

Sweet Baby James in Fire and Rain

By THE MISSION SINGERS

No one will ever be able to say exactly what makes a hit song. One thing certain: quality alone is not enough. In fact, sometimes (but not too frequently) quality is not even necessary.

On the other hand, quality is king in James Taylor's Fire and Rain. Of course, good promotion and distribution are princes, but in this case the mechanics of a hit record are ruled by the regal spirit of good talent.

Fire and Rain is a love song, but there's something that sets it apart from the love songs written today. What's best about Fire and Rain is that it says something about the meaning of love and life. The song is not simply the sorrowful ravings of a guy who has just lost his girl.

If you want just that, listen to I Know I'm Losing You or

Snowbird. No disrespect for those songs is intended, but they don't especially increase our awareness. They're like French fries and hamburgers: good fun but not very nourishing.

Fire and Rain, despite its soothing quality, shocks you

into a realization that the singer is talking about much more than the proverbial broken heart. Instead, he's thinking about things that can break the spirit. His girl has not run away: she died.

What do you do when the person you figured would al-

FIRE AND RAIN

Just yesterday morning, they let me know you were gone.
Susan, the plans they made put an end to you.
I walked out this morning and I wrote down this song.
Just can't remember who to send it to.

Chorus:

I seen fire and I seen rain,
Seen sunny days that I thought would never end.
I seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again.
Look down upon me, Jesus; you gotta help me make a stand,
Just got to see me through another day.
My body's aching and my time is at hand,
And I won't make it any other way.
Been walkin' my mind to an easy time, my back turned towards
the sun.

Lord knows, when the cold wind blows it'll turn your hair around.
Well, there's hours of time on the telephone line to talk about
things to come.

Sweet dreams and flying machines in pieces on the ground.

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ways be there is gone? How do you accept death and still love life? A kid once described a friend as "the last guy around." You know you're not alone when even that friend is no longer available to help.

In the song, the guy loses his girl. In life, maybe a youngster loses a parent in a car wreck, or a parent receives a dreaded telegram about her soldier son. Maybe a high-school girl discovers that her best friend was found dead this morning. How do they go on living themselves?

Religion has always tried to answer that very difficult question. Jesus talked about life's purpose, and He showed that if you have something to live for, even death cannot overcome you.

That's a great tribute to Jesus: He can take life's toughest question and give it an answer. At certain times in our lives, our purposes and hopes

seem threatened; death scares us and we seem to have nothing to live for. Jesus, and His life and death, can be the rope that keeps us from going over the cliff.

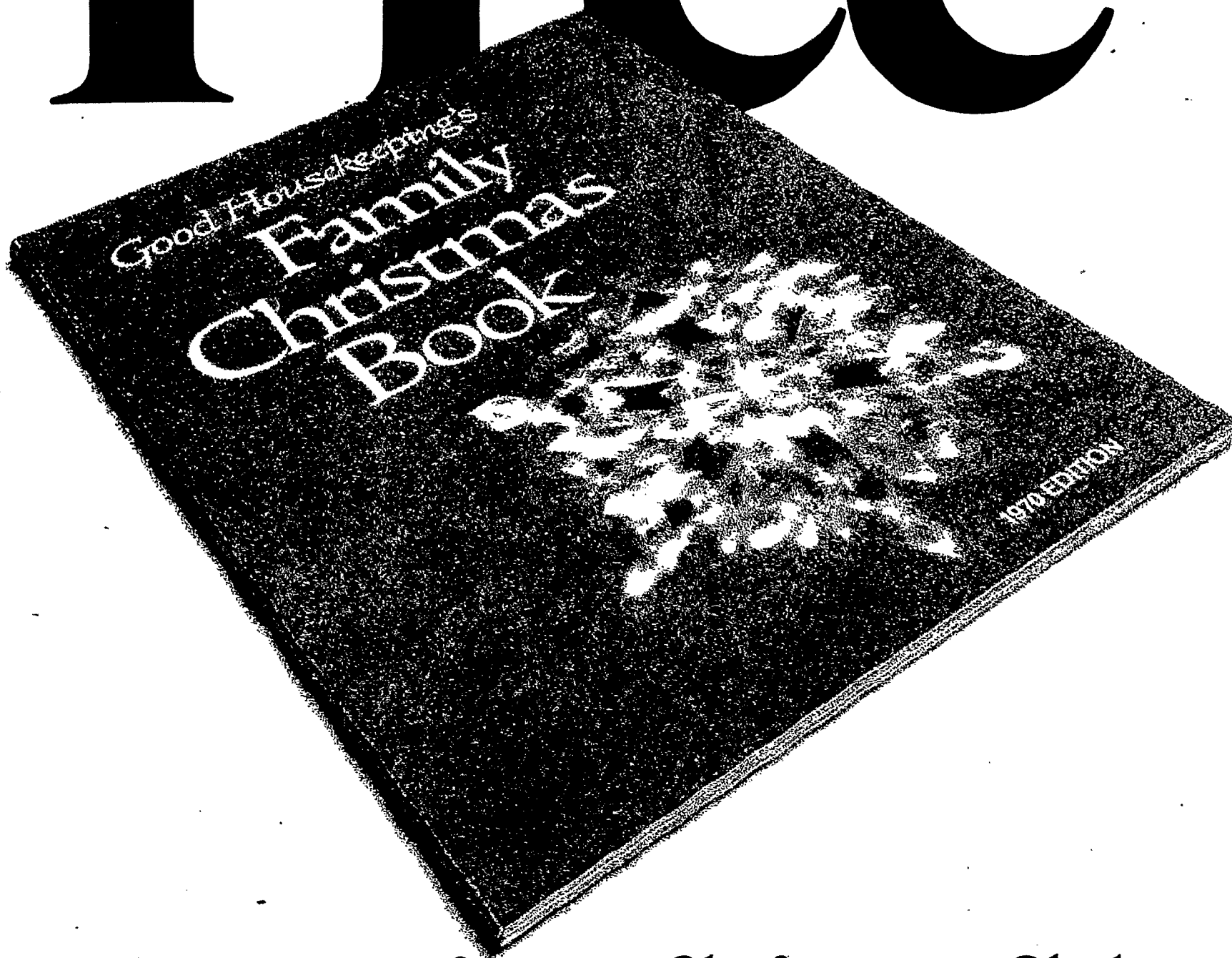
People who can talk about Jesus only by spouting quotes from the Bible often have little personal experience of Him, and so they go to the protection of the "book". But Jesus is real; His meaning can be a part of our lives now.

It often takes times of sorrow to make us plead with the singer, "Look down upon me Jesus; you gotta help me make a stand." But really, He doesn't have to "look down" at some special time. He's right here with us. He told us Himself: "The kingdom of God is within you."

We're all fast-moving, fun-loving people. A song like Fire and Rain slows us down for a while and makes us think: What's the use of living? The singer tries to find an answer. We must too.

(Catholic Press Features)

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