

Mary Alessi: Pressing on Through Adversity

Mary Alessi has been ministering through music ever since she was a young girl traveling with her family. Now, she pastors Metro Life in Miami with her husband, Steve. This mother of four is also a worship leader, and she recently released her third album, *Pressing On*. Alessi spoke to *Charisma* about her music ministry and the inspiration behind her new album.

***Charisma:* Tell us about your music ministry.**

Mary Alessi: I am a pastor's wife, a worship leader and I've been leading worship almost 20 years ever since I started out many years ago I started leading worship. I traveled with my family as a kid and my dad and mom were evangelists, and we traveled, so ministry and singing are definitely in my soul, it's in my blood.

Worship really is the theme of my life. That's my style. That would probably be what would define me. I don't consider myself a worship artist; I am a worship leader. That's what I do every weekend and my projects carry a worship experience. My calling is to lead people into a greater walk with the Lord, not just sing a song but also really have an experience with the Lord through their worship.

Charisma: Your new CD, *Pressing On*, was inspired by a difficult season. Could you explain what happened?

Alessi: Three years ago, the day after Father's Day, my husband had a severe heart attack; actually they labeled it a "widow maker."

We had no idea that anything like this would come; it just really hit us

broadside. Steve had no health issues, never had any scare, no fear, no

warnings from the doctors, nothing. He was very fit, very healthy. His heart

attack came out of nowhere. It took the paramedics 45 minutes to bring him back

to where his heart was stabilized so that they could tell me whether he would

be OK or not. It was devastating, very traumatic.

Being a worship leader, we always say that in the deepest darkest moments we will praise God. We're always encouraging people that when

they're going through it to sing a song of praise. The reality of it for me is

that there are times where you're going through something and a song just

doesn't come. When I was sitting in the kitchen praying, calling family and

friends saying, "Please pray. Steve is dying. He's having a heart attack. This

is serious," I couldn't think of a song. All I could really call on was the

name of Jesus. It was in that moment that God began to do an even deeper work

in my heart and in my life even in that area of what worship truly is. It's

just a heart's cry.

Did you ever question God?

Alessi: We questioned. Why God did you let this happen to Steve? Why is a part of his heart damaged, they call it dead? Why would you let that happen? Lord, we've given our entire lives for you. All we've known is ministry from the time we were little kids. We've never strayed. We've given everything to you. God why would you let this happen to the people you love? Will this bring any future occurrences? What does this mean?

In questioning, God just really began to speak to both of us that if there's a limp in your life, then better you have that limp and live your life to the total fullest than somebody who doesn't have a limp in their life and they still complain about where life is. We just said that we're going to take this situation, we're going to move on, we're going to overcome and we're going to do even great things because of this. We're just determined to live even a greater existence with this limp in our lives.

The song "Pressing On" came out of that; I am pressing on because I don't want live an ordinary life. I don't want to just be ordinary. I want extraordinary things in my life because I know what I'm capable of with God on my side. I'm not going to get out of focus. I'm going to just press on. I think that's the theme of our world today, and definitely should be of Christians, that no matter what adversity faces us, no matter what comes our

way, we still have to get up and make a decision to say, "I don't know where I'm going, but I can't stay here. I'm pushing forward and I'm pressing on toward the mark of the high calling."

What is something you learned going through such a traumatic event?

Alessi: I would say first and foremost leaning what grace is and what grace is not. We aren't lucky boys and girls, sons and daughters when nothing happens to us. ... I used to say, "Look at our lives. None of our kids are sick. Neither one of us had ever had an issue in our bodies. Look how blessed we are. Look how God has shined on us." Well, when something bad happens, how do you say that and who do you look to? You think, *OK God, what's up?*

What I thought was favor and blessing God began to show me, "No, no, Mary, when you walk through a deep dark valley but I sustain you and I hold you, that's when you're favored, that's when you're blessed." It took me to a completely different understanding. ... What grace became to me was that He gave me peace in the middle of the storm. He began to speak even stronger in the middle of this valley, "I don't care, Mary, what adversity slips through and affects your life, you can overcome it. You can come out of it and live an even greater existence with it in your life."

What do you most hope listeners will sense when they

listen to *Pressing On*?

Alessi: This is not and overly emotional “Out of the ashes, I rise” cry. I’m not saying that. Sometimes when people go through terrible, traumatic experiences, worse than me, and we try to tell them, “You’ll rise again,” they don’t want to hear that. That’s a knowledge for later. They’re not there right now. That’s not where they’re at. I wanted to put together from my experience a simple song, more of a song you could sing to remind yourself that life happens, things happen. Don’t get mad at God. Don’t overemotionalize it. Don’t overstate it. Things happen in our lives. Just remember that there is a God who loves you and He will give you the ability to press on. You don’t have to start believing for a year from now, just believe for today, just believe for this next moment, this next step. Just press on, just push on.

You don’t have to have all the answers right now. You may not know where you’re going but you know you can’t stay where you are right now. So just get up and move forward, even if it’s just one step, one step after another. And then let God do the rest in your life, press on.

What I really hope that through the whole theme of this project is that people get that God is a redeemer. He redeems all of your days, the Word says. So even in adversity, any day that you feel like you’ve lost, He

will redeem it. Somehow, someday He will give it back.

I would not trade the experience of Steve's heart attack for anything in the world. Would I wish that Steve's heart were fully functioning

and whole and perfect? Absolutely, I do, and God is the healer. But it won't

stop me. It's not an excuse. It's not a hang up. It's not an argument with God.

I press on because God has called Steve and me to great things, even with a

partially damaged heart. It won't stop us. It won't hold us back. The old us is

gone. We have a renewed sense of acknowledgement of how precious life is, how

amazing this life He has given us is, and we're going to live it all the way

out, squeeze every bit of juice out of it.