

John Bevere: How to Approach Someone Who Has Offended You

Here's what to do if your brother offends you.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother." –Matthew 18:15

Many people apply this Scripture verse in a different attitude from the one Jesus was intending. If they have been hurt, they will go and confront the offender in a spirit of revenge and anger. They use this verse as justification to condemn the one who has hurt them.

But they are missing the whole reason Jesus instructed us to go to one another. It is not for condemnation but for reconciliation. He does not want us to tell our brother how rotten he has been to us. We are to go to remove the breach preventing the restoration of our relationship.

This parallels how God restores us to Himself. We have sinned against God, but He "demonstrates His own love toward [and for] us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Are we willing to lay down our self-protection and die to pride in order to be restored to the one who has offended us? God reached out to us before we asked for forgiveness. Jesus decided to forgive us before we even acknowledged our offense.

Even though He reached out to us, we could not be reconciled to the Father until we received His word of reconciliation: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then,

we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

The word of reconciliation begins on the common ground that we all have sinned against God. We do not desire reconciliation or salvation unless we know there is a separation.

In the New Testament, the disciples preached that the people had sinned against God. But why tell people they have sinned? To condemn them? God does not condemn: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Is it rather to bring them to a place where they realize their condition, repent of their sins and ask forgiveness?

What leads men to repentance? The answer is found in Romans 2:4: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that *the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*" (emphasis added).

God's goodness leads us to repent. His love does not leave us condemned to hell. He proved His love by sending Jesus, His only Son, to the cross to die for us. God reaches out first, even though we have sinned against Him. He reaches out not to condemn but to restore—to save.

Since we are to imitate God (Eph. 5:1), we are to extend reconciliation to a brother who sins against us. Jesus established this pattern: Go to him and show him his sin, not to condemn him but to remove anything that lies between the two of you and thus be reconciled and restored. The goodness of God within us will draw our brother to repentance and restoration of the relationship.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one

another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

We keep this bond of peace by maintaining an attitude of humility, gentleness and long-suffering and by undergirding each other's weakness in love. The bonds of love are strengthened thereby. I have wronged people who have confronted me with condemnation. As a result, I lost all desire to be reconciled. In fact, I thought they didn't want reconciliation; they just wanted me to know they were mad.

Others I have wronged have come to me in meekness. Then I was quick to change my outlook and ask forgiveness—sometimes before they had finished speaking.

Has someone ever come to you and said, "I just want you to know that I forgive you for not being a better friend and for not doing this or that for me"? Then when they have blasted you, they give you a look that says, "You owe me an apology." You are baffled and stand there in confusion and hurt. They did not come to reconcile your relationship but to intimidate and control you.

We should not go to a brother who has offended us until we have decided to forgive him from our hearts—no matter how he responds to us. We need to get rid of any feelings of animosity toward him before approaching him. If we don't, we will probably react out of these negative feelings and hurt him, not heal him.

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Let the Fire of God Burn Any Idols

Allow My holy fire to burn up and destroy any idol in your life and nation. Through My power I will cause men to throw away their idols and to turn to Me. Renounce all idolatry in your bloodline, and break all curses of idolatry in the name of My Son, Jesus. Stand in My righteousness and join with My servants to abolish all false idols in America and the nations. I will cleanse the land from the pollution of idols and will cause Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations in the earth, to fall at the name of My Son. Follow My commandment to put no other gods before Me in your life.

Isaiah 31:7; 2 Kings 21:21; Revelation 17:5; Exodus 20:3

Prayer Declaration

O Lord, let all men throw away their idols and turn to You. I will keep myself from idols and renounce all idolatry and curses from my life through the name of Jesus. Cleanse this land from the pollution of wickedness and idolatry, and allow me to join with Your servants to abolish the idols in America and the nations.

From *Daily Declarations for Spiritual Warfare* by John Eckhardt

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Hyper-Grace and the Consequences of Sin

In the past several months, there has been a lot written regarding grace. My goal in this article is to make clear the difference between grace, which is God's undeserved gracious actions and gifts towards us related to our salvation in Christ, and the consequences of sin that come from numerous sources and places.

It has been said that once we as believers in Christ Jesus confess our sins, God remembers them no more (Heb. 8:12; Ps. 103:12). Some have taken this to mean we can just go on with our lives, as if the sin never happened. But the reality is, based on the severity of the sin committed (yes, some sins are worse than others, according to Scripture; read John 19:11, Luke 12:47-48 and 1 John 5:16-17), there are various ramifications that arise related to God's discipline, opening a door to Satan, destroying relationships and our own heart condition.

To me, a worse thing that happens when I sin against the Lord is that I grieve the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit that lives inside of me is grieved, then I am grieved as well, and it causes great sorrow in my soul.

Regarding repentance: There is a difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and condemnation that leads me away from the Lord (2 Cor. 7:9-11). Godly sorrow does not just involve mere confession of sin with words but also a heartfelt

searching of one's own soul so the Holy Spirit can "put the axe to the root of the tree" and transform the heart.

There are even times when our close fellowship or intimacy with God is affected. Even though we are still saved and our sins forgiven, we can at times lack that sense of closeness and nearness to the presence of God. (I believe this is also a way God disciplines us so we will not be so quick to sin in the same manner again; He momentarily takes away our sweet fellowship and sense of His presence, while at the same time we still have an assurance that we are His children.)

Of course, sometimes not sensing God's strong presence can be another way God is dealing with our process of maturing in Christ. Some have called this "the dark night of the soul," which many saints have claimed to experience, at times not related to a conscious act of committing a sin.

After his sins of murder and adultery (2 Sam. 11), David prayed that God would not take away His Spirit from him (I believe, in this case, he was referring to fellowship with God; read Psalm 51:11). Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart the Lord would not have listened."

In addition, Ephesians 4:30 says not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. In John 14:21, Jesus says those who love Him will keep His commandments and those who keep His commandments the Father and Jesus will love and will manifest themselves to.

Finally, 1 Peter 3:12 says the eyes and ears of the Lord are open toward the prayers of the righteous but His face is against those who do evil. (Those who do evil in this context are not unbelievers but Christians because this epistle was written to the elect, not to the gnostics or to another heretical group.) When God turns His face away from someone, it has to do with lack of intimacy, not necessarily salvation.

Fellowship is when we subjectively experience God's fellowship, hear God's voice and enjoy His companionship. On

the other hand, salvation is our objective, legal-positional standing of righteousness with God based on a person's trust in the vicarious death, burial and resurrection of Christ, in which His righteousness has been imputed to us through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:21-27). Our feelings and sense of God's presence at times varies, but our salvation in Christ depends upon His righteousness and remains firm and secure!

Sin can wreak havoc in our lives because of unrepentant sin, which opens a door to Satan. Ephesians 4:27 admonishes us not to give Satan an opportunity. The context of this passage has to do with speaking corrupt words from our mouths, holding on to bitterness, unforgiveness, acting like a thief and stealing from others.

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As a pastor for almost 30 years, I have experienced firsthand the enormous spiritual warfare that is unleashed when either I or someone in our congregation opens a door to the devil, either through sin or a lack of wisdom in their actions. When Satan gets involved, he distorts, embellishes and magnifies everything so that, in addition to an individual's sin, lies are tacked on to the sin, which results in a distortion of the truth through maligning character and slander. For example, if you were caught stealing \$100, by the time Satan gets finished with the story, the story is that \$1,000 has been absconded, and it is much worse than what actually happened.

Along with this, unrepentant sin also destroys key relationships. For example, if a person commits adultery, even though they may have repented and asked God to forgive them, the trust they broke may result in divorce and the loss of family, friends and even ministry.

Even though God forgives us, there are certain qualifications He gives for those qualified to serve as a leader in His house (as shown in 1 Timothy 3:1-15). Although our sins can be

forgiven and forgotten by God in the context of our legal standing as His children, the consequences of those sins follow us throughout our lives and may cause us to step aside in ministry for a time until full restoration is complete.

All relationships in life are fragile because they are built upon trust. Thus, although we may confess our sins to God and be forgiven, this does not mean others will forget the sin. Relational sins cause wounds that can only be removed by an act of God's restorative power that sometimes, through the eyes of wounded relationships, can take years to recover.

Finally, when we sin, we run the risk of reorienting our hearts and minds away from the mind and heart of God. Proverbs 4:23 says to "keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

As a passionate person, I have intentionally attempted to fill my heart daily with the things of God as well as to avoid those sinful things that pull upon my heart. I am well aware of the fact the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick, who can understand it (Jer. 17:9)? Hence, I am afraid of my own heart's sinful desires, and I take heed to the admonition in Proverbs to guard, keep and protect my heart! In my 35 years as a Christian, I have seen many sincere, on-fire believers totally fall away from God because they allowed a sinful area of their lives to remain undealt with in the presence of the Lord.

Furthermore, certain sins are so addictive to a person that, once entertained and acted upon, it is difficult to gain back the ground lost with God because the sin has captured and reprogrammed their soul. Proverbs 2:19 is a scary warning for a young man not to follow the way of a seductress: "None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life."

Even though the book of Proverbs sometimes engages in hyperbole to make a point, this passage should be a reality

check for anyone contemplating intentionally opening a door to sin. I have seen many people recover and be restored from drug addiction, pornography, adultery and the like; but I have also seen many not restored who battle their entire lives with these issues because they allowed their hearts to experience something pleasurable in the natural that is destructive to their hearts and minds.

Finally, we need to take heed to the last words God spoke to Cain before he murdered his brother Abel: "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7).

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Pope Francis Explains the Importance of the Holy Spirit

The following is a transcript of Pope Francis' speech, in which he explains the importance of the Holy Spirit. The speech was given last week, as Pentecost Sunday was approaching. Here is the translation of the Pope's weekly general audience address in St. Peter's Square, where he continued the cycle of catechesis dedicated to the Year of

Faith.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Good morning! The Easter season that we are living with joy, guided by the Church's liturgy, is par excellence the time of the Holy Spirit, given "without measure" (cf. John 3:34) by Jesus, crucified and risen. This time of grace ends with the feast of Pentecost, in which the Church relives the outpouring of the Spirit upon Mary and the apostles gathered in prayer in the Cenacle.

But who is the Holy Spirit? In the Creed we profess with faith: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life." The first truth to which we adhere in the Creed is that the Holy Spirit is Kýrios, Lord. This means that He is truly God, as the Father and Son are, the object, for our part, of the same act of adoration and glorification that we address to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity; He is the great gift of the risen Christ that opens our minds and our hearts to faith in Jesus as the Son sent by the Father and that leads us to friendship, to communion with God.

But I would like to dwell in particular on the fact that the Holy Spirit is the inexhaustible source of the life of God in us. Men of all times and all places want a life that is full and beautiful, just and good, a life that is not threatened by death but that can mature and grow to its fullness. Man is like a wanderer who, crossing the deserts of life, thirsts for a living water, gushing and fresh, able to quench deeply his profound desire for light, love, beauty and peace. We all feel this desire! And Jesus gives us this living water: It is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and that Jesus pours out into our hearts. "I came that they might have life and have it in abundance," Jesus tells us (John 10:10).

Jesus promises the Samaritan woman that He will give a "living

water," super abundantly and forever, to all those who recognize Him as the Son sent by the Father to save us (cf. John 4:5-26; 3:17). Jesus came to give us this "living water" that is the Holy Spirit, so that our life may be guided by God, animated by God and nourished by God. When we say that the Christian is a spiritual man, we mean just that: A Christian is a person who thinks and acts according to God, according to the Holy Spirit. But I ask: And we—do we think according to God? Do we act according to God? Or do we let ourselves be guided by so many other things that are not exactly God? Each one must answer this in the depths of his heart.

At this point we can ask ourselves: Why is it that this water can slake the very depths of our thirst? We know that water is essential for life; without water, you die; it quenches thirst, washes, makes the land fertile. In the letter to the Romans we find this expression: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (5:5). The "living water," the Holy Spirit, the gift of the risen Lord who makes its home in us purifies us, enlightens us, renews us, transforms us because it makes us partakers of the very life of God, who is love.

For this reason, the apostle Paul says that the Christian life is animated by the Spirit and its fruits, which are "love, joy, peace, generosity, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit inserts us into the divine life as "sons in the only-begotten Son." In another passage of the epistle to the Romans, which we have mentioned several times, St. Paul summarizes it with these words: "All those who are led by the spirit of God, are sons of God. And you ... have received the Spirit that makes us adoptive children, whereby we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit itself, together with our spirit, attests that we are children of God. And if we are children, we are also heirs: heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his

sufferings in order to participate in his glory (8:14-17).

This is the precious gift that the Holy Spirit places in our hearts: the very life of God, life as true sons, a relationship of confidence, freedom and trust in the love and mercy of God, which has as an effect, also a new gaze toward others, near and far, always seen as brothers and sisters in Jesus to be respected and loved. The Holy Spirit teaches us to look with the eyes of Christ, to live life as Christ lived it, to understand life as Christ understood it. That's why the living water that is the Holy Spirit quenches the thirst of our lives, because it tells us that we are loved by God as children, that we can love God as His children, and by His grace we can live as children of God, like Jesus.

And we, we listen to the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit tell us? God loves you. It tells us this. God loves you. He desires your good. Do we really love God and others, like Jesus does? Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us allow Him to speak to our hearts and tell us this: that God is love, that He is waiting for us, that God is the Father, He loves us as a true Father [Papà], He truly loves us, and only the Holy Spirit alone says this to our hearts. Let us hear the Holy Spirit, let us listen to the Holy Spirit and let us go forward on this road of love, of mercy and of forgiveness. Thank you.

[Translation by Peter Waymel]

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7 Ways to Avoid a Public Scandal in Your Life

Every week it seems there is another scandal breaking out with a high-profile person, whether in politics, sports, media or the church. A person could have done much good their whole life but with one act of passion destroy everything they have built.

Proverbs 22:1 teaches us that a good name is worth more than riches. One of the things I have found out through the years is that a person's name and reputation are their greatest capital in regard to opening doors and having influence in the world; this is a quality people look for even more than gifts, talents or leading a successful enterprise or ministry. This is because people know success built upon gifts and talents and not on the foundation of character and integrity will not last in the long run. All of us are tempted to fall and have the capacity to fail because of our sin nature.

My friend Steve Strang just wrote an article regarding a conversation with a young up-and-coming pastor, in which he told him the greatest temptations most leaders face can be summarized as money, power and sex, or the old adage "gold, glory and girls." (See the Strang Report's "How Does a Pastor Finish Well?")

The following are essentials to stay scandal-free.

1. Continually give God space to captivate your heart. By far the most important essential is to cultivate an intimate walk with the Lord. Many leaders I know are so busy in work and ministry they have very little time to pray and meditate on the Word of God. This is a train wreck waiting to happen! God promises success to the person who takes time to meditate on His Word day and night (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1). The greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, mind and soul (Matt. 22:37-40). When this is our first priority, then our love for God will be so strong we will not be as prone to desire to sin against Him. Jesus made it as clear as tar on snow when He told His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41).

Likewise, the driving force in the apostle Paul's life was to know Christ and count everything else as dung in comparison to Him (Phil. 3). Paul was not motivated by ministry success; it was the love of Christ that compelled him (2 Cor. 5:14). When we think of Paul, we don't picture a ministry celebrity or diva; we picture a man after God's heart who walked in brokenness and humility (Acts 20:19). Because of this attitude, it is no accident Paul was able to successfully finish the work the Lord gave him on the earth (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

2. Be self-aware and honest regarding your main temptations. The first step in avoiding temptation is to know what "rings your bell"! Every one of us has particular weaknesses that, if not kept in check, can cause our hearts to turn from God and fall into sin. What tempts one person may not be a temptation for another person. Thus, we need to be self-aware and not live in denial of our weaknesses.

If we have a big ego, then we need to be careful when people flatter or praise us. If we have a problem with lust, then we need to take steps not to be alone when we travel but bring

our spouse or a mature friend. If we have a temptation with loving money, then we need to have checks and balances in financial systems. (Really, most of us have issues with the big three temptations just mentioned and need to take corrective steps.)

We have to be real with ourselves and not religious! Religious people hide behind titles, slogans, rituals and even the anointing. They live superficial lives, never admitting their humanity and never getting beneath the surface of a self-righteous veneer. The more real we get with God, the more real we will get with ourselves.

It wasn't until the prophet Isaiah got a glimpse of his own sin that God was able to send him to minister (Is. 6). Knowing our strengths is not enough to be scandal-free; we need to fully admit our temptations to sin and do what it takes to avoid being in those vulnerable situations.

3. Cultivate a healthy relationship with your spouse. Many busy people are not intimate with their spouse, which makes them open to crave emotional and physical intimacy with someone else. Carving out adequate time to develop and keep emotional and physical intimacy with your spouse is so important, it cannot be overstated in regard to staying scandal-free.

Many ministers have sacrificed their marriages and children on the altar of ministry, even though our families are our first and most important ministry. Some ministers I know travel so much they are separated from their spouses half the year with no plan in place to carve out time to make up for it.

Busy married people should attempt to have at least one night out per week with their spouse and take a few days every three months for time away, as well as at least two weeks away per year with their children if their kids are still young. Quality family time is so important that even much prayer

can't make up for a lack of physical and emotional intimacy.

4. Have your identity rooted in Jesus and not in accomplishments. The first temptation Satan threw at Jesus in the wilderness was to prove He was the Son of God by turning a stone into bread (Matt. 4). Proving who we are by what we accomplish is one of the most common and insidious temptations believers fall for today! Our identity has to be first and foremost in Jesus Christ, with whom we are hidden in God (Col. 3:3). We were created by Jesus and for Jesus (Col. 1:16)!

When our primary identity comes from what we accomplish, then we will fall into the trap of performing in order to please God and others to feel good about ourselves. This is a trap, because when we are performance-based, we will start comparing ourselves with other people's accomplishments and be in competition with others since we believe God loves and accepts us based on accomplishment. But there will always be another person who accomplishes more than you, which can result in you dealing with jealousy, anger, envy and internal rage.

Many pastors have presumptuously begun a huge building project to satisfy their ego or their need to accomplish more than the other pastors in their region. (Many have even said "the Lord told me to do it"!) The result is putting their churches in huge debt and creating unnecessary pressure upon church leadership and their families.

Yes, I believe God created us to have dominion in the created order (Gen. 1:28), which has to do with accomplishment and commission. But God told Adam this in the context of having unbroken fellowship with Him in the Garden of Eden. Thus, God can only trust us with accomplishment if we are rooted and grounded in Him as our life. When we receive our primary affirmation from God as His child even before we minister or perform (like Jesus received from His Father before He ever preached or performed one miracle; read Luke 3:23), then that affirmation will protect us from the sin of presumption and

being driven to succeed instead of being led by the Lord.

5. Have key mentors and friends that keep you down to earth. There are “men worshippers” in the church world as much as there are in the secular world. There are celebrity pastors, evangelists and rock stars in the church as much as there are in the world. We have our American idols on Sunday as much as we have them on television. We have created a weird church culture in which people now attend Sunday church to hear great-anointed rhetoric and oratory (in some cases a performance) and hear incredible musicians and singers instead of coming to meet Jesus. If you ask someone what they thought of the service, most answers will center on the quality of the sermon or the worship.

Furthermore, many churches are known more by the name of the pastor than the name of the church (for example, “I go to Joel Osteen’s church” instead of “I attend Lakewood Church”). We have created a personality-driven church culture based on entertainment and performance more than on meeting Jesus.

In this kind of culture, it is very easy for a pastor to live and die based on the accolades he or she receives from week to week based on the Sunday “experience” of church attendees. It is also very easy for a pastor or leader to believe the hype and think more of themselves than they ought to think. All public leaders need staff, overseers, close friends and/or a spouse who will be honest with them regarding their foibles and keep them down to earth. If they see the public leader behaving like a rock star or a celebrity diva, they need to push back at the leader and not “drink the Kool-Aid.”

6. Have systems in place that make it impossible to commit financial fraud. There are leaders of business and ministry that have total control, access and power over the finances of their enterprises with little or no accountability. Once I heard a minister say “I am the board”! I believe in having strong apostolic executive leaders in the church, but when it

comes to finances there needs to be a process in place that ensures all expenditures are based on a pre-approved budget and/or procedures in place that make it necessary for a leader to obtain permission from a financial board when they want to spend a certain amount of money not already allotted in the budget.

Furthermore, a qualified CPA should officially audit the books at least once per year and, if it is a church, there should be at least one annual financial report given to the congregation to show transparency.

7. Avoid the usual fleshly traps of the enemy based on your past history. I believe there are demonic entities assigned to each person that study their history for the purpose of knowing their weaknesses. Most likely the greatest satanic or fleshly temptation you will face in the future is something God has already warned you about based on past failure. Hebrews 12:1 teaches us to throw off the sin that so easily besets us. There is “the sin” that is the biggest stumbling block in our lives. This is something our spouse, overseers and mentors should know. This is the thing these key people in your life should continually ask you about. Many a leader has lived a double life that shocks a spouse when scandal breaks out. It can be based on insecurity, jealousy, pride, lust, ambition, presumption or self-righteousness, to name a few.

Most importantly, each of us must be honest with ourselves about this “one thing” that can easily become the “main thing” in our lives if we do not take preventive measures to guard against it. Whether it is going back to the first point and cultivating a consistent devotional life that allows our hearts to be captivated by God, or having strong accountability and humility in our lives (1 John 1:7), we need to always be mindful of this one thing (the sin) and crucify it under the power of the blood of the cross (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20).

As we allow the life of the Spirit to operate both in our own body (Rom. 8:13) and through those assigned to us in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16), we will go a long way in regard to taking the steps necessary to avoid scandal in our lives.

Amy Grant Releases First Studio Album in 10 Years

Amy Grant has found a new label home in Capitol Christian Music Group. Her first full studio project in 10 years, *How Mercy Looks From Here* (Sparrow Records/Capitol Christian Distribution) releases May 14.

Where did the project's title come from?

I believe the title was [label President] Peter York's idea. I love the title because I think it sums up the feeling of the record. During the last 10 years, I have had to bury several dear friends and my beautiful mom, Gloria Grant. Yet in spite of those times of real grief, I have felt God's presence and have also felt genuine joy at how life continues to unfold. At age 52, it is nice to have lived enough to really know that God is present in good times and bad and that His mercy continues to make all the difference.

Are there one or two songs that are special to you on this album?

It is hard to pick one or two songs on this project. The inspiration for the entire project was based on one of the last lucid conversations I had with my mom. I had stopped by to spend some time with her before catching the tour bus for the "2 Friends" tour with Michael W. Smith. When it was time

for me to leave, I told my mom that I had to go sing. She looked at me with genuine surprise and asked, "You sing?" My mom was the first person I ever sang a song to as a teenager and the fact that she didn't remember that I was a singer put a huge lump in my throat. I swallowed hard and said, "Yes, mom, I do." She asked me what kind of songs I sang and I told her songs about life, love, family and faith. She asked me to sing something before leaving and so I started an old hymn that I knew she had sung a hundred times before. About halfway through I asked her if she remembered this song. She replied, "No, but I love it! Please keep singing!" So I swallowed another lump in my throat and finished the song. When it was over, I kissed her and said I needed to leave. She looked me in the eye and said, "When you get on that stage to sing, will you do me a favor? Sing something that matters." All of the songs on this record really matter to me.

What was it like working with producer Marshall Altman?

I had never met Marshall before, but upon first meeting him, I felt an instant familiarity. I immediately related to his sort of creative organized chaos, and his warm and open personality made me feel safe as an artist. We started this project by meeting once a week. I would show up and play him some songs and he would critique them and then we would discuss them. I really respected his artistic opinion, but also appreciated that he wanted me to push back and fight for what I believed in. We met every week for several months pulling together the songs we thought were special. We wrote together and tore apart existing songs to recast them in very different light. When it came time to record the record, we had already done so much pre-tracking work that we had a strong sense of what we wanted the album to sound like. What I also love about Marshall is the creative community he surrounds himself with. Every day there are people stopping by the studio—artists he has worked with, writers, musicians, friends—and he welcomes them all. I loved making the record in the midst of all that

creativity.

The Deception of Hyper-Grace

Someone wisely stated, "The church has suffered more from her exponents than from her opponents." This is certainly the case today, as we are seeing an onslaught of dangerous teaching sweeping through the body of Christ like never before. We have the graphic and prophetic picture of the serpent in Revelation pouring water like a river out of his mouth in order to sweep away the woman (Rev. 12:15-16). This, to me, speaks of the false river the enemy is attempting to use to deceive the church in these last days. Thank God that He has promised, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against him" (Is. 59:19, NKJV).

One of the enemy's wiles is to take something that is inherently good and seek to make it appear better. The hyper-grace message is a prime example of this. What is more amazing than grace? Nothing sets Christianity apart more than the message of grace. None of us would ever know our magnificent Savior and Lord without His redeeming, reconciling grace. There is no sect, cult or religion that has any doctrine comparable to it. Grace is found in Christ alone!

Little wonder, then, that the enemy has sought to improve on this glorious message by appearing to make it even more glorious, while at the same time lacing it with his deadly poison of deception and distortion.

Consider how you would respond to a message exhorting you to guard your mind, stay sober, be obedient, don't be conformed to your former lusts, be holy, conduct yourself in fear, obey the Word and put aside all malice, guile and hypocrisy? What

if the message went on to tell you to love and read God's Word, grow up, tell others about God's goodness, avoid fleshly lusts, do good deeds, do right, don't speak about evil, be zealous for what is good and sanctify Christ as Lord?

Many within the body of Christ today would cry out against such a message, claiming it to be nothing more than a religious spirit or legalism or even fleshly works. Grace, we are told, frees you from all these works and liberates you so that you are no longer under any obligation of any kind. Grace, they say, is the gift that comes to us with no strings attached. But is that really the message of grace? Has the enemy blinded our eyes through super-sizing the true message of grace—and thereby distorting it?

It may surprise you to know that all the exhortations I've listed above were taken directly from Peter's first epistle. Now, here is a most amazing truth: Peter tells us in the closing verses of his epistle, "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that *this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" (1 Pet. 5:12, NASB, emphasis added).

Here we have one of the most complete and comprehensive revelations on true grace to be found in the New Testament. Yes, grace is totally and irrevocably free, and it provides us with God's power to change us. That was its original intent. Paul, in his letter to Titus, explains it this way: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *instructing us* to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12, emphasis added).

Peter and Paul saw the Lord, who is the only true embodiment of grace and truth. If anyone had a correct revelation and understanding of grace, these two men certainly did.

Paul, you recall, had to correct the Romans on their tendency to abuse grace by continuing in sin. This abuse of grace has

now raised its head again and is being taught in ever-widening circles within the church. Those proponents of the hyper-grace message will tell you that since your sins past, present and future have all been forgiven, there is no longer any need of repentance for the believer. Repentance, they claim, is the acknowledgment of a sin that has already been forgiven. Why put back in the ledger what has already been erased? So the reasoning goes.

But is this really sound biblical doctrine? Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, scolded them for not dealing with the blatant sin of a brother who was sexually involved with his father's wife. The Corinthians took to heart what Paul wrote. Then in his second letter, he commended them for their godly sorrow that brought them to a place of repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10). He mentions repentance twice within two verses. If we did follow this erroneous concept of grace, then why was this sexual pervert disciplined in the first place, if his sin was already forgiven? Why punish him for something that is already under the blood? Jesus obviously didn't consider this to be the case when He admonished five out of the seven churches in Revelation to repent.

Finally, as I have said many times, if we say that repentance is no longer necessary because all sin has already been forgiven, then why do we need to repent the first time in order to be saved? There is the belief by some that since all sin has been atoned for, all are saved but just don't know it. This is the old but still very much alive false doctrine of universalism or ultimate reconciliation.

Jude was greatly disturbed by these errors in his day and tells us, "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, NKJV). Why? Because there were those within the church who were distorting the grace of God and turning it into licentiousness. This, I believe, was also the subtle teaching of Jezebel in the church of Thyatira. I don't personally believe she was openly

teaching that it was OK to engage in sexual immorality, but rather that the fruit of her distorted message led to this type of activity.

This is also my great fear regarding the hyper-grace message. While I sincerely believe that many advocates of the hyper-grace message firmly believe they are proclaiming a fresh revelation of grace, I truly believe the fruit of their teaching will instead bring disgrace to the very God of grace they seek to magnify.

I can only plead with those who are caught up in this false teaching to re-examine their beliefs in the light of God's Word rather than get carried along by the latest trend being taught by a few popular and flamboyant pied pipers. If the fruit of this teaching does not produce a longing after God and a desire to be like Him, then we should avoid it like the plague. Grace enables us to live and walk in victory over sin, the flesh and the devil. Anything less is not the *true* grace of God.

David and Nancy Ravenhill have a rich history in ministry. David worked with David Wilkerson's first Teen Challenge Center in New York City, Youth With a Mission, and pastored one of the largest churches in New Zealand. He is now a full-time itinerant minister and author of five books, including Blood Bought.