

A Heartfelt Appeal to My Friend Josh Harris

Dear Josh,

The last time we were together, we were strolling the grounds of an amusement park and encouraging one another. Your father had steered us into homeschooling, which paid off incredibly.

I previously gathered friends in my apartment to launch Covenant Life Church with C.J. Mahaney, which later was entrusted to you. There and nationwide, you reinforced for many grateful parents foundational biblical principles of purity and the permanency of covenant marriage.

You married your beautiful Shannon and began raising your three wonderful children. God gave you great favor in the eyes of multitudes, especially young people, who looked to you as an inspiring example: "If he can do it, so can I!"

In your conferences, books and pastoral ministry, you were faithful to Scripture, instructing on the true meaning of *agape* love versus erotic sexual attraction; cooperating with God in character development for stability in marriage; and honoring parents and God's design for marriage and family by resisting the seduction of cultural influences on living together (fornication), homosexuality and unscriptural divorce.

Along the way, God gave you insights for a more balanced approach to singles relating without compromising biblical commands. I honor you for later acknowledging some mistakes in practicing biblical principles along with an element of some legalism. Like all of us, you're on a journey, and you wanted to set the record straight. I commend you for your humility.

Discouragement, Deception and Derailment

Josh, you're very familiar with the importance of maintaining a biblical worldview amidst the avalanche of ungodly pressures causing discouragement, deception and many Christians to be derailed today. Your relocation to Canada exposed you to an even more liberal culture, which I experienced firsthand in ministering there last year.

"Take heed to yourself and the doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:16) is critical for you and me to "finish well" and avoid being one of the casualties prophesied in 1 Timothy 4:1a, "Now the Spirit clearly says that in the last days some will depart from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits."

I've got to be honest with you, my friend, you stunned me this week when you announced that after almost 20 years of marriage, you and Shannon were separating and you no longer consider yourself a Christian.

You also stated that you were reevaluating your views on the LGBTQ agenda and apologizing to them for not supporting same-sex marriage and affirming their place in the church.

If God convicted you of un-Christlike attitudes towards homosexuals, that's good. If you're wandering into unscriptural acceptance of sexual activity that God calls "shameful, unnatural, degrading, impure, indecent and perversion" (Rom. 1:21-32), I beseech you to stop and turn back to unchanging biblical truth. You know I'm not talking about people struggling with same-sex attraction but those who "not only do them but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32b).

My brother, here in Nashville the entire Christian community watched the sad story of a thriving megachurch collapse as the pastor, to whom I personally appealed, decided to become "gay-affirming and inclusive." Local and national media celebrated the development, but soon, he announced the breakup of his marriage as he drifted into heresy, eventually leaving

Nashville with multitudes left heartbroken, confused and devastated.

Time for a Wake-Up Call?

Josh, you're in your 40s. Billy Graham once said, when asked what one thing he learned as he aged, "How quickly it all goes by."

Remember the compelling question you posed readers in *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*? Chapter 14: "What Matters at 50?"

Doris and I have faced incredible pressures, conflicts and challenges in our 43 years of marriage and ministry, but by the grace of God, we continue to honor what we vowed before God, each other and many witnesses on April 10, 1976. Along with our brides, we know there are only two kinds of marital couples: Those who admit their problems and those who don't. All couples have problems.

What about Billy and Ruth Graham?

Ruth was once asked in an interview if she ever thought about divorce in her marriage to Billy? She responded without hesitation, yet jokingly, "Divorce? No. Murder, yes!"

A Tragic Tale

Years ago, I sat in my dining room with one of the premier preachers in America. I devoured his teachings, and once I was married, Doris and I both continued listening to his outstanding messages.

At the height of his ministry, he began compromising his biblically informed convictions and wandered into more comfortable and convenient doctrinal positions. Sitting across from me, he said he reached the point where he wanted "personal peace" rather than problems with his wife.

He separated from her and their six or seven children. He got

involved with another woman. His reputation disintegrated, and his ministry and church came apart. Someone shared with me the effect it had on the children, especially one son, who spun off into drugs. The last time I spoke with the man, he was doing some work on a dock, if I recall correctly.

- What if he'd humbled himself and sought counseling? I'm not talking about psycho-babble and therapeutic victimhood, but godly counsel over a period of time with a seasoned biblical counselor?
- What if he led the way with his wife in coming to a place where they put everything on the table in strictest confidentiality and dealt with generational issues, destructive habit patterns, unwise "friendships", pornography, flirtation with the opposite sex, parenting disagreements, anger issues, undisciplined spending, sexual problems and the like?
- What if he and his wife made the difficult decision to reject the lies of the enemy, repent, forgive and persevere no matter what the cost, while believing God's authoritative Word that redemptive grace would bring them to victory? "No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:13).
- What if he and his wife quietly enlisted the support of trusted friends to engage in intercessory prayer on their behalf during their season of adversity and testing?

A Defining Moment

Josh, and Shannon, I want to assure you that this is truly a defining moment for both of you, as you well know. There are multitudes of people all over this nation and abroad who love you and are praying for you right now. I am in that caring

company available to you, so don't hesitate to call me for encouragement, counsel or prayer.

More importantly, Jesus is praying right now as the one who gave His life for you, committed to save you from a path that undermines the abundant life he desires for you and your family. "Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He at all times lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

"Then the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to have you to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have repented, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

Here's the deal: Joshua, my friend, on the cover of your bestselling book, the image appearing to be you has his face downcast, covered by a hat. Your spiritual family throughout America encourages you to look up confidently, knowing that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6b).

Please don't kiss your marriage goodbye!

Your Friend 'till the End,

Larry Tomczak