

Among the Thirsty ~ *Who You Say I Am*

Ask Ryan Daniel, lead singer of pop/rock outfit Among the Thirsty, about his band's 10-track debut, *Who You Say I Am*, and you'll get an unexpected answer.

"The first five songs were done well before we even moved to Nashville, and then the next five were pieced together as my life fell apart," he admits. "That's the irony of it."

Oftentimes, it's at the place where our brokenness and God's grace meet that the greatest art is forged, and Daniel knows this to be true. He found himself at a point of utter hopelessness, and that's when the songs began to pour out. "They were written and recorded in a short amount of time because [my circumstances] just created this flood of creativity and emotion that came out of me having to recalculate my life," he explains. "The record tells a story of getting to rock bottom, finding God's gift of desperation, and then climbing out of that hole by realizing who God says you are and what you're worth."

Forming in Clearwater, Fla., in 2008, Among the Thirsty's original line-up consisted of Daniel as the lead vocalist, Brian Henderson on guitar and Brock Douglas on bass. The band released several independent offerings prior to signing with BEC Recordings, one of which garnered them a Top 10 radio single ("I'd Need a Savior") on the R&R Monitored AC chart, an unheard of feat for an unsigned artist. They weren't prepared for the popularity of the single and didn't have the bandwidth to capitalize on its success at the time. "We were circling the runway and trying to figure out what kind of band we wanted to be," Daniel reflects.

The group relocated to Nashville shortly thereafter and eventually added two new members to round out their five-piece: guitarist and keyboardist Riley Donnell and drummer John Wall. As for the band's name, Daniel says it's a statement of equality. "We feel like everybody is thirsty for something more; they're hungry for something bigger in life," he offers. "We wanted everybody to know we are just like them. We're no different. It's a great equalizer."

Who You Say I Am was recorded in Atlanta with Daniel's longtime friend, acclaimed producer Scotty Wilbanks (Third Day, 7eventh Time Down). Wilbanks had his eye on Among the Thirsty since they were teens, playing shows before they were even out of high school, so working with him at the helm felt like a natural partnership.

"The recording process was a lot of fun. It's basically like summer camp because you're living in the studio," Daniel shares. The pop-centric album oscillates between the fun and the painfully honest, anchored by strong piano melodies and authentic, exposed lyrics.

The title track, co-written with Garrett Hornbuckle of All Things New and Justin Ebach, is especially close to the front man's heart. "It's essentially the cure for what ailed me," he explains. "I feel like so many people, including myself, suffer with identity. I lived like this for a very long time, and it caused some chaos in my life. I had to be honest about some

pretty awful things. I lost a few friends, and some relationships came to an end. It was a tough time for me, and out of that painful process 'Who You Say I Am' came to be."

That song paved the way for other gut-wrenchingly vulnerable cuts, many of which were pulled straight from Daniel's journal. The poignant ballad "Completely" was one of these songs, centering on surrender. "It's a powerful song for me, because it [was written out of] my absolute coming to grips with who I was, the things I had done, the people I had hurt, and just having to face myself," he admits. "That was my moment of absolute rock bottom, when my world [was] collapsing. It was hard to see the good in it."

Reflecting back on that difficult season today, Daniel now recognizes the beauty that resulted in the form of music, which built the framework for the band's debut. Although his personal circumstances have yet to reach a full resolution, just like anything worth fighting for, he knows there is joy to be found in the process.

"I feel like God is glorified in every step of the journey," he offers. "Every moment that you experience this life and every day that you're battling whatever you're battling, you're overcoming it. Every day you're doing that, every step, is really where the glory is, and that's where God is [most] glorified."

Gratitude for the journey is expressed in tracks like lead single "What Love Looks Like." "It's a challenge to the listeners," Daniel explains. "We wait for a mountain to move or for a miracle to experience the love of God, but how many acts of love are we missing on a daily basis because we're too busy looking for something big?"

"Beautiful Life" listeners also glimpse the band's acute awareness of the wonder found in the ordinary. "I don't want to miss any part of this life because every single day is a gift and a total blessing," Daniel adds. "You have to find what God is trying to teach you in the every day."

While the songs on *Who You Say I Am* undoubtedly reflect the faith of Among the Thirsty's band members, Daniel is quick to acknowledge that discovering Christ at work is naturally what comes out in his songwriting. "At the core of all of our music is what God has done for us and what God is doing in our lives," he says. "We fear God in a healthy way. He's given us this [platform], and we want to give it back."

For as long as Daniel personally struggled with finding his true identity, his greatest hope for *Who You Say I Am* is that it will ring true with the message that you can only ever find your real identity in Christ. "Know who you are and know your worth in the Kingdom of God," he encourages. "You are absolutely perfect in the Father's eyes, and you are worth His best."