

Rock Guitarist Leaves Group After Rededicating His Life to Christ

A founding member of the band Korn, Brian "Head" Welch says faith in Jesus helped him beat depression and addiction

One of the founding members of the multi-platinum alternative metal band Korn has left the group after rededicating his life to Christ and is hoping to lead others to faith in Jesus.

More than 10,000 people attended three Sunday morning services at Valley Bible Fellowship (VBF), a nondenominational church in Bakersfield, Calif., to hear guitarist Brian "Head" Welch share his testimony Feb. 27.

"I used to be like this," Welch said as he lowered his head to the ground and scowled. "Now, I am like this." The congregation laughed as Welch sat straight up in his chair, threw his hair away from his face and smiled from ear to ear.

Though he told a California radio station he had been distancing himself from Korn for more than a year, Welch officially parted ways with the band Feb. 22, giving a litany of reasons for his departure, MTV News reported. Among them was his concern about having his face superimposed on a dog patrolling a strip club in a video for the group's cover of Cameo's "Word Up."

Welch, who resides in Bakersfield, started attending VBF in January after a long struggle with suicidal feelings.

"[Pastor Ron Vietti] invited me to church," Welch said during the service. "I hit the bottom of my life. I didn't know if I wanted to go. But I couldn't kill myself so I decided to go see if God could turn me around. I looked to God when I was 12, then I got into Korn."

"He's been yanking on my shirt, steering me back to Him. I kept falling down, but He kept calling me back. Finally I came back here."

"I was a methamphetamine addict," he said unable to finish his thought as tears welled up in his eyes. "I look at my kid," Welch said, referring to his 6-year-old daughter. "That stuff makes you not have control. The only way to quit is through the Lord. Drugs. I'm convinced that drugs, and other very bad things, steer all of us back to the Lord. But for me, drugs are done."

Welch told attendees that his method of coping was to seek God. "This is the Book of Life right here," Welch said holding up a Bible. "It's not about religion, it's not about this church, it's not about me. It's about the Book of Life, and everybody needs to be taught this. It's crazy, it's gonna do stuff like this, like change a guy from a rock band."

VBF executive pastor Jim Crews said Korn's mission was to help its fans heal through the expression of their anger. Now, he said, Welch wants to take that healing to the next level and explain to his fans that there is light at the end of the anger tunnel. "He is now an extension of the Korn ministry for those fans," Crews said. "He wants to complete the process."

More than 300 people accepted Christ after Welch spoke to the

Bakersfield congregation; others were unsure but supportive.

Stephanie Alvarez and Jody Gutierrez, both 22 and from Bakersfield, have traveled all over the state to see Korn perform.

"What makes them good is the combination of all five of them," Gutierrez said. "It's not going to be the same without him because they are a package deal. But they are like family. They are close with each other and close with their family, and I respect that a lot."

Alvarez said she was disappointed about the split. "If he's changed to better himself I can't be mad at him about that," she said. "I've never seen him so happy."

Kyle Cavazos, 14, of Bakersfield waited in the long line outside VBF with his three friends, wanting to hear Welch's message for himself. "Their music is not about the melody, it's about the words," Cavazos said. "And if he wants to do [this], it's not going to stop me from listening to him."

Chris and Angie Vega, both 30 and from Bakersfield, showed up at the service to lend Welch their support. Chris Vega is Korn bassist Reggie "Fieldy" Arvizu's cousin. The couple said they will continue to love and listen to Welch as he heads into the next phase of his career.

Welch was baptized in the Jordan River in early March, tagging along with other VBF members on a trip to Israel. Welch told MTV News that he believed he would return from Israel a "different person."

Fans likely will hear a different message in the solo music he plans to work on this year. Now sporting a “Matthew 11:28” tattoo on his neck and “Jesus” on his fist, Welch told MTV his new music will have a “Christian, spiritual edge to it,” and he plans to use the proceeds from the album sales to help build a skatepark and possibly help Vietti plant “rock’n roll churches’ across the country.

Michelle Lovato
in Bakersfield, Calif.