' "Soft Bulletin" played at his funeral.*

**Images © 2005 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved.**

No other uses are permitted without the prior written consent of owner. Use of the material in violation of the foregoing may result in civil and/or criminal penalties. Credits and dates are subject to change. For more information, please visit their official site.