

= Lithium ( Nirvana song ) =

" Lithium " is a song by American rock band Nirvana . Written by frontman Kurt Cobain , the song is about a man who turns to religion amid thoughts of suicide . Nirvana first recorded " Lithium " in 1990 but then re @-@ recorded the song the following year for the group 's second album Nevermind ( 1991 ) .

Released as the third single from Nevermind in July 1992 , " Lithium " peaked at number 64 on the US Billboard Hot 100 and number 11 on the UK Singles Chart . The accompanying music video , directed by Kevin Kerslake , is a montage of concert footage .

= = Background and recording = =

Nirvana singer / guitarist Kurt Cobain described " Lithium " as " one of those songs I actually did finish while trying to write it instead of taking pieces of my poetry and other things . " Nirvana recorded " Lithium " with producer Butch Vig at Smart Studios in Madison , Wisconsin during April 1990 . The material recorded at Smart Studios was intended for the group 's second album for the independent record label Sub Pop . The book Classic Rock Albums : Nevermind ( 1998 ) stated that observers considered the session for " Lithium " as a key event in the developing rift between Cobain and drummer Chad Channing . Cobain was dissatisfied with Channing 's drumming as their musical styles were inconsistent . Cobain told Channing to perform the drum arrangement he had devised for the song . According to Vig , Cobain overexerted his voice while recording vocals for " Lithium , " which forced the band to halt recording . The songs from these sessions were placed on a demo tape and circulated within the music industry , generating interest in the group among major record labels .

After signing to DGC Records , Nirvana reconvened with Vig in May 1991 to work on its major label debut , Nevermind , at Sound City Studios in Van Nuys , California . Between the sessions , bassist Krist Novoselic simplified the bassline ; he said , " I enriched the bass @-@ playing a little more but that was about all that we changed . " The recording session for " Lithium " was one of the most arduous for Vig and the group at Sound City . The band repeatedly sped up while recording the song , so Vig resorted to using a click track to maintain a consistent tempo . The producer suggested that new drummer Dave Grohl use simpler fills and patterns for the song , which resulted in a satisfactory instrumental take . Cobain 's guitar track was more difficult to record . " Kurt wanted to be able to play the guitar very . . . not methodical ? it needed to have this space , " Vig recalled . " It had to be relaxed . " Every time Cobain sped up , Vig called for another take . During the first day of recording the song , Cobain became so frustrated at the slow progress that the band instead began playing an instrumental jam it had been working on . Vig recorded the jam , later titled " Endless , Nameless , " and it was inserted as a hidden track at the end of Nevermind .

= = Composition and lyrics = =

" Lithium " is representative of the musical style Nirvana had developed during work on Nevermind , alternating between quiet and loud sections . In the song , Cobain fingers chord shapes on his guitar but varies between playing single notes and double stops on the instrument , giving the track a loose feel .

Nirvana biographer Michael Azerrad described the song 's title as a reference to Karl Marx 's statement that religion is the " opiate of the masses . " Cobain said the song is about a man who , after the death of his girlfriend , turns to religion " as a last resort to keep himself alive . To keep him from suicide . " While Cobain said the narrative of " Lithium " was fictional , he said , " I did infuse some of my personal experiences , like breaking up with girlfriends and having bad relationships . " Cobain acknowledged that the song was possibly inspired in part by the time he spent living with his friend Jesse Reed and his born @-@ again Christian parents . He explained to Azerrad , " I 've always felt that some people should have religion in their lives [ . . . ] That 's fine . If it 's going to save someone , it 's okay . And the person in [ ' Lithium ' ] needed it . "

= = Release and reception = =

" Lithium " was released as the third single from Nevermind on July 13 , 1992 . Featuring a cover photo by Cobain , the single contained a sonogram of the musician 's then @-@ unborn child Frances Bean Cobain , as well as full lyrics for all the songs on Nevermind . Cassette , CD , 12 @-@ inch vinyl , and British 12 @-@ inch vinyl picture disc editions included " Curmudgeon " and a live version of " Been a Son " ( performed on Halloween the previous year ) as B @-@ sides . The British 7 @-@ inch and cassette featured only " Curmudgeon " as an extra track , while the UK CD release added a cover of the Wipers ' " D @-@ 7 " recorded for BBC Radio 1 disc jockey John Peel 's program in 1990 .

In the United States , the single charted at number 64 on the Billboard Hot 100 single chart . " Lithium " peaked at number 16 and 25 on the Billboard Mainstream Rock and Modern Rock Tracks airplay charts , respectively . The song was tied at number 20 with singles by Ministry , Lisa Stansfield , and Utah Saints in the 1992 Village Voice Pazz & Jop critics ' poll . In 2012 , NME ranked Lithium at number 52 on its list of the " 100 Best Tracks Of The ' 90s " in 2012 .

= = Music video = =

The music video for " Lithium " was the second Nirvana video directed by Kevin Kerslake . Cobain originally wanted the video to feature an animated story about a girl named Prego who discovers some eggs that hatch . When Cobain and Kerslake discovered the animation would take four months to produce , they instead created a film collage of Nirvana performing in concert . Among the concert footage used was material from the trio 's 1991 Halloween performance and scenes from the film 1991 : The Year Punk Broke ( 1992 ) . Nirvana biographer Michael Azerrad commented , " Although [ the video ] was enlivened by Kerslake 's neat trick of using more violent footage during the quiet parts of the song and vice versa , it was something of a disappointment from a band and a song that promised so much . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Kurt Cobain , except where noted .

US 12 @-@ inch , cassette , CD , and UK 12 @-@ inch vinyl picture disc

" Lithium " ? 4 : 16

" Been a Son " ( live - Seattle - 31 @.@ 10 @.@ 1991 ) ? 2 : 14

" Curmudgeon " ? 2 : 58

UK 7 @-@ inch vinyl and cassette

" Lithium " ? 4 : 16

" Curmudgeon " ? 2 : 58

UK CD

" Lithium " ? 4 : 16

" Been a Son " ( live ) ? 2 : 14

" Curmudgeon " ? 2 : 58

" D @-@ 7 " ( John Peel Radio Session ) ( Greg Sage ) ? 3 : 45

= = Charts = =

= = Accolades = =

Ranked number 20 in Kerrang ! magazines " 100 Greatest Rock Tracks Ever ! " ( 1999 ) .

= = Personnel = =

Kurt Cobain : vocals , guitar

Krist Novoselic : bass guitar

Dave Grohl : drums

Butch Vig : recording and mixing engineer , producer