

Channel Surfing

SPOTLIGHT

Todd Friel in Wretched

Host of new TV show explains what it means to be 'hollow to the core'

Christian radio talk-show host Todd Friel wants the world to know that he is wretched. And for those tuning in to watch Wretched With Todd Friel, the tall, former stand-up comedian pulls no punches. "So are you," he tells viewers.

The 30-minute program, which recently began airing on the new FamilyNet Television network, aims to touch people's hearts with the good news of the gospel. "Dry teaching or bad preaching" are not what viewers will get, says the show's producer Mark Allen. "[Friel] delivers pure theological infotainment," he says.

Friel already has some public exposure from his involvement with Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort of the hard-core street-evangelizing ministry The Way of the told Charisma he enjoys bringing the Bible to life for others. "I really like to take theology and show how it's not only fascinating, but it is entirely relevant," he says.

With quick wit and personality, Friel tries to get viewers to swallow what can be a bitter pill. To really be washed clean of sin and delivered from the grave, "they must understand first that they're wretched," he says. "It's the hinge on which salvation swings. To be wretched is to be 'hollow to the core, imperfect, sinful.'"

Because he wants to enlighten people from all walks of life to their depraved condition, Friel says he has no time to sit

around as some Christians do and criticize an increasingly godless culture. "Instead of talking about what our society is like, [we are] actually going to meet our society."

In addition to using humor he also connects with people through his story, which began during his Bible-college days many years before he entered the world of Christian talk radio. "I never apologized for my sins," he recalls, "and without repentance, there's no salvation. So, I was a false convert studying to become a pastor."

After completing pastoral training, he decided to seek fortune and fame. As a comedian he worked with Jay Leno, Ellen DeGeneres and Bill Maher. He says his life "looked" real good. "Everything in life seemed to be right."

But when it all seemed right was when it all went wrong. "It was when the cross was lifted really high that it just crushed me," he says of his true conversion. "I cried out to God and asked Him to save a wretch like me, and He did."

"It was then [that] I understood how kind God had been to me by not only providing me with a lovely family, but by dying on a cross."

Friel lives with his wife and three children in Atlanta.

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Anti-indecency lobbyists Parents Television Council (PTC) recently awarded TBN and two of its affiliated networks, JCTV and Smile of a Child, the Entertainment Seal of Approval for offering excellence in "family-friendly" programming. TBN chief of staff Paul Crouch Jr. (pictured above) called it a "tremendously prestigious honor." "TBN constantly strives to espouse family ideals," Crouch said, "which is why the PTC's endorsement means a great deal." PTC president Tim Winter, who described TBN as a "passionate champion of broadcast decency," stated: "We commend the TBN networks for upholding the positive values that families hold dear."

After two seasons on Christian TV networks, popular youth program **The Remix** was pulled off the air in April after the show's 22-year-old host, Azariah Southworth (pictured above with white sweater), announced he was gay. The half-hour show, which featured interviews, cooking and boutique-shopping with members of popular Christian bands, had aired nationally on NRB Network and JCTV, TBN's youth network. Neither network responded to Charisma's request for comment. Southworth told Charisma he wasn't surprised by how things ended. "I know they don't believe in being gay," he said. "I understood and respected their decision." Alan Chambers, president of the ex-gay ministry Exodus International, said Christians should extend "the love of Jesus" to Southworth and others like him but also hold to "the truth of God's design."