

# YOU BELONG WITH ME:

Taylor Swift and God's Transforming Love



think  
CHRISTIAN  
no such thing as secular

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Many Loves of Taylor Swift

By KATHRYN FREEMAN

**On magical nights**, in whirlwind romances, like star-crossed lovers in picture-perfect fairy tales, Taylor Swift's songs tell stories about all the ways we fall in love. The story does not always end well; sometimes the bad boy breaks your heart, fails to notice you, chooses a cheerleader. But in Swift's world you never stay down for long because the chance to begin again is always right around the corner.

Despite what the tabloids say, Swift has never been "boy crazy." Romantic love is not the only kind of love she narrates. She also tells stories of friendship, of nights spent dancing heartbreak away and shaking off both bad boyfriends and haters. Yet even friendships have the potential to sour—for nice things to turn to bad blood.

Swift's stories of love have evolved, from the fairy tales of "Love Story" to calling out your partner's bad habits on "Gold Rush." Not only have her lyrics transformed, but the music has transformed too. She began as a teenage country singer, then became a 1980s-inspired pop star. Now she is still a pop star, but albums such as *folklore* and *evermore* bring together that sensibility and her country sound. Swift reminds us that how our love stories begin may not always be how they end. Love changes, and in its changing, it changes us. Swift is a master of describing love in all its changing colors and hues.

She's right about the power of love to transform us. The Bible speaks of the power of love. It can [cast out fear](#). It can [restore relationships with neighbors](#). It can [bring us closer to God](#) and ultimately [save the world](#). God loves us too much to leave us in our state of sin and despair. His love transforms us into a truer way of being human, first modeled for us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Christian philosopher [James K.A. Smith](#) argues that we are what we love, meaning we become what our hearts most desire. Our loves are forming and reforming us every day. If the thing we love the most is God, we should be becoming more and more like his Son every day, because the thing about true love is that it brings and holds us closer to our true selves. There are no shifting shadows and hidden parts where you are loved; you are truly seen and known.

But Taylor Swift is also correct that people will let us down. Projects we love will not get the recognition they deserve. Our hearts will never be ultimately filled by the things of this world. God, however, never fails. His love is not a nightmare dressed like a daydream. It is real, and it is constant. It will be the thing that remains. No matter who or where we are, God says, “You belong with me.”

God’s love transforms us through our relationship with Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a love truer than any fairy-tale twist and better than even the best Taylor Swift lyric. In the five essays that follow, we’ll mark the ways her music poetically captures human love in all its forms, while also hinting at the Greater Love that lies beyond.



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# 1989 AND NEWNESS

Taylor Swift's career-shifting album offers an opportunity to consider what true transformation means.

By CHAD ASHBY

**In the liner notes of 1989**, Taylor Swift writes, “In the world we live in, much is said about when we are born and when we die. . . . But lately I’ve been wondering . . . what can be said of all the moments in between our birth and our death . . . the moments when we are reborn . . .” 1989 epitomized rebirth and pursuit of the *new*.

Swift’s fifth album took the world by storm. Filled with 1980s-inspired synthesizers and bouncy pop, 1989 sheds any vestiges of Swift’s rootsy twang as she enters a new stage in her life, both musically and personally. “Welcome to New York / It’s been waiting for you,” chants the opening song’s chorus. The track cracks and vibes with hope for sonic renewal.

Although the sound is new, the themes on 1989 are quintessential Taylor Swift. The songs are arranged to follow a general narrative: girl meets boy, things go well, uncertainty creeps in, he leaves, she shakes him off, takes him back, learns about herself, and finally moves on.

The tracks on the album present different ways Swift has dealt with her relationships. On “Blank Space,” Swift lampoons her own reputation as a man-eater: “So it’s gonna be forever / or it’s gonna go down in flames.” On “Stay,” her desperate pleading lays over a contagious Madonna-era beat: “All you had to do was . . . stay!”

Elsewhere she ponders if it’s too much to expect relationships to last. Perhaps she just needs to live passionately in the moment: “Say you’ll remember me . . . even if it’s just in your wildest dreams” (“Wildest Dreams”). The glam and pop of 1989 fade on her pensive final track as she lets go: “Rain came pouring down / When I was drowning that’s when I could finally breathe” (“Clean”). By the end of the album, what was fresh and new has to be rinsed away.

Swift is not alone in her longing to be washed clean of the past. As we listen to the world around us, we realize that everyone is in search of rebirth. People look for it in a new city, a new job, a new diet, a new relationship, a new church. St. Augustine puts his finger on the problem in his *Confessions*: “For you have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you.” Swift hopes for renewal, but 1989 is really about restlessness. Her album throbs with the question to which the world has yet to provide a satisfactory answer: *After so many failed attempts, will this new start finally be my salvation?*

In her 2020 documentary *Miss Americana*, Swift faces down the pressure to generate one

artistic renaissance after another. Newness fades—giving way to the demand for another *new*. In pop culture, rebirth becomes a curse. “Constantly having to reinvent. Constantly finding new facets of yourself that people find to be shiny,” Swift [says](#). “Be new to us! Be young to us! But only in a new way, and only in the way we want.”

Is newness good in itself? Is it worth the never-ending hunt? A new start, a new job, a new identity. We convince ourselves that good, happiness, and joy lie just behind this doorway marked “New.” And as we pass across the threshold, the sound system cranks, “Welcome to New York! It’s been waiting for you!” But the bright party anthem reveals a darker undertone as what seemed like freedom begins to feel like perpetual slavery: “I could dance to this beat *forevermore*.” If we put our faith in what is *new* to save us, we will never find rest.

The [author of Ecclesiastes](#) warns that we’ve all been sent on a snipe hunt: “. . . there is nothing new under the sun. 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. It has been already in the ages before us.” *1989* is a fun experiment in a new direction, but beneath Swift’s reinvented sound of razor-sharp beats and irresistible choruses is a heart searching for what will “never go out of style” (“Style”).

We are not wrong to long for something new. The problem is that the newness we long for is not something the world can provide. Our souls long for a newness that is eternal. We do not have to sink into nihilistic despair that life is just new becoming old, rinse and repeat. We are not trapped in some eternal karmic spiral. History, the span of our lives that often looks and feels like a circle, is actually a straight line. As the world’s flashy *new* proves to be a slightly refurbished *old* time and again, our Creator is moving the universe toward a newness that [will never perish, spoil, or fade](#).

*Newness* is a fickle savior. Instead, we put our faith in the One who [keeps his promise](#): “Behold, I am making all things new.”



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# FALSE REPUTATION

How does the bitterness and sensuality of Reputation stand alongside a biblical vision of womanhood?

By MARILETTE SANCHEZ

**I've followed Taylor Swift's career** from the beginning. I've admired her flair for storytelling and her ability to transform the mundane details of everyday experience into profound life lessons. I've also admired her knack for creating an endless number of catchy melodies. Being a fellow millennial woman, I feel like I've gone through the awkward transition from insecure, adolescent teenager to self-assured woman right alongside her. Yet on *Reputation*, she presents a brand of womanhood that is a world apart from mine.

With her sixth album, the world witnessed Swift's complete evolution from squeaky-clean country sweetheart to femme fatale sex symbol. The synth sounds that she introduced on *1989* are center stage. Gone are the guitars, replaced by layers and layers of keyboards and bass-filled drums. Even Swift's voice goes through a vocoder on "Delicate."

As John Caramanica noted in [\*The New York Times\*](#), there is a shift away from Swift's signature melodies into a style that uses her voice as an "accent piece, or seasoning." (To be sure, "Delicate" and "Dress" retain the [one-note melody](#) that has worked so well for her in the past.) According to Caramanica, the songs of her new album "emphasize the cadence of her singing, not the melody or range." This musical element is an appropriate choice, since it seems to reflect Swift's move to further de-personalize herself.

*Reputation* is a coming-of-age album, showcasing plenty of "firsts" for Swift: her first on-record curse word ("I Did Something Bad"), her first time singing about consuming alcohol, and her first time singing overtly about her sexuality. Of course, boasting of sexual prowess is pop culture's way of dubbing a female artist a true "woman." Although Swift had been dropping hints for a while, from 2010's "Sparks Fly" ("Give me something that'll haunt me when you're not around") to 2014's "Wildest Dreams" ("Tangled up with you all night / Burning it down"), *Reputation* is shamelessly drenched in the theme of sexuality.

In "Dancing with Our Hands Tied," Swift reflects on a lover who chose to look past her shortcomings and "turned [her] bed into a sacred oasis." In "King of My Heart," she mentions a "kingdom inside [her] room." In "Delicate," she tells her lover, "Just think of all the fun things we could do . . . Do the girls back home touch you like I do." The steamy "Dress" exemplifies this the most clearly. Over a slow-jam beat that seems a more likely fit for a Rihanna song, Swift

sings, “Say my name and everything just stops / I don't want you like a best friend / Only bought this dress so you could take it off, take it off / Carve your name into my bedpost.”

Popular culture, including *Reputation*, often disregards God's design for sex, limiting our God-given sexuality to the physical, instead of encompassing all aspects of our sexuality. It glamorizes pre-marital sex, purposefully leaving out any negative consequences. In *The Gift of Sex*, in which Clifford and Joyce Penner discuss sexuality as a component of God's design for marriage, the authors write: “Lovemaking cannot be just physical. . . . If there is to be a fulfilled relationship, there must be more to it than meeting physical needs. The total person—intellect, emotions, body, spirit, and will—becomes involved in the process of giving ourselves to each other.”

Besides boasting of her sensual side on *Reputation*, Swift proudly displays her vengeful tendencies as well. I see this antagonism as a direct result of her years of pining as a hopeless romantic, which is the subject of many of her early songs. She has put all of her hope and identity into romantic relationships. When her boyfriends fail her, her emotional walls go up. Slowly but surely she has gotten to the point at which, as “Look What You Made Me Do” exclaims, “I don't trust nobody and nobody trusts me.”

Distrust easily devolves into being outright vengeful toward her enemies, a recurring theme reflected in two more tracks: “I Did Something Bad” and “This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things.” The former seems to be a throwback to “Cell Block Tango (He Had It Coming)” from the musical *Chicago*, complete with gunshot sound effects and Swift's first on-record curse word (“If a man talks s\*\*\*, then I owe him nothing / I don't regret it one bit, 'cause he had it coming”).

There is a bite to her lyrics, so *Reputation* lacks the playfulness of past Taylor Swift albums. If 1989's “Blank Space” has “a long list of ex-lovers,” *Reputation*'s “Look What You Made Me Do” mentions an ominous “list of names and yours is in red, underlined.” In “This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things,” Swift sings, “Friends don't try to trick you / Get you on the phone and mind-twist you / And so I took an axe to a mended fence.” Later in the song, Swift literally laughs at the prospect of forgiving those who have wronged her.

With Swift's brand of womanhood, sensuality and bitterness are the pillars of a woman to be emulated. Yet *Proverbs* reminds us that “charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” I believe Swift's deepest desire is the same as mine and all women: to know someone intimately and be known in return; to love someone unconditionally and to be loved unconditionally in return. Swift holds onto this side of herself by a thread, with only two out of 15 tracks on *Reputation* reflecting this theme (“End Game” and “New Year's Day”).



I can relate to Swift's relentless search for intimacy—whether her focus is romance or sex. Yet worldly intimacy, separated from the love of Jesus, will always come up short. I'm reminded of the [Samaritan woman at the well](#), who was also tempted to find her fulfillment in romantic relationships. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again," Jesus told her, "but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."



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# TAYLOR SWIFT'S TELOS

On *Lover*, Swift rightly understands that we are what we love.  
But love can be even bigger than the album imagines.

By KATE MEYRICK

## “I want to be defined by the things I love.”

This is how Taylor Swift ends “Daylight,” the final song on *Lover*, her shimmery, color-driven seventh album. “I want to be defined by the things I love,” she says, “not the things I hate, not the things I’m afraid of, or the things that haunt me in the middle of the night.” She concludes her diverse collection of pop anthems and quiet, intimate ballads with this spoken-word observation: “I just think that you are what you love.”

As the track faded with the tender pulse of the piano, I realized I had heard those words before. Taylor Swift had just inadvertently quoted James K.A. Smith, whose book, *You Are What You Love*, proposes that to be human is to be driven by love. “What if,” Smith writes, “instead of starting from the assumption that human beings are thinking things, we started from the conviction that human beings are first and foremost lovers? What if you are defined not by what you know but by what you desire?”

Taylor Swift has made it clear to us that she is a lover. She writes, sings, and talks about love; because her songs have the feel of journal entries, we have seen her relationship with love grow and change. In the foreword to her album notes for *Lover* she writes, “In life, we grow up . . . trying to figure out who to be, how to act, or how to be happy . . . above all else, we really, really want our lives to be filled with love.” Her longing for love is strong and true in the title track, which has already become a first-dance song at weddings. Full of crunchy, retro drum beats, a country-infused melody, and tender lyrics, the song sounds like a vow Taylor makes to her lover.

In *You Are What You Love*, James K.A. Smith draws on the work of St. Augustine and Martin Luther to propose that humans are both lovers and “teleological beings,” meaning that we have our hearts set on some end goal—a *telos*. “To be human is to be for something, directed toward something, oriented toward something,” he writes. So when Swift is singing about stepping into the daylight with her lover after what feels like a “20-year dark night,” she is talking about her vision of “the good life.” Taylor’s vision of the good life is to be happy in love, a love of golden sunlight, ethereal dreams in the middle of the night, and moments of sacredness between her and those she loves the best (her boyfriend, her mother, her friends). Swift’s “good life” is not letting hate win (“You Need to Calm Down”), standing up for those whose voices are not heard (“The Man”), and staying loyal to those who have proved loyal to her (“Afterglow”).

There is another layer to this. In his book, Smith quotes Martin Luther as saying, “Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your god.” This means that to say “we are what we worship” is the same as saying “we are what we love.” Smith writes about the rituals and habits that North Americans participate in, calling them “secular liturgies.” These secular liturgies are deeply rooted in our subconscious and our culture; Swift gives us a glimpse of one in her jazzy, sexy, saxophone-filled track “False God.” What does she worship? Love. Human, imperfect, carnal love. “Even if it’s a false god,” she lilts in the chorus, “we’d still worship this love.”

Smith writes about “the good life” and “secular liturgies” and *telos* in order to make a major point about how we are formed as humans, and even more so as Christians. When our hearts are set on Christ, if our *telos* is oriented to God’s desire and vision of what “the good life” (the kingdom) looks like, we learn to love that vision. We desire what God desires. This is not to say that Christians are excluded from the identity of lover. Instead, 1 John 4 tells us that we only love because God [first loved us](#): “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God is The Lover. As Christians, we are lovers because we are defined by and created in the image of The Lover, by the God who became human in order to teach us how to love.

And there’s more! 1 John 4 goes on to say that this love is a [call outward](#): “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” We are lovers surrounded by other lovers—although not necessarily in the romantic sense. Perhaps this is the distinction between Christian love and the love that Swift describes. The love of Christ is bigger, deeper, truer than any earthly love we could experience. Swift describes loves that are bound in attraction, in admiring someone’s mind or physical appearance. But God loves us in a way that gives us purpose. And we ought to love one another because we are made in God’s image, not because we like the way someone talks, looks, or if they love us in return.

Even so, I truly believe some of the loves that we experience on earth point us to the love that Christ has for us. I believe I see ripples of heaven in the lives of the people who love me the best. And I saw them through all the colors that Swift evokes on *Lover*. I was reminded that the love of a true friend is a deep, warm violet. Unrequited love is gut-wrenching gray. The love of my mother is a strong, tender blue. And the love of Christ, which seeks me out and captures my heart again and again, is golden. Like daylight.



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# ISOLATION HYMNS

A surprise album released amid COVID-19, folklore quietly yearns for human contact and gospel comfort.

By RACHEL SYENS

**With the release of her eighth studio album, *folklore*,** Taylor Swift wanted the world to know that she's more than just a pop princess. What *folklore* lacks in power ballads and dance tracks, it makes up for in raw emotion and acoustic musicality. It's both harkening back to Swift's country roots and introducing a new version of herself, a reflection on life lessons during a time of isolation due to COVID-19.

*folklore* is Swift's first album to be labeled as "Alternative," fitting in with the likes of [HAIM](#) and [Vampire Weekend](#). Alternative encompasses a wide breadth of styles, allowing space to create and explore new sounds. Swift's album features collaborations with indie artists Aaron Dessner from The National, Bon Iver's Justin Vernon, and Jack Antonoff. Swift has previously worked with Antonoff, and the influence of his style can be heard on *folklore*—both "[The Archer](#)," from her previous album, and *folklore*'s "my tears ricochet" rely heavily on vocal echoes, creating the sensation of more than one voice. While *folklore* certainly presents the same Taylor Swift the world has come to know, she feels more authentic. The album departs not only from her pop sensibility but also from her typical influences, answering the question: what happens when we're forced to be alone with ourselves?

In her [Instagram post](#) announcing the album, Swift wrote: "In isolation my imagination has run wild and this album is the result, a collection of songs and stories that flowed like a stream of consciousness." *folklore* is a retrospective exploration of deep, uncomfortable feelings that arise during isolation. Swift's voice is raw and emotional, accompanied by singular piano notes or softer guitar chords. The album feels moody, with a quiet sadness permeating throughout. "epiphany" is reminiscent of Imogen Heap's "Hide and Seek" and Sufjan Stevens' signature breathy sound, providing an almost hymnal experience. "betty," with its harmonica and catchy folk melody, brings to mind songs sung around the campfire, creating a communal storytelling experience. At the same time, the lack of a large backing band creates the illusion of being alone—it reminds us of the isolated world that was 2020.

Despite this loneliness, Swift reminds us that we can still find comfort. For her, it's being wrapped in an old cardigan. On the song of that name, she sings, "And when I felt like I was an old cardigan / under someone's bed / you put me on and said I was your favorite." For Christians, this can serve as a reminder of God's love, wrapped around us during times of deep sadness. When we feel left out in the cold, exiled, or alone, we can turn to God for warmth,

grace, and love.

In its distress, however, *folklore* finds harmony with the [book of Exodus](#) and the story of Moses. The story begins with God's call for Moses to release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. When Pharaoh refuses to listen, Moses returns to God, [crying out](#): "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" This feeling of helplessness and isolation is echoed by Swift in "my tears ricochet," when she sings: "even on my worst day, did I deserve, babe / all the hell you gave me?"

After God's release of the Ten Plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh allows Moses and the Israelites to leave. The story seems to have found its resolution, until Pharaoh changes his mind and sends his army in pursuit. Perhaps we can imagine Moses and the Israelites crying out to God in a similar way that Swift croons on "hoax":

*I am ash from your fire  
Stood on the cliffside screaming, "Give me a reason"  
Your faithless love's the only hoax I believe in*

Elsewhere, on "[this is me trying](#)," an exasperated Swift has hit a wall, wondering what else she can do to prove herself (perhaps Moses felt the same standing at the Red Sea). The music starts slowly, Swift's voice even. Then there is a sharp inhale and a shift to higher notes—almost straining beyond her reach—as she sings, "at least I'm trying," marking a change in the song. *folklore* collaborator Dessner [said](#) that "this is me trying" relates to the entire album. If we look at the album as a collection of related stories, this is the point where we see a change in the narrative.

We can also examine the Bible as a whole and find the shifting point of the narrative in the New Testament. Unlike Swift, who sings of a "faithless love," Christians can have faith in God's love because Christ has done the trying for us. He took all of our brokenness, sadness, and sin and brought it to the cross. In [Ephesians 2](#), the apostle Paul writes: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." While Swift sings "maybe I don't quite know what to say," we have been given the words to remember God's beautiful promise to us: we have been saved. Like an old cardigan, God has named each of us as his favorite and will always be with us, even when we feel most alone.



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# EVERMORE AND FOREVERMORE

On Taylor Swift's poetic evermore, love is a wish.

In the poetry of the Psalms, it's assured.

By KATE MEYRICK

**I believe the Bible is a love story:** the oldest, most beautiful love story the world has heard. It's fitting, then, that I often find echoes of that ancient love story in contemporary music, art, novels, and poetry—including Taylor Swift's second surprise release of 2020, *evermore*.

The opening track of the novellesque new album, "willow," gives us a clue that the body of work we are about to listen to is a collection of love stories that intersect and mirror each other. Twinkling pianos and light guitars back Swift's distinct falsetto as she introduces us to her fictional world: "I'm begging for you to take my hand / wreck my plans / that's my man / Life was a willow and it bent right to your wind . . ." It's like turning the page of an old book and watching the dust turn to glitter. What the listener doesn't realize upfront is that the "mythical thing" she invites us into is like an old diamond that hasn't been cleaned in centuries. *evermore* is about a love that is scratched and chipped; looking back on it is both nostalgic and painful. It shows us facets of love in ways that cut deep. Here we will find lost and broken love, love that left you stranded without a home and identity.

In *evermore*, I hear the themes of another love story—the biblical one. God's covenant love story with Israel is also a multi-faceted diamond. Although they don't fall into the genre of fairytale (or *folklore*), the Psalms prove to us that this love can be expressed in the beauty and complexity of poetry and songwriting, which are the same tools Swift implements to tell her stories. *evermore* revolves around several stories of infidelity and the pain that couples experience during separation; the Bible describes the story of infidelity committed by Israel and the loss they experience when they are taken into exile in Babylon, separated from God and homeland.

On *evermore*, Swift explores the pain of exile and loss of identity most vividly in "coney island." She sets up a scene that evokes images of being lost at a crowded fair or alone in a crowded room—even if the one you love is right next to you. "If I can't relate to you," she sings, "then who am I related to?" An ascending guitar riff behind her vocals repeats without changing harmonies or rhythms, matching the cyclical lyrics: "Sorry for not making you my centerfold / over and over / Lost again with no surprises / Disappointments close your eyes / and it gets colder and colder."

In the psalms, I sense the Israelites's loss of identity most distinctly in songs that express how separation from God feels being cut off from things that feel familiar. You can hear that sense of loss in [Psalm 27](#), which is similar to the words of one of Swift's lonely lovers:

*Do not hide your face from me,  
do not turn your servant away in anger;  
you have been my helper.  
Do not reject me or forsake me,  
God my Savior.*

Similarly, in her song “ivy” Swift explores the idea of finding love in a hostile world. She sings to her lover: “How’s one to know? / I’d meet you where the spirit meets the bones / In a faith forgotten land.” Here in the dreamland she creates with her partner, her sorrow turns to joy—indicated by a banjo-heavy change of minor chords to major chords, which “cover” her like ivy growing over a quiet cottage in the woods. It reminds me of how God is described as a “shield” in [Psalm 28](#):

*The Lord is my strength and my shield;  
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.  
My heart leaps for joy,  
and with my song I praise him.*

Still, for all of Swift’s hopeful pondering, it only feels like an *ember* of joy trying to beat back the darkness, as the last track, “evermore,” fades. Although Swift journeys from a place of pain to a place of hope by the end of the song, I can’t help but feel that her hope is unsustainable. Backed by a single piano line, Swift delivers these meditative verses: “I couldn’t be sure / I had a feeling so peculiar / that this pain would be for / Evermore.” This is contrasted by the rousing, pulsing chorus and bridge featuring Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon: “Oh, can we just get a pause? / To be certain, we’ll be tall again / Whether weather be the frost / or the violence of the dog days.” When Swift returns to her meditative state, we can tell she has edged closer to the light—“And I couldn’t be sure / I had a feeling so peculiar / This pain *wouldn’t* be for / Evermore”—yet her hope still resembles a wish or a dream.

The journey the psalms take us on is also a journey from sorrow to joy. The biblical idea of hope, however, is a promised reality that is both here and still coming. It is something that we have experienced and believe in, rather than merely wish for or dream about. Swift’s tales of infidelity end in a nostalgic reflection of what went wrong, what she learned, and how she is finding healing in herself or a new relationship. But Scripture tells us of a holistic redemption. In the story of unfaithful Israel, we learn about a steadfast God who never breaks his covenants. Moreover, the people of Israel already know that God will remain faithful in the face of their



infidelity because they know how God has acted in the past.

In [Psalm 30](#), the Israelites can visualize and believe in that forgiveness, even while they are still in bondage to the Babylonians. They are anticipating a return to their homeland and to the presence of the Lord:

*Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people;  
praise his holy name.*

*For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may stay for the night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

This is our hope too. This is the ultimate love story: though we turn away and break our promises, though we sin against God and one another in unimaginable ways, we are never too far from forgiveness. There is no darkness too dark for God's light to reach us. This is the scandalous promise of the new covenant: that even in our sin, [Christ died for us](#) and will be with us always, even to the end of the age. We are all exiles who have lost their true identity, who have been stranded with no direction. But in Christ we are part of the family of God, who has been faithful and will remain faithful, forevermore.



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