

Greg Laurie: Johnny Cash Sometimes Heard Holy Spirit Say, 'I Still Love You'

"Sometimes I am two people. Johnny is the nice one. and Cash causes all my trouble. They fight." –Johnny Cash

By his own estimation, he had wrecked virtually every car he ever owned, totaled two Jeeps and a camper, and overturned two tractors and a bulldozer. He sank two boats in separate incidents, and he once leaped from a truck just before it went over a 600-foot cliff.

After long, frenzied drug binges, when Johnny Cash finally crashed, just before he drifted off into unconsciousness, he sometimes heard a quiet voice say, "I am your God. I am still here. And I am still waiting. I still love you."

Cash came from an intact, albeit dysfunctional, home with a distant, often harsh father. But his mother loved him deeply and instilled in him a faith in Jesus Christ that the young boy embraced. Cash was raised in the church and knew right from wrong.

He went from darkness to light—back to darkness and back to light again, and he continued this cycle throughout his life.

Like many of us do, he had a complex relationship with God.

He often vowed to change, to go back to church and to be the kind of man he always wanted to be. But he relapsed so many times. His heart's desire for righteousness was overruled by his body's craving for amphetamines. It was a true Jekyll-and-Hyde existence.

Many times, he felt he had wasted his life, drifting so far from God and every bright and stabilizing influence that all

hope was lost. The glamour of sin was gone, and in its place were the harsh and bitter results.

But like the prodigal son, Cash would eventually come to his senses and return home. Home, of course, was the church.

When John, June, daughters Rosey and Carlene, and son John Carter attended Nashville's Evangel Temple on May 9, 1971, Cash sat in his usual spot in the very last row. The congregation sang a couple of rousing favorites, and Cash soaked in the words and the message that day. He realized that he couldn't make it without the Lord. How much suffering he could have saved himself had he abandoned the selfish lifestyle he chose to live and instead walked in a consistent relationship with God.

Cash had made his first altar call when he was 12, and again when he was 41.

An altar call, or invitation, is a moment when whoever is speaking challenges people listening to make a public profession of their faith.

The reason for this is to help the person making that commitment to put "feet to their faith" and stand up and be counted. When I extend invitations for people to come to put their faith in Christ, I often quote the words of Jesus, where He said, "Whoever will confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father who is in heaven" ().

That moment had come for Johnny.

Then the "Man in Black" led his family to the altar, and they sank to their knees and recited the "sinner's prayer."

Johnny Cash not only said those words, but he lived by them for the rest of his years. He stumbled many times along the way, but he always maintained the course.

Johnny also sang in many Billy Graham Crusades over the years

and was close friends with the evangelist. Johnny knew he had a platform, and he used it to encourage others to believe in Jesus as he had.

We are holding what could best be described as a Billy Graham-style event at the Angel Stadium in Southern California on Aug. 23-25. I will give a message similar to the one that changed Johnny Cash's life and extend an invitation for people to believe in Jesus Christ, just as the Man in Black did. I hope you will join us or watch online.

If God could change a man like Johnny Cash, he can change a person like you.

Greg Laurie *is an author, evangelist, pastor and founder of the Harvest churches in California and Hawaii and Harvest Crusades. He is a bestselling author of several books, and his newest book is Johnny Cash: The Redemption of an American Icon. He is hosting his 30th annual SoCal Harvest crusade at the Angel Stadium of Anaheim, Calif., Aug. 23-25.*