

Episode Title: **Amy Grant's Life of Faith**

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to the legendary Amy Grant about the 30th anniversary of her crossover hit album Heart In Motion, life on her Tennessee farm, her life-long connection to faith and her recent induction into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

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AMY: To be southern means to have spent a lot of your childhood barefoot. To be southern is a table with extra places set already. To be Southern is talking slower and telling stories. Southern, to me, is gentle.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Sid NARRATION: Welcome to Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. My guest this week is a Nashville legend who has found comfort over the years in connecting with others - whether through the church or through her kitchen.

AMY: Food is such a part of Southern comfort. Sometimes when I've been on the road or out of town, I'll come home and just start cooking, like massive amounts of food, just cause to me it's grounding and then sometimes I'll cook because I just have this feeling if you build, they'll come.

Sid NARRATION: Having sold over 30 million albums worldwide - including the first Christian music album to ever go platinum - Amy Grant is one of the South's most beloved and influential talents. Growing up with a deep connection to the church and her faith, Grant released her first album in 1977, before she had even turned 18. This year, she celebrates the 30th anniversary of Heart In Motion -- a record that took her from Christian music star to contemporary pop icon, and spawned massive hit singles like "Baby Baby," "Good For Me," "Every Heartbeat," and "That's What Love Is For."

On this week's show, Amy discusses her faith and how it's influenced her career as well as her life out of the spotlight.

AMY: I really think it's in the context of all of us that we see the greatest work of reconciliation, we see the greatest work of needs being met, that we see that. And all of that is spiritual work. And it's all very exciting. I mean, that's the frontier that never gets boring. And, personally, I

don't think you have to understand faith. I don't think you have to have the language of the church to have access to that. I think we are all so connected in so many ways.

Sid NARRATION: Plus life on her Tennessee farm, how she and husband Vince Gill have spent a LOT of time together over the last year, and much more this week on Biscuits & Jam. **[THEME MUSIC ENDS]**

SID: Well, Amy Grant, it is so great to have you on Biscuits and Jam.

AMY: Thank you. I'm so glad to be here. I was kind of hoping it would come with food, but I guess it's just you and me and microphones.

SID: It is. We need to work on that part of it.

AMY: OK.

SID: So I just saw yesterday that you're going to be inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in November. Congratulations.

AMY: Thank you so much. I know. What an amazing honor. You know, the first thing that went through my head? I should start writing more songs.

AMY: I was getting messages last night from songwriters I have loved for a long time, "Welcome to the party. Glad you're in the circle...."

SID: Well, it's a very elite group, but I wanted to ask you, what was the first song that you ever wrote and performed?

AMY: First song I ever wrote, was a song that I wrote about a guy I had a crush on. He was a friend of my older sister. It was called, "Mountain Man," I never recorded it. I was 15.

SID: You remember what it felt like to have written that song? Did it feel good?

AMY: Yes, writing always feels good. You start a day and there's nothing there and you end the day and there's something to sing.

SID: Any day you can do that is a good day.

AMY: Any day. Yep.

SID: So, Amy, you were born in Augusta, Georgia, and then you moved to Nashville not long after that, right? When did you move?

AMY: I was six months old.

AMY: We were from Nashville they just relocated because my dad was in the army and the army base was there. You know, Augusta, so they were there for a little over two years, and my sister Carol and I were both born there and then we came back to Nashville.

SID: So you don't really have family in Augusta still?

AMY: I don't. my parents made some good friends in Augusta, lifelong friends. You know, I just remember hearing stories, like we had a house on Ralley Drive. My three sisters and I, the four of us shared a bedroom. And, so I've been in Augusta and taken my bike and gone and found the old house. It's still standing, but I don't have any recollection of it.

AMY: But, my mom, she passed away several years ago, but I wanted to see this house because she was so wild about her garden then, you know?

SID: Hmm.

SID: She just felt better about life if she had her hands in the dirt. And I think that was the first yard — it was maybe a quarter of an acre but she sent soil samples in to the Department of Agriculture, but probably like every three feet, she was taken another soil sample. They must have thought she was like part of the nursery that was acres and acres and acres. And they sent her back sort of the analytics of what she should be planting in each location. And she was like, OK, three inches over, I'll change —.

AMY: Anyway, I just wanted to see the scene of the crime, and I did.

SID: Well, so your house in Nashville that you moved to, can you describe that for me a little bit?

AMY: Well, my parents actually moved quite a bit until I was in the third grade. I'm not sure which house we moved back to from Nashville. My earliest recollection of a house was on Shiz Hill. That's the first house I really remembered. And it's still standing, it was on a street that was cut into the backside of my great grandparents' farm.

SID: Oh, wow.

AMY: The dead-end half of that street, there were seven houses that were like my grandmother lived there, a lot of cousins, seven houses were all relatives. And there were, you know, paths back through everybody's backyard, into the farm. I think that was just such a beautiful gesture on my great-grandparents' part.

AMY: My parents always created a space for us to gather in. And so, Vince and I have really tried to do that. And we are empty nesters now. We live in the house that we had when all five kids were here. But I just keep thinking "there's got to be a gathering space." And my three sisters and I and the children that we have and who they've married and the kids that they've had — they're 60 plus of us when we are —.

SID: Wow.

AMY: Around the table or several tables as the case is when we gather.

SID: So Amy, who was the cook in your family growing up?

AMY: Ahhh. Well, what we used to say about my mother's cooking is, and she was a good cook. But we would say, if she's created something you love, enjoy it to the fullest. You're never going to have that exact same dish again because she would always kind of go, you know, off map. I would have to say my father's mother, had legendary yeast rolls.

AMY: You know, there's a process. I cannot make them. Hers were light as a feather, I'm sure, swimming in butter. But she would actually heat her house up for whatever the great temperature was to let the yeast rise. You know, it's kind of a dual process. You knead it.

SID: Yeah.

AMY: And let it rise, knead again. Yeah, but that's a committed baker there to let the house be sweltering hot.

SID: Was she sort of the matriarch when it came to the holidays?

AMY: Oh, um — God, it was so long ago, Sid.

AMY: I mean, she passed away in 1988. I mean, we gather at her house a lot. Really, my parents house was the gathering place.

SID: Mm-hmm.

AMY: It was. I look back and think, I wish I had helped my mother more. But, there is always something to celebrate and it always involved food. And, my friends would come over. They loved raiding our refrigerator in the middle of the night.

SID: Oh, that's a good sign.

AMY: Yes, I know. Food is such a part of Southern comfort. Sometimes when I've been on the road or out of town, I'll come home and just start cooking like massive amounts of food just because to me it's grounding.

SID: Yeah.

AMY: And, and then sometimes I'll cook because I just have this feeling, if you build it, they'll come. Um, some of my favorite cooking experiences have been when I've cooked inordinate amounts of food, and then I'll like send out a message to my extended family, hey, if anybody just wants to stop by and pick up carryout on their way home or have a business meeting and it'll be me and three men, you know, and I'll say anybody, anybody responsible for dinner at your house tonight?

SID: There's nothing wrong with a bribe every now and then.

AMY: That's right. Sending somebody home with some food. Yeah, I call it food love.

(EDITING: Instrumental music break -- pull from various choices -- :10 fade in/fade out)

SID: Well, Amy, you know, the holidays are such an important part of your career and it's gotten to the point where you can't celebrate Christmas in the South without Amy Grant. I mean, it's just so much, a part of what you've done over the years. And I'm curious, what were some of the things about Christmas as a kid that, you love the most?

AMY: Hmm. I just love the togetherness, you know? I'm not going to quote it exactly, but, I've watched the Christmas movie, Family Stone many times. And I know there's one scene toward the end of the movie and it's like, "so what's so special about your family?" And they say, "well, it's not any more special than anybody else's family's. It's just ours. It's just our family," you

know? And honestly, my family was, not loud and raucous. I mean, I'm pretty quiet and I think my sisters would call me the wild one.

AMY: All things are relative, but, I just love the gathering. That was really it. So, I think in making music, I've also just wanted to create a sonic palette for the — I don't know, just the welcome that you want to feel toward yourself, toward anybody that you love toward, just the welcome table.

SID: Yeah. Well, there's a great song you wrote called "Tennessee Christmas", and as someone from Tennessee, I've always loved that song. Do you remember sitting down and writing that?

AMY: I remember exactly where I was when that song came to be. Gary Chapman and I wrote that. He and I were married for 17 years and we were driving south on Hillsboro Road and it was July. And it was a full moon. And I just remember the conversation being something like. Look at the moon on the hills, it just was magical. And we started singing that song, like ideas for it, apart from any instrument but just making it up as we were driving.

SID: Amy, would you mind singing just a little bit of that, just a verse or so?

AMY: Sure. [sings] Come on, weatherman, give us a forecast snowy white. Can't you hear the prayers of every childlike heart tonight?

SID: Oh, it's just such a great song.

SID: And, you know, at Southern Living, of course, we celebrate Christmas starting in July, so it couldn't be better timing than right now.

AMY: Oh, yes.

AMY: And, you know, it's funny. I mean, what Southern living does is just creating all these beautiful landscapes, tablescapes, even if somebody can't do that in their own home, they can say, oh, well, I can light some candles.

SID: Right.

AMY: I'm inspired by — I can't do the whole display, but I can do something. And to me, you put on good music, light a few candles you already have an environment to be welcomed into.

SID: Well, you know, we spent a lot of time during the year trying to figure out how to do just that, how to inspire people a little bit and give them something to look forward to.

AMY: Mm-hmm.

SID: And then it's all over and we start again.

AMY: Yes, I know. That is the beauty of holidays. It goes by quickly. But actually, it's like the arcing story that lasts for a lifetime. Oh, that was the last Christmas with great grandmother.

SID: Right.

AMY: Oh, that was the first Christmas with — you know, because we returned to it and it happened so quickly, it's just like the story that keeps being told.

SID: Yeah, they're markers in your life.

AMY: Mm-hmm.

SID: So, Amy, your life as a spiritual person and as a Christian has always been a part of the Amy Grant that everyone knows.

SID: I'm wondering, did you start, going to church, and was it just always obvious to you, that this is who I am? Or was it something that you kind of discovered a little bit later?

AMY: While, I was born into a family that went to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. And my earliest memories of churchgoing were a feeling of just incredible security.

AMY: When I was in the third grade, we moved to a neighborhood that had a whole lot of kids. It was so much fun. None of them were like three times a week churchgoers. And Sunday, of course, like the end of the weekend, some of the funnest games were happening on Sunday. Like once in a blue moon, my mom would say, "honey, your dad's just too tired to go to church tonight. We're going to stay home." And I think, "yes, there is a God, I get to stay home and play."

AMY: But honestly, it was in high school when I went to the church I grew up in, everybody looked the same. It was a very homogenous community. Our lives were more similar than they were different. And when I was in high school, I started visiting a church because my older

sisters had come home from going to school in Boston and they went to a church downtown that was right on the edge of a lower-income housing.... It was a mixed neighborhood. It was the up and coming and the down and outers. And the youth group was that same mix. It was mixed, you know, socioeconomically, racially, and suddenly, I, I stepped out of what I had understood or just experienced sort of as a culture. And I stepped into a circle that experienced all those things that I thought I knew very well, differently.

AMY: Like, I remember being in the youth group — when they bowed their heads to pray, it was as though Jesus had walked into the room. It was so immediate, so vulnerable. “My family's really struggling with this. I don't know if my dad is going to make it. We're having a hard time paying the rent.” You know, I went to an all girls high school and my father's a doctor. I just had not ever known scarcity. My life was not well integrated into the larger community of Nashville.

AMY: And in this new context with different people, there were homeless people that went to our church. In fact, I visited that church recently, as recently as last Sunday, and they said, please greet everybody. And I lean forward to the Hispanic man in front of me. And I said, Hey, my name's Amy, what's your name? And he said, Joseph. And I said, Where do you live? And he said, outside. And I said — just what— well I said, I love camping and but I've never actually lived outside, but I was outside last night when that storm was coming in and the temperature dropped like 10 degrees. That must have felt really good. You know, it reminded me so much of high school. And really, that's when my faith took off. When I, when I realized this is not just a cultural experience. I didn't think it was, but it was like — the world just got really big for me, [SID: Wow.] very quickly. And I really think it's in the context of all of us that we see the greatest work of reconciliation, we see the greatest work of needs being met, that we see that. And all of that is spiritual work. And it's all very exciting. I mean, that's the frontier that never gets boring. And, personally, I don't think you have to understand faith. I don't think you have to have the language of the church to have access to that. I think we are all so connected in so many ways and that — and a lot of our first interaction with that, we don't even know what we're stepping into. It's just like, [gasps], I was at the right place at the right time. I had this need and somebody showed up. You don't have to have the secret handshake for that, you just go, oh my gosh, it's bigger than I thought.

SID: Right.

AMY: Yeah, and then inside of that, you know, is the language of faith and God and the Bible and all of that, you know, and and some people want to take a deep dive and some people live their whole life in a real childlike faith and never take a deep dive into all that. But I, I just think

we all have — everybody's got equal access in this world of mixed opportunity, there is equal access to the spirit and that's good.

SID NARRATION: We'll continue with Amy Grant, after the break.

BREAK

SID NARRATION: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and we're talking with Amy Grant.

SID: So, Amy, your album, Heart in Motion is turning 30 this year, which is incredible. And this is an album that has sold millions of copies. It was nominated for a Grammy. And more than that, it was really the soundtrack that a lot of people grew up on and it means so much to people. What are some of the things that you hear most from fans when they talk about that album?

AMY: I hear from people my age—that was what we danced to my kids and me. And you know what? That was happening in my home, too. That's why I made that record, because I had young children. I was pregnant with my second during the writing of a lot of it. And then she was born. I toured when she was one. And by then, my son was three. But to me, it's just filled with youthful energy and innocence.

AMY: And how faith helped navigate that journey, and — anyway, so it's all on that record.

SID: As this anniversary has approached, have you spent any time going back and looking at some of those videos?

AMY: Um, I've seen clips of them?

AMY: And I've seen pictures. I have not made the time to go back and sit and watch the videos. Those were a lot of fun to make.

SID: Well, there's all these very attractive guys in them, and, you know, I was wondering, did you help pick the cast and script them or...?

AMY: Oh those? Yeah.

SID: Yeah.

AMY: Yeah. Well, first off, let me say I had a few dates in high school, but when we were at the casting call to figure out who is going to be cast opposite me in "Baby, baby" we chose a guy named Jamie Stein. But I remember clearly sitting there, the director saying, look, I was not the number one on anybody's list. It feels really — is this how guys feel that you're just looking at — I look at you, turn around, I pick you. But I picked Jamie because he was fun and funny.

SID: Yeah.

AMY: And to me, I mean, how we look, everybody does the best with what they have however, they're compelled to do with their face or their hair. But to me, what always shines out about a person is their personality. That's what you really feel from somebody is, is what's coming through them. And he was just fun and that's what I liked. Of course, everybody in the casting call was handsome. I did not make those selections, but that day was easy on the eyes. But, it's funny because I worked with Jamie for the "Baby, Baby" video and then again in a video called "Good for Me." And I never saw him again, and then one — I was in Los Angeles and at a movie theater, this was probably within two years of that time. And I was going out of a theater and he was coming in. And I saw him and I just had such warm feelings toward him. I just wanted the best for him. He made my job so easy in those days. It really was fun. And it was — it was just I was like, "Jamie!" we gave each other a big hug and it was so funny because people came up, are you guys still together? And I was like, no, we were actually never together. I just haven't seen him since we made that video.

SID: Well, it might be time for a reunion as long as it's OK with Vince.

AMY: You know, I saw him on a Viagra commercial a few years ago, and all I could think of is time changes everything.

AMY: And changes nothing at all.

SID: So there are so many great songs on this album, but I want to ask you about one called, "Ask Me."

AMY: Hmm.

SID: Which is definitely not happy like the others, and which was a pretty gutsy song to put out there because it's about sexual abuse.

AMY: Mm-hmm.

SID: What have you heard about this song over the years and what does it mean to you now that you look back on it?

AMY: Well, I remember writing that song. I have two friends that experienced sexual abuse as a routine part of their childhood, and I had no idea until we were grown women but following that, tell all conversation, with one of those friends, I just remember being so disturbed and so, fearful for the — my — the children that I would have, you know? And so I, like some songs, you're just writing to try to get your way through the chaos in your mind because of what you've heard about somebody that you care for. And that's how that song — I think I, I think I stayed in the basement of that farmhouse where we lived at the time for two days. And just like trying to get through those ideas and pen them in a way that brought some kind of not closure to the situation, but just some response to the conversation I had with my friend. And when I played her the song, she said, how could you have possibly known what that felt like? And I said, all I did was tell you back the story you told me.

AMY: The most powerful experience I ever had happened night after night, and it would be when I would sing — especially when that song first — when that record first came out. And I would begin the song, "Ask Me", and you would see this like lone figure, stand up on the 20th row. And then somewhere else, another person would stand. And I just felt like that song just gave a way for somebody who had experienced the unthinkable to be seen. And for them to acknowledge, too. Hey, this is my story. And that happened many nights. And, and probably of all the songs on the record, that bad experience of people standing alone, it's probably the most powerful thing, for me, that came out of that whole record.

SID: Well, I think you paved the way for a lot of other artists to write gutsy songs. I mean, this was not something that was being done very often in 1991.

AMY: Well, music can go places that nothing else can. You know, it kind of seeps in the cracks and finds us and makes us feel not alone. So...

SID: Well, I want to ask you about a happy place of yours, and that is your farm.

SID: You have posted a lot about your farm, it's a very important part of your life. You often share videos from there and you run a summer camp there, which you're probably just wrapping up. What are some of the day-to-day things that you love most about the farm?

AMY: Full immersion into nature. I feel like it's the best therapy, period. It's good soul food. It is a great reminder that, every tree is different. Every creature is different. We as people are all different and unique. And I don't know, just something about being out under an open sky and in a primitive setting, you just feel like a kid again. Being out in nature is peaceful and also always a little bit — [gasps] what was that? You know, what's that crawling on my leg? There's a snake. It's full of wonder and I would have never been able to buy that farm had I not made records that people bought or sold concert tickets that a lot of people purchased, you know? And, that really has been the lasting gift of all that hard work is now I've got a place that I can share with other people.

AMY: We just hosted this spring, our first two-night campout, for 12 women who live at the Nashville Rescue Mission, who are recently homeless, and in a kind of life reboot program and I cooked for them one night and my youngest daughter and a friend of hers did music for them and we had songwriters come and we all have so much more in common than we have different. And it was just so great to hear their stories. It's a good place to be curious about life, about nature, about each other.

SID: So you've probably spent a lot more time with Vince in the last year than you have in a long time.

AMY: That's true.

SID: Have you learned anything about him as a cook?

AMY: No, he doesn't cook.

AMY: I've even said, can I just show you how to like — just chicken breast and a cast-iron skillet? He went, nope.

AMY: And I do enjoy cooking and he feels so strongly about breakfast. Breakfast at his favorite breakfast restaurant. Um —.

SID: He told me about that when we talked. Yes.

AMY: I know. He — it's so funny. We were talking about this last night and he just said, I don't want to create more work for you in the kitchen. And he said part of that is I don't want to create any work for myself. And so, for somebody who loves to cook and loves to eat, we're not

doing a lot in the kitchen these days. That's OK.

SID: Well, for a couple that had an awful lot of tour dates, last year, it must have been a little bit of a gift, to get to spend so much time together.

AMY: It really was. Yep. it was a gift in two ways. You know, when you pack your bag to go to work and you're always having to get on a bus and leave, even if you love it, like a part of you sort of fantasizes about not having to do it. Wouldn't it be great if I could? But then when it's actually taken away and you can't do it and everything you love about what music does inside of you and with other people and all that. So I know going back on the road, he and I, both of us just feel incredibly grateful that we get — we get to go to work. It's like, yeah, that's only good news.

SID: So last year was the first year in a long time that you didn't do a run of Christmas shows at the Ryman.

AMY: Right.

SID: What are you most excited about when you look ahead to Christmas 2021?

AMY: Hmm. I just love the tradition continuing. We've done those shows most years since 1993. And in that time, I mean, generations have passed on and been born and so many families come and it's grandparents, parents, children, and just to watch that shift over all these years, it's almost 30 years.

AMY: Vince and I just sort of created the gathering. But, you know, we've had a lot of special guests over the years. And, mostly people just want a beautiful setting to be together and to enjoy the familiar songs. And they want to laugh and they want to be moved and they want to be reminded and want to feel hopeful. And I go, that's the job? Pick me.

AMY: Yeah, that's a fun time of year for us.

SID: Well, Amy, I just have one more question for you. What does it mean to you to be Southern?

AMY: To be southern means to have spent a lot of your childhood barefoot. To be southern, is a table with extra places set already. To be Southern is, talking slower and telling stories. Southern to me is gentle. I'm sure there are a lot of other lists that could come from a lot of places that

might include less glowing words.

AMY: Yeah, but for me, Southern like immediately, I'm going "a thin sheen of perspiration on every forehead. Take off your coat."

AMY: Yeah, what-what's southern to you.

SID: Well, that's a great question, and I'm glad I haven't had to answer it.

AMY: Yeah.

SID: But, it's conversations like this one.

AMY: Mm-hmm.

SID: And being able to, talk to someone and open yourself up and learn something about somebody else.

AMY: That's good.

SID: So with that, Amy Grant, thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

AMY: Thank you, Sid.

Sid NARRATION: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Amy Grant. You can find the 30th Anniversary, remastered edition of her hit album Heart In Motion wherever you get music.

Join me back here next week as I chat with country music and culinary superstar Trisha Yearwood.

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, TN. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program. You can find us online at southernliving.com, and subscribe to our print publication by searching for Southern Living at www.magazine.store.

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We'll see you here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!

END MUSIC

