OG Pastors: Faith Over a Lifetime

Episode 3 — Greg Volz

Full Transcript

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Host: Stewart Foley (That Texas Pod-Vangelist)

Guest: Greg Volz — Former lead singer of Petra, evangelist, musician

TRANSCRIPT

Host: A lot of people talk about faith, but what does that actually look like over a lifetime? I'm Stewart Foley, and this is OG Pastors: Faith Over A Lifetime Podcast.

> Hey, welcome back. This is the OG Pastors Faith Over A Lifetime Podcast. My name's Stu, I'm also known as That Texas Podvangelist. And on this podcast, we sit down with someone who has been walking with Jesus for a long time, and we ask them to share what they've learned so that the rest of us can benefit over a lifetime of God's faithfulness. And today's guest is a very special one. Um, we are joined today by Greg Volz. And if you listened to Christian rock music in the late 70s or early 80s, there's a good chance that Greg's voice became part of your story. As the lead singer of the band Petra, he helped shape Christian rock into what it would become and introduced countless people to the songs that are still meaningful today. But that's not really why I invited him. Uh, as the more I learned about Greg, the more I learned that his story's not really about music; it's about a young man who discovered God and had a different plan for his life than the one he thought he wanted. And it- it's about saying yes to Jesus over and over again even when it meant walking away from things that were really pretty good. Greg, thanks for being here. I appreciate it, it means a lot, and I'm- I'm looking forward to- to this conversation.

Greg Volz: My pleasure. It's a good day. Any day above ground's a good day at this point, I think. That's what we say.

Host: That's right. That's right. So, I want to kind of start- like, people know, like, they know Petra and they know, you know- I mean, people still recognize you everywhere you go, which is- which is amazing, right? But you were raised by a single mom, your father left, and you grew up in a house that had actually been your dad's former business, a mortuary. Which is a pretty unusual beginning. And I'm going to tell you something that's crazy: my dad left when I was three, and he spent part of his life as a mortician.

Greg Volz: That is crazy! That's crazy!

Host: That's awesome. Okay, so tell me about life growing up and just kind of- kind of start us off there.

Greg Volz: I have four other siblings. I was the last of five. So I have- and each one of my siblings were three years apart. And, um, when I was growing up, of course, my father left when I was four,

but I still have memories of like walking in on a corpse one time and, "Gosh, that guy's cold." And- but my mother was a saint, basically. So as growing up, I know- I mean, I was very much loved. She had six sisters and a brother, and they were all- I'm going to say this is strange, but I never in all of my years growing up ever heard a cross word from any of her sisters or her siblings. Never. And, uh, to even make it more interesting is that- and I can only attribute this to the Lord- but my mother never said one bad word about my father in my entire life. Never ever criticized him, never beat him up, you know, never- she just, I don't know, she had this- grace about her that was- beyond me, I'll just say that. But, you know, as growing up in a- in a home that was full- I mean, she was loving, caring. We were poor! After my dad left, I mean, that there went the- I mean, we were- we had the house, but-

Host: Did you have a family car?

Greg Volz: No, not for- the time that I was four to the time that I was 16. So that's what, 12 years? No, we walked everywhere. We lived in a small town. Uh, it was four blocks to the store, it was, you know, so many blocks to the school, it was- but no, never did. And when we'd go from Metamora, Illinois to Peoria, we took the bus, the Greyhound stopped in, and for 25 cents, you could ride the bus to Peoria. And on Mondays, my mom's day off after she graduated from beautician school, and she turned the- the embalming room, which was built off the back of the house, into a beauty salon. How poetic is that?

Host: That's super cool. So what was the name of the town that you grew up in?

Greg Volz: Metamora, Illinois. And that is about 15 miles northeast of Peoria, uh, where a lot of famous people came from. Of course, Caterpillar's there, but I mean, I'm thinking Richard Pryor, I think Andrew Wayland's from there, too, but anyway, interesting. But, you know, it was because my mother never complained, we didn't know that- I mean, it- it might've been a grilled cheese, but we always had food.

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: So, as we grew up, you know, we- I wore hand-me-downs for the first six, seven, eight years of my life, of course my mom had six sisters and a brother, so I had 45 first cousins.

Host: Holy smokies!

Greg Volz: Yeah, that's- that's a pretty good- so when we got together for a reunion, we had a pretty good group there. But it was good. My brother bought me a set of drums when I was seven years old, put them in the cellar. This house was over a hundred years old- I mean, it was built in 1896 or something like that. It's in the registry, but- so it was a cellar. You know, you had to- square to-

Host: Right, you had to duck down.

Greg Volz: Right. But, so when I was seven, and he was an older musician, that's another story, nine years older, but he, uh, he's in the Rockabilly Hall of Fame.

Host: Oh wow!

Greg Volz: Oh yeah, his first record at 16 was gold.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And his band's called The Rockin' Rs. People still play their music today. He says, "You know," he says, "I still get royalty checks from Warner Brothers." I said, "Are you kidding me?!" So, he and another guy named Ron, they're both names were Ronald, Ron, and so they called "The Rockin' Rs." And then after that group he joined a group called The Swingin' Lads, which went on to become- well, they did the Ed Sullivan Show five times, Dean Martin Show, Hollywood Palace, you know, did all the- the big rooms for seven years in Las Vegas. And here's the fun part: when he would come home, and he was a mentor to me in music, and he would always say, "Greg, stay out of clubs." I was thinking, "What?" So in my whole life, I played two nightclubs my whole life.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: That was it. So growing up, you know, I learned to play a little banjo, learned to play tenor guitar, then I got my first real guitar at 13. and I think the strings were about a half an inch off the neck, paid $19 for it, was made by Kay- Kay guitar. And it was, uh, right at the time when- well, it was a year before the Beatles hit in '64, so my cousin and I started a band called The Wombats in 1963. And it was he and I, and we had- of course we had the Everly Brothers and- Roy Orbison and- people like that, that we were learning those songs, but when the Beatles hit, oh we got that first Beatle book and we became the Beatles. And we got eventually became Beatle haircuts, Beatle boots, the suit, the coat, the tie, I mean, we- we- and that- we signed our first contract- recording contract in 1965 when I was 15 with Golden Boys.

Host: That's amazing. I want to get into that. Let me- let me ask you this question: so, one of the things that- and you kind of touched on this- one thing that really struck me was that you were a self-taught musician. And in weirdly enough- this is another weird thing between the two of us- like, I had drums in the basement too. Uh- and it wasn't- like, my grandparents' basement was like the one you're describing. There was a timber across it that had- my grandfather had painted red and white stripes on it because I- and I'm pretty tall, and I- and I whacked my head on that thing a few different times. But our the basement that I was in was like a normal height- well, not was low, but, um, not that low. But you were a self-taught musician by the time you were 13 and you just mentioned this, you already started a band, The Wombats, right? Did you feel like even though you came to God later, were there instances where you look back and say you thought God was working at that point?

Greg Volz: Here's the interesting- part of it. I went to parochial school, and I have flat knuckles to prove it.

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: If you know what I mean.

Host: Yes sir.

Greg Volz: And one thing that I did learn- I got a good education, and I learned respect. And, uh, you know, as we- my wife and I always say, "You know, yeah- no home training for that," because people, you know, the- the Z generation and the G Zens and stuff, you know, they're stuck to their

phone, they don't look in the eye when they talk to you, and you know, we were- we learned proper manners, I'll just say. But when I was seven years old, second grade, something happened to me that I can't explain until later I realized what it was, I had a visitation. And it was during a time in the gymnasium, the whole school was watching a- I call it a training film- they were showing us about the priesthood and the- and the nunhood and- and all this, and- and so I'm watching it, and all of a sudden, I know I just felt this presence come over me that just melted me! And I began to just uncontrollably weep. I didn't know why. And shortly after that, I found out that I was hearing harmonies that I had never heard before at seven, I could sing perfect harmony, whatever. And I got this- this- once a week they would have- music. There was a piano in the classroom, 60-some students in a class, so you're going to have order.

Host: Right.

Greg Volz: And they would play, and I'm sitting three or four rows back, and you know, they're playing, and I'm just singing, I don't know what I'm doing. And- Sister Mary Arthur, I believe was her name, she just stops and said, "Okay, who's- who's doing that?" Of course, nobody's going to, you know, they just bunch their arms underneath and get their hands out of the way before the ruler-

Host: Everybody's hands- everybody's sitting on their hands. Absolutely!

Greg Volz: And then- so she starts again and we're singing and then she says, "Okay, who is doing that?" And nobody's responding. So she gets real sneaky and finally she goes, "Gregory, come up here." "Oh boy, I'm in trouble," you know, I get up, she says, "Stand here. Okay, class, we're going to do this again." And then she starts playing and I start singing, I don't realize I'm singing perfect harmony.

Host: Right.

Greg Volz: Yeah. And she says- she looked at me and she said, "So where did you learn to do that?" And I said, "Uh- do what?" And then I could hear fifths- I mean, I could hear, and for whatever reason. And then, you know, I was always this kind of kid that- I want to know why it works that way. How's it built? And, you know, the Erector Sets and the- the building blocks and whatever it is. And it's like, I just want to know- I'm still just today. And my- my mother used to call me Mr. Fix-It because something'd go bad in the house, she would just call me and I would take it apart and figure out how to fix it. It was mechanical. You know, if it had a schematic- you know, later, electronics was so different back then, you know, with just- and I never did learn that whole part of it because I had friends that did that. So, but I walked literally uphill to school both ways. Well- and I lived close enough that, you know, if the buses weren't running or whatever- and this is not for me, but other people coming in, they still had school and you'd have 20 people in the class and they'd still- there's still going to have school because Illinois, you had some snow, you know, you got plenty of snow. And- and you're an Illinois boy too, aren't you?

Host: I'm originally from Missouri, but I spent a fair amount of time in Illinois.

Greg Volz: Show me. Just- go ahead and show me.

Host: Yeah, exactly.

Greg Volz: So I lived in Springfield eight years. We can get to that later, but-

Host: Springfield, Missouri?

Greg Volz: Springfield, Missouri.

Host: Yeah, my mom did too. Yeah.

Greg Volz: Yeah, when I got married, uh, my father-in-law, who was a pastor, was a writer, actually. Ex-marine paratrooper- that's a wildest deal.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And- he said, "I was no more a writer than the man in the moon." And he said, "After I got out of the service and got married," and he said, "this man walked up to me that I never knew and pulled out this long sheet and said, 'Here's what the Lord says,' and he read it to me. 'Thou shalt write, blah blah blah,'" and he thought, "Huh- well." I think he was on his third book when I moved there- back from Indianapolis, Indiana, to Springfield and worked with him in the ministry, and- was the worship leader of our little church for about eight years. Actually, during- during the time that Petra was just getting started and wanted me to- you know, be a part of their band from the get-go, which was- that's another story, if we could jump to that.

Host: Yeah, I'm going to get there. I'm going to get there, I promise you. So- let me ask you this question: so- you figure out that you can sing at seven. Like, you kind of accidentally figured it out, but I suspect that you didn't stop singing at seven. What did your mom think about this when she found out that you could sing like that?

Greg Volz: My- my mom sang every day. Is that right? I didn't find out- I didn't find out until right before my father died that he was a violinist- he played violin- and was a first tenor.

Host: Oh!

Greg Volz: I never knew!

Host: So this is- this is a story that I think everybody needs to hear. It is a remarkable story. And so, I want to set it up, and I'd love for you to finish. So, you're playing in a band called Gideon's Bible.

Greg Volz: That was after The Wombats. Mhm.

Host: And one night this entire group of what you've described as dope-smoking hippies-

Greg Volz: That's pretty accurate. Yep.

Host: -met Jesus, right? And it sounds like something only God could orchestrate. Can you tell us that story?

Greg Volz: So, I personally believe in divine appointments.

Host: Holy cow. Thank you. Thank you.

Greg Volz: And, uh, so Gideon's- we had a record that was- made it to number 14 on the charts and as a result, we were asked to be- opening act for major groups that came into the Indianapolis area. And, uh, so at 20 years old, you know, we're opening for like Janis Joplin, Chicago, we did a- thing with Nas, which'd be Todd Rundgren, if some people remember that. Small festival with everybody you can imagine, including BB King and about 80,000 people. Back then, that's a small festival. That's- that was shortly, really, literally right after Woodstock.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And, uh- you know, we believed in love and peace. We believed in- you know, we were studying- now this is- how this goes, but- Catholicism didn't do it for me. And when I left high school to go to college- and Illinois State University- I- I just quit. And plus, they changed the mass from Latin to English, totally ruined it. No mystique left! You knew everything they were saying, thinking, "I don't- I don't quite get that." So for the next two and a half years, I went on this journey, and part of that journey was studying- Eastern philosophy under Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Yukteswar, Babaji, of course Jesus was one of the boys. He- I mean they- they keep him in that deal, you know. So our drummer met this little German lady at- I don't know, down in Talbot Village, it was like near Herron Art Institute, places like that, and she had- this relationship with the Lord that was- she was a seer. And she, as she told us later, "The Lord spoke to me and said, 'Invite these boys to dinner. I'm going to save them.'" Well- we didn't know anything about- I didn't even know there was Christian music. I mean, I had no idea that there was "quote" gospel, even if it was- quartet music. But anyway, and that's all it was back then, it was southern gospel quartet music. But I learned later. So we went to this- to this dinner party and, um, it's the only place that we went that was not to a gig. Now, we lived in a seven-bedroom house, there were a dozen of us, the band members and our friends. Uh- we had our own- had our own garden-

Host: Of course!

Greg Volz: But we believed in peace and joy and love, we did. But we didn't know who the author of that was. So anyway, Dave says- Davy says, "Well, you know, we- we've been invited," and we thought- looked at the cupboards, the cupboards are like bare- you know, starving musician syndrome. And so we all went, and not just the band- the whole house! Everybody that was there.

Host: Oh wow! All 12.

Greg Volz: A dozen of us. Yeah. And we get there and we have this wonderful meal and we're sitting in the living room and we're philosophizing about God and vegetables- we were vegetarians also at that time, kind of went together, you know.

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: I was 138 pounds, had a 28 waist. I mean, it's like, come on! Come on! But I was healthy. But that's just where it led. And so, we're talking, you know, philosophizing, and in walks this old man. He was 55 years old-

Host: I was going to say, what- what constitutes old at that point, right?

Greg Volz: Little German lady spoke broken English. Her name was Elfreda Platasis. So this guy walked in and- and hung up his coat- this was October the 25th.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And, uh, hung up his coat and looked at the room and I'm thinking- I'm really thinking- you know, "Who's this old dude?" And- he just shouts out across the room, "Praise the Lord!" And the room stops. It's like an E.F. Hutton moment.

Host: Wow, yeah.

Greg Volz: And it was like, "Wow!" And I thought- look- I said, "Did you feel that vibe, man?" Because, you know, we- back in the 60s, it was all about vibrations. It still is.

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: I mean, really, it still is. So all of a sudden, he's got our attention and then he starts- and I'll use the word- prophesying to us. He starts telling us about ourselves, like- Jesus and the woman at the well. You know, "I know who you are, you've had five husbands, the man you're now living with is not your husband," but- "come and drink of the living water." And he was telling us, you know- and- and it was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" And then he comes to these words, he says, "You know, you've been- you've been looking for the way," and I'm thinking, "Yeah," and he said, "Jesus is the way." Just shouted out, it was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" You know, and the head- even now, the hair is standing up on my arms because- you know, the soul never ages.

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: And when that frequency that- hit me at that time, it's still there. And then he said, "You know, you want to know the truth," and we said, "Yeah, I've been reading the Koran, the I Ching, the- the this, the that," and he said, "You know, Jesus is the truth." And it was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" Man, it just got heavier and heavier. And then he said- looked us straight in the eye and we're just like glued, and he said, "Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man goes to the Father except by him." And when he said those words, this presence of God manifested in that living room so powerfully that everybody went face down and you couldn't move. You were stuck! You were just- I could weep. I just started gushing this stuff that I'd been filling my soul with. And it went on and on and on and then there was Elfreda- his name was- when I- I'll tell his name later- but when I got up from a three-hour carpet washing, literally- and you know, I got snot coming out my nose, my eyes were puffed and I'm thinking, "Oh man! This is- this is unbelievable!" And- because I received those words! When he said- I received those into my spirit and all of a sudden my- my heart just exploded.

Host: That's so cool.

Greg Volz: And he reached down and he held up- then hands- and these guys that- these people that were there, they had laid- they were laying hands, praying for all these people in- and the truth is- as it says in the book of Acts: and the whole house was saved. Every member of the band, every member- all of our friends all received, made a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I-

I'm, you know, like, I don't know what's going on, but he holds out his hand and he says, "I'm Brother Earl, I'm your brother in Christ," and I thought, "Well, hey brother, we- we play rock and roll." You know, and- and I see this, like I said, a twinkling in his eye, it was like a- it was a revelation. And he said, "Well- play Jesus rock!" Well, there was no such thing.

Host: No such thing, yeah.

Greg Volz: And then we- you know, we said, "Well, you know, so what do we do?" And he held up- the Bible, held up the book, and he said, "Read the book and do what it says." That was his counsel. Read the book and do what it says. It says, "Whatever it says you can do, you can do. Whatever it says you can't do, you can't do. Read the book and do what it says."

Host: Okay, so that- that next morning- so, I've heard that story and it's amazing. What's the next morning like for you? And the other members of the group, right? Because it's not- it's you, but there's other people, too.

Greg Volz: You know, there's kind of a floating sensation. But, uh, we just discarded all the music that was not- spiritual, but there were songs like "In the Presence of the Lord" by Eric Clapton, there were songs that regular secular musicians wrote in the 60s because I believe they had an experience somewhere along. And so we grabbed as much as we could and then we climbed on our instruments, our living room was full of- had a, you know, a B3, 120- 122 Leslies, there's trainer amps, you know, I mean- packed! And we would spend six hours a day jamming. And we just started writing. We started writing music. And it just- it came out of what we called the flow. We're just playing and just things just went a certain way and pretty soon- even today, when I certain music I hear it, I get lyrics with it. I hear the- the music and the lyrics- like- it's like an Amadeus experience. I didn't write it, I penned it. And I have many songs in my computer right now that someday, hopefully, we can record- not just demo, but record all the way. You know, I'm in- in a bedroom at the house, I've got a recording suite that I- it's a- you know, editing and- of course I play drums, I play bass, play guitar, play a little keys in sections, because I'm not real polyphonic at it but, and I can program, and so I just use it to write music here, but, you know, that next day, it just was- it was like you were high all the time without the drugs! And I was instantly delivered! I had never, never touched another drug.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: No- I mean, no drugs, no alcohol, no sex, which was a big deal back then because- I mean- being a musician, it's like in- what-

Host: There were opportunities, I would think!

Greg Volz: I mean, you could write a bad song and- and- and women would sleep with you. But it's like that hole that I was trying to fill up with all this stuff, external stuff, it was full to overflowing and I never even thought about it. There was not even consideration. And so that group- we changed our name right in the midst from Gideon's to a group called E.

Host: Now- that's what I wanted to ask you about.

Greg Volz: Okay, why would you call a band E? You got the Kinks, the Birds, the Stones, the Beatles, the blah blah blah, but E! And, um, it was, I don't know how many years later, 20 years later, that I hear this little voice and say "E," and it was at the time when all the electronic was coming in: e-tickets, email, e-this, e-that. And it was basically, I think the Lord was saying, "This is- about the future, this is a prophetic thing, E." And- and there were a lot of symbolic things about E and what it stood for, but eventually inside the little card said "Emmanuel" because God was with- we baptized 2,000 people the first year! That- that bunch of hippies.

Host: That's what I wanted to ask you about. So the E band became part of the Jesus Movement, right?

Greg Volz: Right at the very beginning. Yeah.

Host: And you were helping people discover that you could love Jesus without giving up music or- or listening to music that you like the sound of and love Jesus at the same time. Can you talk a little- you mentioned these baptisms. What was that season like for you? Talk to us a little bit about, for example, I mean, you tell us you recorded something called- "Because I Am."

Greg Volz: Ah yes, that's right. '71. Celebrex Productions. Met a guy-

Host: What was- what was the Jesus Movement like from the inside? I guess that's what I'm trying to get at.

Greg Volz: Well, we had- we stayed as a community in the band- the band house stayed the band house, our keyboard player had a bank account, so everything- everything went to him. When people- called us, we just went. We didn't- there was no negotiation. Right. In '71, there was a big festival, the first big blowout called Faith Festival '71 in Roberts Stadium in Evansville, Indiana. And there were like 40 Christian ministries there, like Thurlow Spurr and the Spurrlows, and- the blah blah blah- but- that's where I first met Larry Norman, who was another Jesus guy from California. But at that point, the E band played and, you know- I don't know how many hundreds of people met the Lord during that weekend. But we met a man who was an evangelist from West Chicago. He lived in St. Charles. And he was a- an actor, he did commercials, but he met the Lord personally in 1969. And when he saw the band, he says- he met us- "I want you guys to come up. We're going to evangelize West Chicago." And his name was Ron Rendleman.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And he was a- really well-known celebrity in West Chicago. Had a beautiful spread, his house was big enough that all the band could go stay there and each had a bed.

Host: Oh wow!

Greg Volz: Because during the early days, we slept on floors and sleeping bags, we slept in the basement of churches, you know, I mean that's just the way it was.

Host: Sure.

Greg Volz: So we went up and started to evangelize West Chicago, Carol Stream, Lombard, Wheaton, all those areas, and he would just- he would get a stage in a park, we would bring- we'd

set up, draw a crowd, six, seven, 800 people, a hundred people'd get saved, take them out and baptize them. I mean, it happened all the time! And he was, I mean he'd get thrown in jail all the time for evangelizing with a Speaker on top of his pickup truck and going to baseball parks and they'd throw him in jail. So later- and this is a little jump forward- but later after I joined Petra, when I'd go to Chicago we'd play the Chicago Fest for two days, he would say, "Well- you're going to church with me on Sunday." I said, "Yeah, where are we going?" She said, "Cook County Jail." That's where he goes to church, eight years! That's where he went to church. And it was like, it was amazing what the Lord did. But during the early days- and between three days after I committed my life to Christ, I got baptized in a horse trough- we all did. And then three days later, we're in a little prayer chapel meeting with these bunch of old- and I can say this, old people: 50 plus. And they were- they were Pentecostal people, and the Holy Spirit got poured out and I was- received the Holy Baptism of Holy Spirit. And then it was just, wake up and whatever the Lord tells- you know, Jesus said these words, he said, "Whatever I see the Father do, I do. Whatever I hear the Father say, I say." And it was like, so he was the pattern son. And basically he was saying, "You can have a relationship with me that where that my heavenly Father can be your Father. He'll speak to you, he'll guide you, he'll lead you," and scripture says, "into all truth. But you have to seek him." And that means forsaking all others. And so there was some major changes that took place, and of course we, you know, we think we know stuff and then we find out we really didn't know as much as we thought we knew. But the Lord is gracious and leads us in paths of righteousness to where we become- that was 56- it'll be 56 years ago on October the 25th.

Host: I'm on that path too. I'm- I'm far behind you, but- but I'm on that path as well. But I want to go back- I want to talk about this- this is a pretty remarkable part of your story. So- based on my extensive research, Greg, in 1976 you received a call offering you the lead singer position with REO Speedwagon, which was my very first 8-track, REO Speedwagon, "Ridin' the Storm Out."

Greg Volz: I did! Yes, I did!

Host: A few weeks later, Petra called.

Greg Volz: Same studio!

Host: Yeah. Looking back on those two phone calls that represent sort of two completely different lives- yeah- that's a big- that's a big fork in the road. Walk us through that season of your life.

Greg Volz: So, I'm going to Illinois State University at the time, Gideon's Bible is doing concerts on the weekends. I'm also working a job as in a music store, taking 17 hours, and I'm living in a band- in a house with ten guys that's off-campus approved housing. So what I realized- well I took- I'll tell you this: that REO was from Champaign-Urbana, University of Illinois. I was at Illinois State in Normal. But Blythem Agency was trying to get me out of Gideon's into that band back then. They all- I knew all the- they all knew me back then, REO did. And when that first phone call came, it was from the studio where The Wombats signed their first recording deal with Golden Boys, and people like Dan Fogelberg, REO, Andraé Crouch, you can go on, I mean they've got a wall- at the center in- on the riverfront in Peoria that- Right. -that has hundreds of records. And The Wombats are up there. But anyway, our record didn't happen until 49 years later. We had all the tapes, but

never did the record, just had all the tapes. So, I get this call, and Kevin Cronin had walked out. They got in a big fight and he just walked out and said, "You know, see ya." And they're in the middle of a recording- you know, recording a record. And so they said, "Who we going to get?" "Well-" and- and this is the conversation I was told by the engineer, who was a friend of mine there at the studio, says- so the engineer goes, "So who- who are we going to get?" "Well, we don't know." "So what's Greg Volz doing?" "Uh- I don't know, you know-" and the engineer says, "I've got his number." So they call me. And they say, "Hey listen, we know who you are and we just want to know if you- if you would like to be a part of the band. We're making-" this was in the 70s "-making $10,000 a night, you can become very famous and make a lot of money and, uh, we'd like you to be our lead singer." And I'd been a Christian for six years- it was five and a half years- and I just said, "Uh guys, I- I don't think I can sing that material."

Host: Yeah.

Greg Volz: "But you know, I- God bless you, I hope you, you know, good luck or whatever." And then six weeks later, I get a call. Same studio! Petra is recording their second album, "Come and Join Us," and their manager Dan Brock calls me and says, "Greg, yeah- you gotta come man, this isn't going to work." Now, the reason he said that was because from the very beginning, the first day that Petra did their first concert in Fort Wayne, Indiana, they were my opening act.

Host: Oh wow! Okay.

Greg Volz: I was doing a fulfillment an engagement for E band at Adams Apple Coffeehouse, 300-seat coffeehouse, it was a big deal.

Host: Wow.

Greg Volz: And John Lloyd says, "You know, I said, 'John, our guitar player is with the Milwaukee Jesus people, and I don't think he's coming back.'" And he said, "Well, I don't care if you have to bring acoustic guitar yourself, you're coming." I said, "Okay!" And then we get there and he says, "Okay, I got these guys that are going to the church bible school here, and they put a- they put a band together and this is going to be their first concert and they're going to open for you, they're really loud." I said, "Well, good, you know, I said, well what are they called?" He said, "Yeah, they don't know. They think maybe they're going to call themselves Petra." So they get up and it's like a poor-man Allman Brothers, but you know- still, Christian music, it was rock. And then at the end, Bob and Greg came up to me, after we're talking to people, they come up, they just- like seen- "Come here!" They said, "Hey listen, yeah, yeah, yeah- we- we believe God told us you're supposed to be our lead singer." And I went, "Really? Or I could do this English. Really?" And thought, "Well, you know, let me pray about it." And E band had disbanded at that point. And I prayed about it and the Lord said, "Not now." And so they- they started sending me tapes all the time! They sent me these tapes, "I got this song, got this song." And they did their first record at Golden Boys in South Beacon and then they're in doing their second one which was really more- they needed a rock singer. And when they called, I immediately heard- my heavenly Father say, "You can do this." I got on a plane the next morning.

Host: Wow!

Greg Volz: And flew to- to Peoria and I spent, I think I spent 15 hours straight in the studio singing. Did back- all the backups for like six songs, did the lead vocals on two or three songs and- and then, you know, I'm back to Springfield, I'm raising a family, I've got kids, you know, and I'm working with my father-in-law, and you know, we play golf, it's fun. And then- right, you know, they would just call me and say, "Hey, we got this thing in Chicago and we really need-" and so they'd fly me and so I started doing dates with them. And, uh, they officially didn't- didn't say I ever joined the band- by- I don't know who it was. I really joined the band in '76 and I started doing dates with them and I packed up my wife and two kids and in a van and I would drive and I paid all my own expenses!

Host: No way!

Greg Volz: I think I made $800 the first year that I worked with Petra. Now, how could I do that? My father-in-law, who was a- very insightful pastor, and he says, "Greg, I really don't like this music, don't care for it at all, but I see what God's doing with it, so, uh, I want to support you as a missionary to the United States." He said, "I'll make sure that your rent's paid and that there's food on your table." I said, "Okay!" And because of that faithfulness, I was able to- to start working with Petra, which later- when I moved from Springfield to Nashville when on salary for $250 a week in 1982.

Host: Wow. Now, that's interesting that you- you talked about your father-in-law's reaction, because- at my understanding was at that point, Christian rock was a brand-new idea. And some churches embraced it, and some churches wanted nothing to do with it. So talk a little bit about breaking ground, breaking that ground and- did you have any sense of what it was going to become?

Greg Volz: Uh, I can show you the scars that I still have. You know, I would say 1 out of 50 churches would embrace it. Churches didn't want anything to do with it, it was taboo, it was too loud, it- it- come on! It just made you go crazy, you know? It's like- I was thinking- and for ten years, from '72 to 1982, televangelists preached against us, called us out by names: we're the devil's this, we went through hell, you know, we're that- blah-blah-blah, and it's like- I- I have to tell you, uh, I cannot find any place in the scripture that the devil ever had any power to create anything! All he does is pervert it. I believe music is a gift from God, and I believe that- that we can- it's a gift. So you can use it for yourself, you can use it for the devil, you can use it for the world, whatever- that's your choice! He gave us free will. But, um, when I committed my life to the Lord, it was- I was whole hog or- or- or none. I mean, I was a hundred percent! And of course, the support group I had, all these- musicians that were a hundred percent in! And we saw these- I mean, every day for at least the first year and a half, every day, somebody got saved under the ministry of the E band. I mean, sometimes it was a dozen, sometimes- but every day, somebody. And- I mean people would come, there were people that would come and want to like beat you up and you know, because their little sister got saved and came home crying and- you know, whatever it was. But, you know, we took hits like crazy. And as a result of not giving up- and there's a message here-

Host: Yes, there is.

Greg Volz: -because you're going to take hits. Jesus said, "You- you're going to follow me, you're going to have tribulation." But he said, "I've overcome the world, you'll overcome the world because I live in you. Just keep walking, get up, take another step." So we, you know, when that thing is- is so strong in you that you- what- like Peter said, "Who- where would we go?" You know, he said- Jesus, "Are you going to leave me too?" He said, "Well, where- where would we go?"

Host: Where would I go? Yeah.

Greg Volz: So over those ten years we took hits like you cannot imagine and these were, you know, major preachers. And I think later some of them recanted because- eventually, our bass player at the time, Mark Kelly, his dad was- was an Assemblies of God pastor and, you know, they were old-school! But when he came to a concert that was in the Quad Cities at the civic there, and a hundred kids came down and received Christ, he decided to go back and just- lay it out for the deacons and everybody else that was involved. And so all of a sudden, we had- a group of youth pastors that were willing to take a chance. And as a result, these people- they- they doubled their youth group overnight because we would do a concert and- we'd have numerous salvations that took place and then they had to put them somewhere! Because in the beginning, the Jesus movement for those first ten years, they didn't want them! They- they didn't want us! We auditioned for a charismatic church. They said, "Well, let's see what you do and we'll decide," and they said, "No, we don't want you. Now, if you want to cut your hair and put on a tie and you can be- sitting in the back row and be a good little churchgoer, but no." Meanwhile, we were out rescuing the perishing and they were condemning us for doing it. Does that sound like something that Jesus went through?

Host: Yeah, I mean, it's- it's amazing that that happened. And I mean I kind of want to talk about that a little bit. So, and I mean you're- I mean, just for- just so that you know, right, like you're inspirational to me, and you're inspirational to others. But people see the concerts and the records and the success and they don't see the cost. I know just, you know, with my shift in this direction, I can already see that, you know, folks that I was- some folks are uncomfortable with that or whatever you want to call it. So what did this ministry and all of that success cost you personally?

Greg Volz: Well, I think as the scripture says that- the cost is all. Because there will be times, and there were times where you had- to leave it all and follow Jesus and- and it didn't matter. And somehow there was the- the grace to do that. Now, it helps if you have someone that's- that has the same passion. But the call- you know we all don't have the same call. And- Oswald Chambers once said in- in one of his- his readings of My Utmost for His Highest, yeah My Utmost for His Highest, he said, "Others may, you cannot." And I thought- "Man!" And it's like- because God doesn't- it has to do with the call on your life and the stronger the call, I will say, the- narrower it gets. But also, I mean gosh, it's- there's a stripping. You know, the pruning, you can look at the scripture about the pruning, it's like, well- that hurt! Well, you know what? Yeah, but that's how we grow. And if it's pruned, it bears more fruit. Now I will tell you, I'd like to- and I have repented for all the mistakes and- and errors that I've made and- and the sin that- is simply missing the mark. You know, it's like you just- ah gosh, well- it didn't look that bad- it doesn't matter! That's not the way the Lord- I decided I was going to be God in that situation and, you know, my best thinking got me into the messes that I was in and my best thinking didn't get me out. It was only because there was that call

on me and I was willing to repent from the mistakes that I made that I was able to continue on and grow. And that's a big- that's a big deal. And that never stops. And when you get older in the faith, it becomes more- nitpicky. You know, it's like- I'm not a judgmental person, I know that people have to- and I asked the Lord one time- I was really complaining- I was going to use another word but I'll say complaining to the Lord about someone that is- like that- that person- and then heard the Holy Spirit just say to me, "Greg," said, "people are just where they are." Right. "Yeah, what?! Come on! That's too simple!" And then I think about Paul, and he says, "Hey listen, I'm afraid for you people that you're going to miss it, the simplicity that's in Christ by all of this stuff," and he was a theologian! I mean, he knew- he knew it all, but he had to just abandon all of that religion and all of that "quote" learning to follow the Nazarene. And sometimes I don't understand the- the way. "What happened just recently?" It's like, "Oh my gosh!" And then it was like, "Wow, that's why this happened or we ended up here because of this person." And I will say this, that over the years, the biggest thing that I've learned is- and- I pastored a couple years in Southern California and I've been an evangelist for- for- fifty- well, it'll be 56 years, you know, I've been in music ministry, I've- I've been a worship leader, I've- I've seen a lot of different aspects of the church ministry and the church realm. But what I learned is is that everyone is a minister. They're either ministering life to life or death to death. It's that simple. And ministry is as simple as this: ministry is meeting needs and healing hurts. And everyone can do it. You know, we were at the Dollar Store yesterday, my wife and I at the Dollar Store, and there's little cashier girl, she just looked despondent and- and I said, "How are you doing?" She said, "Uh-" and Pam looked over at me and she said- Pam says to the girl, "Can I touch you?" She said, "Uh- yeah." "So," she said, "Can we pray for you?" And we laid hands on this little girl just, you know, just pray that- she just, just was letting it out. I have no idea what she was going through. But the Lord knew! And when that happened, it was like- holy cow! It was like the Jesus movement, there was this- this vibration! And I- I'll put it this way: if you've ever worked with electricity and- in like 440 3-phase and there's kind of this open current and you step into it and it's like "Oh!"- all the hair stands up on your arms- "Wow, that's what it's like!" It's like your whole body starts to vibrate, in a good way. And then we moved on. But it's- I'm not a Bible thumper, I'm just trying to be obedient to be sensitive- to when I feel that little nudge. And most of the time it's just a little nudge, it's just a little- it's like an- it's a thought that's in my own words, my own speech. And I hear that thought and I think, "I- I know that voice." You know, some people say, "Well, you know, I hear the Lord." I said, "Well, what- what does he- what does he sound like?" And I thought, "Well- I can say it- for me mostly it sounds like my own voice! But I remember my mother's in the next room, I can't see her, but when my mother says my first and middle name, I know it's her! I don't have to be there, I don't have to see her. I hear that sound and I know that's my mother." And God has a sound. He has a sound that resonates in your body and you just need to take time to listen to it.

Host: Yeah, it's really- that's really insightful. You've lived through the Jesus Movement, you've lived through Petra, you've a solo career, Classic Petra, and now you're still writing and recording and singing because you believe God has given you another invitation. Can you talk a little bit about that and what you're doing today? Just so that folks know that you were still rocking.

Greg Volz: Yeah, I can still hit the high notes, it's true. I'm still kicking! Not quite as high- but I'm still kicking! What- when I left Petra, and I'll just be honest, you know, my family was falling apart. I was spending- sometimes 300 days a year on the road. And it was great for them but it wasn't good for my family. And when I left and there were problems that were starting to develop in the group and, uh, it had to do with making money. You know, because the group was- made a lot of money and it went into the ministry but, not- in- into my mind, but still. And when I- I left and, uh, I don't know how it happened, I was talking to this- kid in Florida that- he helped me to start to get my music- digitized. And I said, "Well- why would you want to help me?" He said, "Well, you led me to the Lord in 19- 1985 at the Sun Dome in Tampa, Florida." I said, "Really?!" And so anyway- so he knew this guy who did promotions in Texas, like the big deal- like- and the guy says, "Well, I want you to put a band together and-" this was in- 2008, 2009, 2009 maybe- and I'd been away from Petra for, you know, since '86. And- for some reason I feel like I'm the donkey sometimes. You know, the- Balaam's- Balaam's donkey? You know, the donkey talks to Balaam because he's trying to- prophesy evil against Israel and can't do it. And- and the donkey says- and he starts beating the donkey and tell him to shut up, he doesn't realize the donkey's talking to you man! So- I'm talking to this guy and he says, "Put a band together and go out and do about 20 dates with Whiteheart." I said- and for some reason I said, "You know, I could do that. But- why not just have Petra do that?" And Petra was- had disbanded in 2005. Petra was- done. And- he said, "Can- can you do that?" And I said- "Uh- I- I don't know," I realized what I had just said. It came out of my mouth! But I don't think I instigated it. And so I said, "Uh- you know what? I'll call my- my old partner." And I called him and I said, "Hey listen, blah blah blah," he said, "well are we talking guarantees here?" You know, Christian music's like, "You know, sorry man, I- I can't pay you," it's like- it happened a lot. But- so he- I said, "Yeah." So he said, "Well you know, it'd have to be all the old guys." And found Louie, found John Lawry and- turned out Mark Kelly, the bass player, was living in Dallas where I live. Didn't know it. So my- my always- you know, "Lord, what- why? After all these years, why?" And- as clear as- as loud and clear, he said, "Prodigals. They're out there. They grew up on your music. They're away from me. They're out- they're- they're living in caves, running from mad kings like King David." He said, "But the music will reach them."

Host: Wow.

Greg Volz: And then, at the same time, one- miracle after another that was impossible happened. A deal with Sony, uh- William Morris Booking Agency, our old road manager- I mean it's like just everything just went bam! Together. And all of a sudden, we were in the studio recording "Back to the Rock" with two new songs and- everything was just going gangbusters. And- the prodigals started coming in! By the hundreds. And- and it's like- we were at this- doing a pickup date in Columbus, Ohio at a Nazarene church. About 800 people showed up, we're on our way to a festival in New Hampshire, and you know, two weeks, three weeks out we called and said, "Yeah, we'll- come on!" And it was like, you know $10 at the door and whatever. And so we go there and this guy comes up at the end of this concert and he said, "I- I just have to tell you what happened today." Said, "I, uh- you know I got saved under this ministry years ago back in the 80s. I have two brothers, we all walked with the Lord, stuff happened, we became estranged. We have not talked to each other in 20 years. Family." And he said, "Unbeknownst to each one of us, we all came to this

concert, not knowing the other one was coming, and your message tonight, our- our family was restored. I just wanted to thank you." And I thought, "Doesn't get any bigger than that! Because that's what the Holy Spirit is about, restoration." So these three guys hadn't talked to each other in 20 years. Wow. So and it- it went on and on and even in Europe, I mean they were all over Europe. They were everywhere. And that went on for a- a year and a half, and then it disbanded for- a reason that, you know, it just didn't go on. And then- I don't know, four years later, five years later, this man that had been a minister, he was in finance at this point, and, uh, you know him, he met our drummer down in San Antonio somewhere and he reached across the table and he handed him a check for $10,000 and said, "The Lord told me that I'm supposed to give this to you for your next record."

Host: Wow.

Greg Volz: And we'd been praying, John and I and Louie'd been praying, "You know, we want to do another record but- finances were tight." And I called John- I said, "John, Louie called me, said 'What am I doing?'" I said, "Take the money!" I called John Lawry, had a studio in Nashville- good engineer, good producer- I said, "John, I have $10,000." He said, "Let's get started!" And then we, you know, we pulled in a bass player that was- also a Petra player, still a Petra player, Greg Bailey and- Ronnie Cates, who was an extra Petra player, and an old guitar player that played with me from the Rivers Rise, Come Out Fighting- Kirk Henderson, back when he was- I mean, he was young and- boys, these guys were good. So and we started doing- part- we- reformed Classic Petra as CPR so there wouldn't be any technical problems with using that. But CPR- I have the domain name and I have the logo and so it means, really, it's Classic Praise Rock. That's really what it is. And mostly what we do is Classic Petra. So, um-

Host: I love it. All right, so as we wrap here, it's June and a- a whole bunch of- of folks just graduated from high school. One of them is Beverly's son Micah. You have the opportunity, just hypothetically, to speak to an 18-year-old. What would you say to an 18-year-old just coming out of high school? There's lots and lots of them. You remember when you were 18? And I- I do- barely, but I do. What would- just kind of to wrap, I mean, what would you say to an 18-year-old Greg Volz or an 18-year-old Micah?

Greg Volz: Well, I did not have the distractions growing up that they have today, obviously. The- with the internet, with phones, with everything just constantly just pounding away, demanding your attention. I would say that if you're serious about knowing about the true meaning of life and an abundant life, you gotta take some time to shut that electronic stuff off and literally sit in a room and be quiet and listen. And I'm have to- I tell you: if you'll ask this question, "Jesus, if you're real- really real- then reveal yourself to me." And if you ask that question and remain quiet, you will have an amazing experience. I know you will. I have thousands and thousands and thousands of testimonies. But it has to do with which horse you feed, I guess. There's an old story about that, you know: this guy, this wolf or this wolf, which one's going to- well, whichever one you feed. And so, we are very complicated human beings. But our makeup was made for a place for the presence of God to live inside of us. And actually, it's like a kingdom! It's a- massive, amazing thing that lives in us: the kingdom of God. But you have to invite that presence in, through- Jesus Christ our Lord. And

Sri Yukteswar won't get you there, Babaji, Paramahansa Yogananda won't get you there, Buddha won't get you there. Now they can show you enlightenment, I mean they have their truth, but there's only one guarantee- and that is through the blood of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. And, you know, it's like- "uh, uh, yeah"- well, you know what? It can- get ugly out in the world, and you need a safe place. And I'm telling you there's only one place that's safe that I found and that is in the presence of God. And- our home is a- is a haven. And people walk in the door and go, "Whoa, wow, man! Wow!" I said, "Well, because you know- there's a lot of praise going on here. We, you know, we crank it up, start singing and dancing and enjoying the presence of God." And everybody has a little different flavor. But you know what? Because of the forerunners that pressed through the trials and- and tribulation, it expanded this whole industry of music. It's all kind of genres! They're all available to you. Pick one you like! But- make sure they're talking about the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Host: Greg Volz, what a great podcast, man. Thanks so much. Thanks so much for being on.

Greg Volz: My pleasure. Looking forward to seeing you again when we get back- your way.

Host: Absolutely! Uh, yeah- we'd love- love to have you. Love to have you over, love to have you to Hill Country Church.

Greg Volz: We'll do it again.

Host: Absolutely. Um, really appreciate you being on. This is the- this is the OG Pastors Faith Over A Lifetime Podcast. My name's Stu, I'm known as That Texas Podvangelist, and you can be too if you just tell one person about OG Pastors. I want to say thank you so much for listening. Que Dios te bendiga- may God bless you and yours. We'll see you next time on OG Pastors Podcast.

OG Pastors: Faith Over a Lifetime

"Faith Over a Lifetime"

Episode 3 — Greg Volz