

YOUR WHOLE SELF

BY DAN HASELTINE



I STEPPED OUT OF THE PUB AFTER sharing a pint and some jovial conversation with some men that I have grown to love and respect. Every Monday night, I sit in a room with guys who are trying to figure it out. It is a group of guys deeply engaged in a dialogue born out of weakness. We are a group of sinners, addicts, haters, drinkers, smokers, liars and thieves. We are also followers of Christ. Every week, we come together to share openly the struggles and depravities of our lives. It is the language of brokenness, of commitments severed, confidences lost, relationships destroyed and, mostly, the language of restoration and recovery. It is the gathering of men to witness the resetting of mis-set bones in slow motion and in real time.

After our meetings, we move to the Irish pub and let our souls and stomachs grow warm. This night I decided to walk across the street and step into a movie theater. The air was crisp, and I could see my breath. It was silent. The streets were deep in hibernation. No cars. No sound. I walked slowly across the street, and my eye caught the posters for *Walk the Line* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

I walked in and purchased my ticket. I chose *Narnia*. Having just stepped out of a pub and a conversation that was still spinning in my head

about the Gospel story and how we tell it—the kind of conversation I love having over a pint—I thought that this movie would have some bearing on that dialogue. The lights dimmed, and I felt my expectant heart rise.

There is a scene in *Walk the Line*—I saw it on another night—that has given me permission to think differently about art, music and the Gospel. After listening to Johnny Cash sing a gospel standard, Sam Phillips sets the tone for Cash. “If you were about to die, lying in the gutter and you had one song to sing, one chance to tell God and man what you thought about being on this earth and being alive ... Is that the song you would sing?” Is that the way you would communicate the story of humanity, the way you would describe the world? To Sam Phillips, Cash’s trite old gospel song was not believable. That same gospel song is still not believable.

There is a weight to the Gospel. There is a mass connected to the story of redemption. It is in the dark places—the addictions to pornography, alcohol, drugs, power and control. It is in our propensity to blame and abuse each other, our greed and our depravity. It is the substance of these things that gives us a place to speak about the slow road to recovery.

When we find the Gospel to be true and start to wrestle with the implications, it eventually brings us to a place where we must confront our humanity and know ourselves as ooth the walking wounded and the perpetually healed.

In our church culture, there are behavioral codes set in place to give the appearance of victory. There are things that church people cannot talk about. There are activities that church people do not

engage in. There are places we do not hang out, girls we do not call, hotel rooms where things do not happen, computers that do not show destructive images, relationships that are not failing, abuses that are not stealing joy. There is not a darkness or a shadow to speak of.

But these things *are*, in some fashion, part of every church person’s life. Because we have chosen to speak only about the victory from these things, we are left to promote a gospel that is feeble and moveable at best, rather than one made of stone—one strong enough to withstand the weight of the world and the depravity that is balanced upon its surface. Our gospel is unbelievable because it is only half of a gospel. It is the resurrection without any signs of the crucifixion. I believe there are profound reasons why Jesus still carried the scars from the nails on His hands when He appeared to His friends. He was bringing the entire Gospel to His disciples.

The inability to think deeply about our true character found its way into *Narnia*. It was a good movie, but I was disappointed because I did not know any of the characters the way I wanted to know them. With Edmund, I did not get the sense that something

had crept into his life and become such an obsession that he would risk family, friends and dignity to get it. I wasn’t given a glimpse into what a world that is only winter and never Christmas would do to

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a character. Without that kind of weight, Aslan was not worthy of fear or high respect, and he failed to capture the fullness of character necessary to make the coming spring plausible ... even in *Narnia*.

Within the language of recovery is a phrase, a challenge, a mandate: “Bring the full weight of who you are into your relationships.” It means that we are free to bring all of who we are—every part of our story—into our decision-making process. It can be part of the ways we talk, act and love others. It gives people the chance to know us, and it gives people the permission to be known. All individuals have things in their lives that make them unique. Most often this part of their story is connected to abuse, addiction, fear or pain. I have come to believe that the things that make us unique are the ways joy enters into our secrets, the ways light exposes our darkness. This is why we choose not to open these parts of our story up to others. Ultimately, it is our redemption that looks unique—it is the way healing comes, how long it takes, who is involved that makes us different.

What I see in the Christian music community and in church culture at large is that we have not been given permission to be ourselves completely. We are not allowed to bring the *full* weight of who we are into our music conversations, our movies, our pulpits or our church halls. And as I see our church culture striving to take the weight off, I have decided that perhaps it is best to keep the weight on. ❧

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