

Singer Michael English Tries to Put Past Behind Him After Drug Problems

A new understanding of God's love keeps the artist working through the fallout of his divorce and drug addiction

If the life of Christian singer Michael English were a roller-coaster ride, one would have to think this period must be the low end of the deepest valley—and that everything from here must be up.

Friends, family and fans alike are praying that this is so, that his fall from acclaim as one of the nation's top Christian singers after an extramarital affair and a subsequent bout with drug addiction that could have landed him in jail are now behind him.

That is, the worst is behind him if a judge who reviewed his case in October agrees that English's confession of guilt to abusing prescription drugs and his voluntary participation in treatment programs prove that more punishment is not warranted. If not, English could face jail time.

English, 38, was slated to appear before Judge J. Randall Wyatt on Oct. 6 to find out if he would serve jail time for the 12 counts of fraud for illegally obtaining prescription medication. He became addicted to the codeinelike painkiller drug hydrocodone in 1997 after receiving a prescription for it following back surgery.

After his back healed and his physical pain subsided, English

continued to take the drug.

English was completely open about his problems during a recent interview with Charisma. With his sobriety intact and a new album under his belt, Heaven to Earth, and a restored relationship with his father and a strengthened relationship with his 15-year-old daughter Megan, English was upbeat and optimistic about his life, his ongoing restoration and rehabilitation, and his regenerated ministry.

“God doesn’t throw anyone away,” English said. “He ‘don’t make no junk.’ Sometimes it is hard to believe—that God loves a bum on the street as much as He loves the president of the United States. I am just thankful because after all the things I’ve been through, He loves me still.”

English credited Topper Council, 51, of Paducah, Ky., as being his spiritual mentor who holds him accountable daily while he recovers.

“I’ve known him for years. He’s just been here for me through this whole ordeal. He constantly calls me and leaves me scriptures on my answering machine. He gets on to me if I miss church. It makes me feel stronger to know that he’s there.”

English went through a rigorous on-site rehabilitation program at Vanderbilt University. A psychiatrist diagnosed him with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and this doctor believes that English’s drug addiction partially resulted from his brain trying to replace a stabilizing chemical.

“He said I was taking these drugs, not to get high, but to feel normal,” English said. “It really made me feel better to

know that there was something wrong with me. I'd been ADD and didn't know it."

Now English is hearing a different call for ministry—to reach out to struggling believers like himself who want to give up their walk because they don't feel worthy of God's love when they fall.

"If you need to get your car fixed, would you take it to someone who has read all the manuals, but has never been underneath the hood?" En

glish explained. "I kind of feel like the guy who has never read the manual—his fingers are all dirty—but he sure can 'fix the car.' There are a lot of hurting people in this world. Who better to tell them about a God who forgives us and loves us no matter what?"

In liner notes on his CD *Heaven to Earth*, English apologizes to those closest to him who were hurt by his fall into adultery, including his former wife, Lisa. "Lisa and I try to get together as often as possible to discuss our daughter," he said.

"I'm not going to hold my head down because God told me I don't have to anymore," English said. "I told God I was sorry. He heard me the first time. I am excited about the future. I get excited about a lot of things these days. I don't take anything for granted after what I have been through."

Megan, English's daughter, played a major role in inspiring English's addiction recovery. The singer said she came to see him at the Vanderbilt rehab center.

"My daughter is a great little is someone I can be proud of," he said. "She hides her feelings most of the time and that is hard for me. She doesn't want to hurt me. She says she just wants her father back –mentally and emotionally. My promise to her to come back as her father was a driving force in my recovery."

English hopes his audience sees a man on stage who has struggled and at times was vulnerable to sin, but who fought back in faith to stand in the victory that Jesus offers.

"What has happened to me has happened, but it is not the sin that can tear us down. It is how we react and what we do about it.

"Through it all, if we learn how to keep our faith in God, He can totally turn around our failures and use it for His glory. That's what I am trying to do—get back up and keep on going. I know that is what God wants me to do."