

**BRANDON HEATH**  
*The Ache*

*“I’ve been thinking about heaven a lot.”*

That’s the first thing Brandon Heath reveals when he sits down to talk about his eighth studio record, *The Ache*. It makes sense considering the events that have unfolded in the award-winning artist’s life. Shortly after he started work on the new 12-track collection — his second LP with Centricity Music — his mother entered palliative care. Knowing a goodbye was imminent, the Platinum-selling singer found himself wrestling with a certain ache he’s experienced only a few times in his life.

He first felt the sensation shortly after his parents divorced when he was three. While his single mom worked, he spent a lot of time at a babysitter’s house, and Heath vividly recalls a patch of grass in her yard where he could see a motel in the distance where his father was employed.

“My dad was figuring things out. He had left us and started a new life with a different family,” Heath remembers. “If I stood in this one spot in the backyard, I could see the sign for Howard Johnson’s in the distance. And sometimes, I would just go over and stand by the fence, and I would see that sign and wonder what my dad was doing. I would just long for him. There was this physical feeling in my chest, and I’ve only felt it for a few people my whole life.”

That familiar ache returned as he watched his mom live out her final days. After his dad passed away in 2017, one month before his first daughter was born, the compounded loss of another parent felt all the more life-altering as an only child.

Ironically, Heath’s self-proclaimed “season of sorrow” followed a period of professional renewal that saw the eight-time GMA Dove Award winner release his first full-length project in five years, *Enough Already*, a series of reflections on self-identity, fatherhood and faith, which returned him to the top of the charts with his sixth No. 1, “See Me Through It.” Moreover, he shared countless intimate evenings of stories and songs with listeners across the country via his popular “Brandon in the Backyard” concert series. No stranger to success, the Nashville native unveiled his major label debut in 2006, swiftly amassing fans with his introspective vulnerability. He’s since garnered five GRAMMY® nominations, an American Music Award nod, an Emmy Award and a Platinum RIAA-certified single courtesy of his career-defining smash, “Give Me Your Eyes.” Additionally, Heath’s been recognized as a top lyricist in his field earning numerous songwriting accolades, including being named BMI’s Songwriter of the Year.

Coming off the high of 2022’s lighthearted, tongue-in-cheek lyricism of “See Me Through It,” however, Heath stepped into his profound and unexpected time of grief. “Every record I release is a snapshot of the season I’m in, and I thought this was going to be a record about mourning,” he admits. “But I’ve learned that two things can exist at the same time. You can talk about heavy things with a joyful spirit, and I have totally embraced paradox in this season. I knew there was going to be sadness, but I also knew there was going to be joy because I knew where my mom was going.”

Joy is palpable on lead radio single, “He Does (Oh By the Way),” a cleverly penned, choir-assisted number about God’s role as a consistent provider and faithful friend. “Honestly, I was just thinking about all the things that we forget the Lord covers,” Heath says of the celebratory reminder he wrote with Kyle Williams (*We Are Messengers*, TobyMac), who produced the majority of *The Ache* alongside additional production from Micah Kuiper (Jeremy Camp, Anne Wilson) and Cason Cooley (NEEDTOBREATHE, Ellie Holcomb). “He fills our needs in wild abundance and lavishes His love on us in crazy ways. We often just miss it. So this song was my fun, upbeat way of saying, ‘Oh, by the way, God does all that — He does.’”

While careful to avoid an overarching tone of melancholy that reflected his inner turmoil, *The Ache* doesn't shy away from the heartache he was experiencing in real time either. The bittersweet "Other Side of the End" was the first selection that initially poured out in one of Heath's earliest writing sessions with Paul Duncan and Christian Hale. The mid-tempo ballad unleashes Heath's curiosity as he ponders the eternal home his mother left this world for when she eventually passed away in July 2023. "We don't exactly know what heaven's going to be like. We have a few hints in Revelation, but even those are kind of hard to decipher," he says. "So it helps to know I've got a friend on the other side of the end; and Jesus is that friend."

Heaven again consumed his thoughts when a shooting occurred at The Covenant School, just minutes from Heath's Nashville home. Although his own children were not yet school age at the time of the tragedy, it was especially personal considering Heath's oldest daughter was already enrolled in kindergarten at Covenant for the following year. The morning of the shooting, a school volunteer had left a welcome gift for his daughter on Heath's front porch.

Wanting to find a way to help and to honor his longtime friend, Covenant School chaplain Matthew Sullivan, the father of two did what he does best — he channeled his conflicting emotions into a work of art. With the help of Duncan and Kuiper, he penned the raw, in-the-moment "Scars" just a few days after the shooting. Within hours of finishing the track, he sent the demo to a text thread of Covenant School teachers and parents.

"It's one of my favorite songwriting experiences I've ever had, because I feel like in my grief, God showed up and gave me medicine to disseminate immediately to my friends," he shares. "That song reminded me of our responsibility as artists: to say the things we don't know how to say, put it to music, and then get it out to the masses as soon as possible and let it do its healing work."

While *The Ache* was inspired by hard moments, the album's dozen originals — all co-written by Heath — were also influenced by the life growing all around him, even in the midst of sadness. The simplicity of his daughters' innocent nighttime prayers shaped "Thank You. Need You. Love You," an intentionally brief, piano-led conversation about the ways we often overcomplicate dialogue with our Heavenly Father. Even the poignant, heaven-forward "Can We Go Home Now?" is a subtle nod to a frequent question his youngest daughter repeatedly asks when they're away from home for more than a couple nights — even if they're on vacation.

Another child — this time, in another country — also inspired Heath when he stumbled across a video of a young, underprivileged boy singing a song expressing his gratitude to God for both the sunshine and the rain. Heath wasn't the only person who fell in love with Rushawn Ewears and his "Sunshine"; the world started sharing the clip, which soon went viral. It turns out Rushawn's simple song of thanks was written by a Jamaican Gospel singer named Jermaine Edwards. With the help of his label, Heath tracked Edwards down and invited him to collaborate on his own spinoff of the song from a perspective of faith, resulting in "It's A Beautiful Day," on which Edwards is featured.

Elsewhere, the steady acoustic-pop of album standout "Gospel Truth" sums up how Heath reconciles the heartbreaking realities of this life with what he knows to be true of God. Penned in the midst of the pandemic with his friend and neighbor Luke Laird, the gem of a cut has been tucked away for the better part of four years. "It's one of my favorite songs I've written in a long time," he confesses of the track that reads like a personal mantra. "It just fits me so well, and it tells the story of who I am and what's important to me."

In truth, holding the tension of loss and longing, *The Ache* as a whole solidifies what's most important to Heath — his family, his faith, his community and his ultimate belief that there is life after death. Perhaps the biggest lesson the album teaches is that the intrinsic ache we all experience this side of heaven points us to the things that matter most.

“It feels like a thing that God put in us. It’s this ability to feel connected to people,” he remarks of the emotion he’s tried his best to articulate, adding, “This has been my season of sorrow, but it helps me to engage with it just by writing about it. That’s what music has always done for me.”