

The Upside-Down Rock Star

Brian Welch, one of America's most popular hard-rock artists, traded in his wild ways when he discovered real faith.

For 10 years the phrase "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" was more than just a tired cliché for musician Brian Welch. It was his life. As the lead guitarist for multiplatinum-selling hard-rock band Korn, Welch consumed everything the realm of fame and fortune served up. And at times, it tasted pretty good.

But that was before Welch met Jesus and had his world turned upside down. Since his miraculous salvation experience two and a half years ago, the once insatiable rocker has developed an appetite for a much different menu.

"To be quite honest, you could put me in a room full of drugs, booze and hookers for a year, and I wouldn't touch any of them," Welch says. "I'm just so in tune and so close with God."

That might be a hard pill to swallow for the millions of Korn fans across the globe who remember Welch's past existence as one of the hardest partying rock stars on the touring circuit. Though some have shown a certain level of respect for his decision to leave the band to pursue a relationship with God, others have made fun of Welch via Internet message boards and even obscene T-shirts that mock his faith.

With the publication in July of his autobiography *Save Me From Myself*, which debuted at No. 20 on the New York Times best-sellers list, and a solo CD in the works, Welch says he's prepared for the

worst—but he's still hoping and praying for the best.

"I'm kind of used to [being ridiculed]," he says. "So I'm ready for it. The good thing is, I just want to get my story out there. These people can take it for what it is."

"I just want them to know what I went through in my life that got me to the point where I could give up everything to follow Christ and how He took my shattered life and changed it so quickly. Whether they accept it or not, who knows?"

To Hell and Back

Even though Welch's autobiography discloses personal information about his childhood and teenage years, the bulk of his story starts in 1994 when the music world met Korn, a new kind of rock band that combined elements of rap, metal, hardcore and electronica. The band's self-titled debut sold more than 2 million copies in the U.S.

Korn found themselves on the road with the likes of Marilyn Manson, Ozzy Osbourne and Megadeth. They were more than just rising stars. They had risen straight to the top.

It didn't take long before fame quit filling the void Welch felt in his soul. Even though he had accepted Christ at the age of 13, he never took the relationship further. So instead of relying on faith he developed a strong dependency on alcohol, drugs, sex and pornography.

After the birth of his daughter, Jennea, in 1998 Welch tried to clean up his act, realizing his actions someday might have

severe consequences for both of them. He now believes the Holy Spirit was using that circumstance to encourage him to be a good father—but to no avail.

“I still tried to make it work,” Welch says. “I brought her out on the road, and she was watching her dad pound beer every night, and she saw all the craziness on stage. And every time, that was convicting me. Every time I was like, ‘How can I let this little girl watch me on stage?’”

Welch started making his daughter leave the stage for certain songs but discovered that it didn’t help him clean up his act. “I sunk lower and lower. I got more addicted. I got crazier. I got so obsessed with pornography. I was just a mess.”

By the end of 2004 he was divorced and raising then 6-year-old Jennea alone. His ex-wife, also a drug addict, had bailed out of the marriage five years before. In desperation, he reached out to a Christian friend in the real estate business. Before Welch knew it he was making his first visit to church in nearly 20 years.

He admits being high on speed when he walked into Valley Bible Fellowship (VBF) in Bakersfield, California, but says the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit penetrated his hallucinated state and nudged him down to the altar where pastor Ron Vietti led him in a prayer of repentance.

“The pain in my life and the trials and the storms just got worse and worse and worse as the years went by, until I couldn’t take it no more,” Welch says. “I’m thankful for everything that I went through. I’m not proud of all the drugs that I did and the abuse of other people and myself, but I’m

glad that I went through it.”

Welch quit Korn and went public with his faith during the first weeks of 2005. His aggressive, in-your-face approach to his newfound freedom in Christ was uncomfortable for Korn enthusiasts who didn't know what to make of the radical, 180-degree change.

But it was at times just as difficult for the observant Christian community that was also watching his zealous faith unfold. Some Christians thought, after all, of the many times before when other radical celebrity conversions had ended badly.

In Welch's case, it all had become very public after news hit the Internet that he was quitting Korn and would be giving his Christian testimony at VBF. Some 13,000 people as well as media outlets CNN and MTV showed up to hear him.

The day after he gave his testimony Welch left for a trip through Israel with a group from the church. He had agreed to a request by MTV to send a camera crew along to film him touring the country.

While there, he battled some personal issues, primarily depression. His ensuing moments of frustration and anger were captured on MTV's cameras.

Welch now sees how he might have made the church a little nervous at the time with so much publicity. But he by no means regrets his decision to throw caution to the wind and allow his new relationship with Jesus to be an open book for anyone to see.

“I was so on fire for the Lord,” Welch says. “I was so touched by God—and the supernatural was opened up to me—that nothing else mattered.

“I didn’t care if I was saying wrong things. All I knew was that God loved me and He saved me and I walked away from everything and I wanted to shout it to the world. I probably said a couple of things that were kind of wacky and stuff, but it was all out of zeal and love for the Lord.”

Welch had no intention of slowing down his quest to share the gospel. He propelled himself into the Christian media circuit at warp speed. He also did what he could to reach back into the mainstream world with his story.

But eventually things started to slow down and open doors began to close—leaving a confused Welch asking God some serious questions.

“[God] started telling me, ‘Look, you’ve got to relax,’” he recalls. “‘You’ve got to go into seclusion and get away from all of that stuff, and I’m going to start training you. I’ll build you up. I’ll build your ministry up.’”

The Raw Truth

Welch and his daughter moved from California to Arizona, where Welch says God slowed him down long enough to allow the Holy Spirit to do some serious work. He dealt with some deep issues that had plagued him since his teenage years and had followed him through his commercial success in the recording business.

It was a process that put Welch on his knees and eventually left him emotionally and spiritually spent.

“Since I became a Christian, I just started praying and I haven’t even stopped,” Welch says. “Like all day throughout the day I just pray. That’s what I did.

“I went into seclusion, and I just pressed in. I hungered for the Lord and I said: ‘Change me. Do Your will for my life. Just take the junk out of me.’

“And then I went through tons of pain for two years—just brokenness. I didn’t cry for 15 years so I’ve just been crying for the past two years.”

As Welch went through the painful process, he started to understand more about the Holy Spirit. Not only did he enjoy a newfound comfort and peace, but he says he also learned that God wanted to be with him through His Spirit—a revelation that “floored” him. All these changes took place amid times of doubt, severe anger and a recurring bout with depression.

“I’ve been going through so much healing and deliverance and all that stuff for these two years,” Welch says. “And no matter how I acted or no matter what I threw back at God, the Spirit was just doing its work.

“I had some hard times. I had so much pain with the deliverance and the changing and the process that was going on. I would find myself cussing out God and then I’d feel guilty afterwards. I had zero control. I don’t know what went on, but now I just love the Holy Spirit.”

Welch wrote his autobiography while he was going through the painful process, which helped him to endure it and resulted in a more deeply authentic account, he says.

“That book is real. I poured my heart out,” he says. “I was going through the tears and the pain and the anger and the happiness—all of it at one time. I was crying when I was typing these chapters.”

Nearing completion of his book, Welch faced a peculiar dilemma. Parts of the story included profanity-laden conversations. As a young Christian, he wanted to reflect his desire for holiness, but he felt led by God to leave some of the coarse language and brutally honest depictions in the text.

“The religious part of me was like: ‘How can God be telling me to do that? How can the Lord be telling me to say that stuff?’” Welch says. “I could’ve reworded it, and it would’ve been close, but I really felt led to be real and raw. I wanted the darkness to be real and accurate and I wanted the light to come shining through bright.

“There might be some people that might say I went a little too far with the realness and rawness, but all I can say is that it’s a real and accurate book and I can’t apologize for that.”

On the opposite extreme, Welch also wrestled with whether or not to include a chapter titled “Tongues,” which explains what he says is the “huge part” speaking in tongues has played in his spiritual growth.

“I pray in the Spirit a lot at home, and it really has helped

me be delivered, and it's opened my spiritual eyes to understanding," Welch says. "But I didn't want to freak people out. I knew it was going to be weird to some people that don't know the Lord, and even some Christians think it's weird.

"Then I felt the Lord ask me, 'Are you ashamed of the Holy Spirit?' And there's no way I'm ashamed of the Holy Spirit. I had to be real."

The First of Millions

Now that Welch's sabbatical has ended, he finds that he is no less gung-ho than when he first experienced the miraculous power of God's grace. In fact, he has since wholeheartedly embraced the work that prophecy plays in his life—a spiritual gift that Welch says not only guided the words of his book but also provided him with the songs for his solo project.

One thing Welch doesn't want the book to do is simply come off as a feel-good story about how religion helped a rock star overcome his addictions. Instead, he desperately hopes that his testimony will challenge people to draw closer to the Creator of the universe and experience the fullness of His love.

"I want people to see how God revealed Himself to me and that God is so real and that He wants to come as close to every human as they want Him to," Welch says. "I just want a burning desire to be placed into the hearts of every reader, whether that's a Christian or a non-Christian, because we should always be growing and getting hungrier for the Lord because there's always more. There's always more that He wants to reveal to us."

That type of spiritual wisdom is a far cry from the state of hopelessness that Welch himself knew less than three years ago. It's the kind of thinking that reminds him daily of the fact that he has many friends still trapped by the deceptive glamor of the "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" life.

Now that he has been delivered from those addictions, Welch is driven by a sense of urgency that is fueled by his compassion for the lost.

"I feel like I need to do everything and anything that the Bible says that I can do to get these people saved like me," Welch says. "I just pray constantly that He will open the hearts of those people and open the minds and the spiritual eyes so they can see Him. All they need is a glimpse of His love, like I had. I was forever changed.

"I've just pleaded with Him that He would do that for this generation. I pray that I'll be a prophetic example of what He's going to do for all of those people that are living the way I did. I pray that I'm the first of millions that are going to be coming."

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