

# Runaways

*Sumerlin (Dream Records)*

Sumerlin, ever intentional to maintain cultural relevance alongside spiritual significance, infuses a heart for ministry in this bold new release charged with emotional presence.

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# Right to Believe

*(Rossetti Productions)*

When a struggling reporter is demoted to the local paper's community section, he's faced with a career-ending dilemma. Tasked with covering the town's first gay pride parade, he must determine if he'll allow his biblical morals and beliefs to end his career. Out on DVD this month, *Right to Believe* tackles one of today's most divisive topics between the church and secular culture.

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# 5 Ways to Resist Sexual Sin

The Bible teaches, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). It also tells us to turn away from those who are led by various lusts (see 1 Tim.3:5-6).

Many great people in God have fallen into fleshly temptations and potentially ruined their lives and ministries. One person has said, "It takes a lifetime to build integrity and a minute

to lose it." This is a true saying!

I believe one of the most important reasons leaders fall is that most have never intentionally set up mental and emotional firewalls. By "firewall," I mean something that acts as a barrier so that the temptation does not easily penetrate the heart. Proverbs 4:23 instructs us to guard our heart because out of it flow the issues of life.

Most people have no firewalls set up; thus, as soon as a strong temptation comes their way, the only thing stopping them from sinning is their own will power, which is based on the spiritual and emotional condition they are in at the moment of the test.

In order for the enemy to trip me up and get me to fall into adultery or other forms of sexual sin, he would have to get through not only my will power but also five layers of firewalls I have set up to protect my soul.

No firewall is foolproof, of course. The primary way to resist temptation is to be in the strength of the Lord, as Ephesians 6:10-13 teaches. However, there are times we may not be at a high level of spiritual and emotional strength or times when we are caught off guard. Firewalls are something the Holy Spirit can use to further strengthen our resolve.

The following are some of the firewalls I have set up:

**1. Maintaining intimate fellowship with the Lord.** By far, the most important relationship I have in my life is my friendship and covenant with the Lord. I told the Lord when I first started in ministry that I would never allow the ministry to be so consuming that I did not have time to pray and walk in His manifest presence. The main reason we were born is to grow in the knowledge of and relationship with the Lord, and I never want to exchange my walk with Him for any earthly pleasure (see Eph. 4:30).

## **2. Maintaining the trust my spouse and children have in me.**

Besides my commitment to the Lord, the greatest call and joy of my life is caring for the family God has entrusted to me. Before I fall into temptation, I will think about the commitment I have to my wife and remind myself that I do not want to devastate her. I will also consider that I never want to do anything to destroy the way my children view me and possibly hurt their view of the Lord and His church. Our greatest legacy will be the life we lead, which is the inheritance we pass on to our children's children (see Prov. 13:22).

I want my legacy to include leaving a generational blessing to my biological family that will continue to speak after I am long gone (see Heb. 11:4).

## **3. Staying true to the purpose of God and His call on my life.**

I believe a person can derail his purpose and the call of God on his life by the choices he makes. I have worked more than 35 years to fulfill His call, and I do not want to blow it for momentary pleasure.

## **4. Setting a good example for my spiritual sons and daughters.**

I have only five biological children, but I have many close spiritual sons and daughters. I have seen and read about how church members and spiritual children become disillusioned with the things of God because of their leader's failure. Of course, I have also seen incredible restoration and transformation in the lives of fallen leaders because they repented and climbed back up the mountain of their great calling from God.

The bottom line is, people need to put their eyes on Jesus more than on their leaders. But I do not want to allow foolishness in fleshly pursuit on my part to place a stumbling block in others' lives.

## **5. Maintaining the integrity of the gospel before the world.**

The last and one of the most important firewalls I have is to maintain the integrity of the gospel before the world. I do not want to bring shame to God or His Word.

The more influence I have, the more temptations and tests I will experience, so I need to have these five firewalls up perpetually and to continually inspect them to make sure there are no cracks in them. The flesh-driven scandals of the 1980s set back the reputation of the evangelical church in this nation for many decades, and I do not want to set back the gospel in my family, community or city.

I speak about the need to have firewalls in my life because I know that, like all other humans, I am fragile and born with a wicked and sinful nature, and that I have to watch and pray lest I fall into temptation (see Matt. 26:41). Part of the way I “watch” is to construct and maintain these firewalls. But unless I pray and walk in the presence and power of the Spirit, no amount of firewalls will be able to protect me from my wicked flesh.

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## **Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace**

# Message

*Michael L. Brown (Charisma House)*

Is the modern grace movement the beginning of a grace awakening or an open door to grave error? Christians on both sides debate the issue with fervor—and sometimes lacking a measure of, well, grace.

Author Michael Brown takes a refreshing tone in his newest book, *Hyper-Grace*. He doesn't come out bashing and lambasting those who would differ from him, but rather first recognizes teachers in the modern grace movement as brothers and presupposes they have a true relationship with a mutual Savior. Phrases such as "I agree with him here," "This is really good, but I have a problem with ..." and "Come, let us reason together" pepper the book's pages.

Ultimately, Brown is concerned that although certain teachers in the modern grace movement's intentions are good and their messages have liberated some, the movement's teachings have also confused others. Also, many who follow these teachings, he says, are liable to drift into error and not appreciate the true nature of the grace of God, which includes loving discipline and the encouragement to pursue holiness.

Brown works through Scripture to illustrate a fuller counsel—how a call to good works empowered by the Holy Spirit does not negate the grace that saves and sanctifies. He addresses the difference between conviction and condemnation, while arguing that actively participating in and cooperating with God in our sanctification process does not negate the finished work of Christ on the cross—instead, it honors it.

*Hyper-Grace* will enrich believers' understanding of the gospel. If read with an open heart, it can bring unity to the body of Christ. —Deborah Grady

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# Why It Takes Faith to Find Your Purpose

I was in my car at an intersection, waiting for the light to change. Through the window of the car to my right, I saw a woman standing on the curb. It was the view of her upper body that caught my eye. She was grinning from ear to ear and highly animated, with hands pointing to the traffic light, while she talked and talked—to herself. Poor thing!

Then the light changed and the car next to me moved on, revealing the whole scene. A young boy was standing by the woman—indicating that she was a mom talking with her son, instead of a disturbed woman talking with phantoms. Her young son had been there all along, hidden from view.

My original assessment of this scene reminded me of the way in which we often misjudge people and situations based on our limited view. We notice a fellow employee in a lower position who is a hard worker and determine that he is contending for our job. We consider a bad report from the doctor and determine that it is the final verdict. We look at the mistakes of our past and determine that we are failures. If we are not careful, we end up living—and being ruled—by the judgments we make based on what meets the eye.

Consider Joseph of the Old Testament. He is an example of someone who could have been deceived by focusing on what met the eye. The pit his brothers threw him into after he revealed his prophetic dreams to them looked like the end of his dreams! (See Gen. 37.) Joseph could have considered himself defeated, but he kept the faith.

In Potiphar's house, when things turned from bad to worse for

him, Joseph continued to trust God—who took the pit and made it the very vehicle that moved Joseph in the direction of the palace, the fulfillment of his dreams (see Gen. 39-41).

Now think about your own life. Regardless of the way things look, God has a wonderful purpose for you. Where is the evidence? Since God is Spirit (see John 4:24), He often moves in ways we can't see. That's why we need faith—defined in Hebrews 11:1 as, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” We get glimpses of God and the evidence of His work through our faith.

Today, I challenge you to join me in dwelling not on the evidence of your calling, but on the God of your calling—the God who is faithful (see 1 Thess. 5:24), the God who will make it happen, just as His Word promises (see Phil. 1:6), the same God who brought Joseph from the pit to the palace.

The God of your calling cares about what you see. He also cares about what you don't always see—the evidence of things yet to come.

#### **PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 01/06/2014**

This week thank the Lord for His faithfulness in leading you to fulfill His plan for your life. Pray that those persecuted for the sake of Christ would stand firm, and that God would develop an army of prayer warriors and youth to carry on His worldwide purpose. Continue to pray that our President and those working with him would recognize their need for God and seek Him for guidance when making decisions affecting our nation and the world. Pray for those embattled by horrific winter weather, job losses, crime, broken relationships and health issues. Ask the Lord to show you what you can do to be a blessing this year. Lift up Israel as well as our military, their families, and our national, civic and spiritual leaders. Heb. 11:1-16.

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# Christmas Doesn't Have to Be Perfect to Be Joyful

With all the hustle and bustle during the holiday season, combined with hectic daily schedules, it's not easy to always be on top of things.

One year in my attempt to be on top of Christmas, I made lists of gifts, charity projects and party invitations complete with matching maps of subdivisions. I soon discovered that I had too many lists so I made a master list. I began carrying a daily organizer (resembling the planned invasion of Normandy), which let me view and review throughout my day the entire month of December. I was Super Woman storming into Christmas!

Then came the night of our company Christmas party. Not only had I prepared a map, it was also color-coded. As my husband, Terry, and I headed off toward our destination, I gasped: "I knew I forgot something!" My lists, master list, organizer and color-coded map were back home on the kitchen counter!

With God's grace we were able to locate the right subdivision and the house with the party going on! Greeters standing on the porch called out to us, "Welcome!" A chorus of people from inside the house yelled to us: "Hey, it's about time!"

Before we knew it, Terry and I were swept up in a torrent of hugs, kisses and then—*dead silence*. The entire room and all activities had suddenly ground to a halt. People were staring. "This is a rough crowd," whispered Terry out of the side of his mouth. Then it hit both of us at the same time: it was *the wrong crowd*! Our party was several doors down. The laugh we had over the whole goof-up was worth its weight in gold. It became a fun memory (thankfully, not a tradition)!

I'm coming to the awareness that things don't have to be "just so" for our Christmases to be joyous and wonderful. Our cookies don't have to be baked picture-perfect—or made at all! I recall one year in an attempt to make "the best cookies ever" I wound up with little hockey pucks. But we all survived (probably because no one ate them). When it comes to perfection at Christmas perhaps we should remember that there is only One who is perfect—and He is the reason for the season. His name is Jesus!

So what if our house isn't decorated just right. So what if we can't hit all the high notes of the choir's Christmas program. As we put all of our trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus—who has promised to never leave us or forsake us (see Deut. 31:6)—we'll find comfort and joy this season and in the days beyond!

As your sister in the Lord, I wish you a Merry Christmas! May the wonder of His birth, the power of His ever-abiding grace and presence fill your days with peace and joy! May your faith rest in the bright promises of God Almighty!

### **PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 12/23/2013**

Pray for those who are without family and loved ones this Christmas, as well as for the many who need to hear, understand and receive the gift of salvation and eternal life through Christ.

Pray for the survivors of this year's fires, tornadoes and snowstorms that have not yet recovered from their losses. Pray that God's people would show His love by their giving and sharing with those affected by these disasters, job losses and ongoing poverty. Continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the Middle East when you remember the persecuted church and other nations of the world. Pray for a spirit of repentance and revival to engulf our nation, and for our leaders to recognize their need to seek God for His will,

favor and wisdom. Luke 2; Isa. 9:6; Deut. 31:6.

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# Israel Houghton: From Music to Movies

Five-time Grammy Award-winning worship leader Israel Houghton has forged into new territory as a producer of the new film *I'm in Love With a Church Girl*, out on DVD this month. Houghton shares why he wanted this film released, what it says about the church and his future filmmaking plans.

CHARISMA: What made you decide to help produce *I'm in Love With a Church Girl*?

HOUGHTON: The commitment to excellence when I first saw it—how things were edited, how things were shot, how the actors were trained and performed their parts. I was blown away. It's great to get behind a true story and help people experience that on screen. It was also done in a way that doesn't apologize for what we believe, but also we never have to add a disclaimer for a lack of excellence.

CHARISMA: Why was this film so important to release now?

HOUGHTON: There are so many people who look at church and look at Christianity through jaded glasses. I think this story says, "Be careful who you push away. Be careful who you write off. Be careful who you consider disqualified." Because God has a way of putting His hands on those types of people.

If you look at the disciples, none of them were credentialed. If anything, they were a rough group of guys. And God says, "These are the guys I'm going to put My Spirit in. These are

the guys I'm going to build My church on."

I think sometimes we pray, "God, send us revival," and God sends us some ragtag people. Then we go and say, "Oh, no, not that kind of revival. More neatly packaged than that." And God says, "No, this is what I'm doing."

This story [shows how God can] take someone who probably had a view of what Christians were supposed to be and take that same guy and now he's pastoring. It's remarkable.

CHARISMA: Do you relate to the lead character at all?

HOUGHTON: To a degree. My struggle has always been very veiled. I've had plenty of people say, "You're not this enough or that enough. It won't work." I just kind of smile and say, "Oh, really?" and just go and do what I've been called to do. So, to that degree, I can relate to that.

CHARISMA: How did you see God's hand in the making of this film?

HOUGHTON: Honestly, if you look at the whole process, this was written [by executive producer Galley Molina while he was in prison], and it was on the silver screen [last year]. That, in and of itself, shows that God's hand is on the whole thing. God is just breathing on the whole thing, intersecting and orchestrating everybody's lives to tell the story. And then along the way, to have gotten involved how I did—that, in and of itself, is Ephesians 3:20: God is at work doing exceedingly above all I could ask or think.

CHARISMA: You didn't just produce the film; you also worked on the soundtrack. Tell us a little about that.

HOUGHTON: The soundtrack includes several new songs I've done as an artist and as a producer, and it has great collaborations with Donnie McClurkin, Marvin Sapp, James Fortune, Lalah Hathaway, Sheila E. I'm really, really happy

with the way it turned out.

CHARISMA: Will the songs be on your upcoming album?

HOUGHTON: [They're] on the film's soundtrack. In many ways, this is a new CD for me. Of the 13 or 14 songs, seven or eight are mine. It's basically my new CD coming out.

CHARISMA: What plans do you have for your filmmaking company, Reverence Gospel Media?

HOUGHTON: Currently, we are raising funds for a whole slate of films. And that is actually going really, really well. I know people who are in this process for years and years, and right now we're ready to get started.

There are true stories and stories that just need to be told. The themes will differ a lot for each of the films we put out.

CHARISMA: Will your future films all be faith-based?

HOUGHTON: Oh, definitely. But even "faith-based" has a stigma. We're trying to make competitive Hollywood films that have messages of comfort and redemption.

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# Commanding Your Morning Daily Devotional

*Cindy Trimm (Charisma House)*

This daily devotional helps Christians achieve victory over everyday circumstances through spoken declarations based on the Word of God. Based on popular preacher Cindy Trimm's book

*Commanding Your Morning*, it includes daily teachings, Scriptures and declarations intended to empower readers to start off every day right.

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## **Ego Trip: Rediscovering Grace in a Culture of Self-Esteem**

*Glynn Harrison (Zondervan)*

Harrison, a Christian psychiatrist, says modern thinking on self-esteem is contrary to God's plan and even hazardous. In *Ego Trip*, he offers a more biblical solution to our questions of significance and worth.

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## **Power in the Promises**

*Nick Harrison (Zondervan)*

In the latest from the author of the best-seller *Promises to Keep*, readers will learn how to pray God's Word and see Him change lives.