Life As a Single Dad

Going Solo

By Mark Smeby

ROBERT BEESON HAD THE JOB OF HIS dreams. While still in his 20s, he found a way to combine his intense love of music with his burgeoning business and marketing acumen. But as is the case with any visionary, he had no idea where his dream was about to take him.

Robert's story is perhaps not one he would have chosen, but God's greater story of redemption is being written.



RISING TO THE TOP

What started as a tiny, rock-driven label launched out of Robert's bedroom in Southern California, Essential Records was about to become one of the most successful record labels in all of Christian music. His label's sharply defined focus on the Christian youth market captured the interest of a large music distributor in Nashville, Tennessee. This corporate boost from Provident Distribution moved his company to Nashville, where Essential quickly developed a reputation for being a source of music that was essentially relevant to youth. Beeson's Essential was home to popular bands Jars of Clay, Third Day, Caedmon's Call, and FFH — each making huge waves, and dollars, with their music ministries.

Things were going better than Beeson could have imagined — gold and platinum record parties, trips to New York and Europe, and the Grammys. He was the envy of the industry with his tremendous commercial success combined with his savvy, cutting-edge, entrepreneurial attitude (and his cool hair)! Beeson always maintained his Southern California rocker image with his long black hair — perhaps his way of saying to Nashville, "I'm not going to cave in to your expectations."

It was during this time of great prosperity that Beeson began his family, marrying his wife and eventually having three children, each girls. And then, as Beeson confesses, he became "his own worst enemy."



CRASHING DOWN

He sees now how the demands of running a successful record label did not allow him to create a healthy environment to have a family. "The Essential family was my family. I wasn't cheating on my wife or not telling my kids I loved them. But my passion wasn't at home — it was at work. It was instant gratification. I could see things happening instantly — completely filling that fairly shallow part of me. I didn't realize what kind of destructive root I was setting by doing something ministry oriented, or in the name of ministry, simply because I was neglecting what was my first calling — my family."

Then Beeson says he was hit in the head by a few metaphorical 2-by-4s. "A close friend died suddenly while playing soccer and then Sept. 11 happened. Not a year later, I got really drunk and keyed TobyMac's car and didn't remember it. I was a mess. My behavior was destructive, and I had become untouchable."

He found himself slowly waking up, wondering what he was doing with his life. "I was pursuing this career like it's my life and my identity, and it could all change on a dime. Ultimately, my work doesn't matter. I started to yearn for something more. I realized I couldn't continue to live this way and made the decision to curb some of these destructive areas." It was at that point, Beeson said, he began his prodigal walk back to the Father.

During the most difficult times, Beeson poured over Psalm 23. "Reciting it over and over, I realized the reality of walking through something bigger than you think you can take. God doesn't say He's going to take you out of it but that He'll be there in it with you. The image of God as my shepherd really connected with me."

Even after his choice to get his life back in order, that is when he started to harvest some of the things he had sown in his marriage. "With my first two daughters I had been fairly neglectful. Every day ended at 4:00 p.m. and I'd go to happy hour and not get home until 7:00. I wasn't all there." His wife struggled to believe that he really wanted to change, since his talk was not consistent with the way he had been living the previous 12 years.

"I'll never forget one marriage counseling session when my wife was pregnant with our third daughter. She said, 'I'm sick of you having all the fun in this marriage. As soon as this baby is born, I'm going to find my own vice.' I didn't take it seriously. But she did. And not a year later, she disappeared and never came back. We didn't know where she was for a couple of weeks. Turned out she had been planning her departure for a while."

A NEW DIRECTION

That same year, Robert turned 40 and left his job at Provident. He cut off his long hair — a visual declaration of brokenness and surrender. It was time for something new. Returning to the desire born during his days in California

of creating faith-based entertainment that is culturally relevant, Beeson had to look no further than his own kids — Zoe, Skylar, and Zara. When he noticed his kids were watching popular TV programs such as *Hannah Montana* and listening to acts such as the Jonas Brothers, he saw a huge amount of preteen acts with wholesome messages being pushed by Disney®. But he could not find anything with an overtly faith-based perspective. So while his girls were spending hours upon hours soaking in this kind of entertainment, memorizing lyrics and learning dance moves, Beeson started dreaming again. "The more I dug into it, the more I realized what was happening in my own home. I didn't know where to turn."

This fatherly perspective became the filter through which Robert could develop his business perspective. The result was the launch of iShine, a multifaceted preteen entertainment company, formed with the purpose of teaching kids of their value and identity in Christ. Since launching in 2006, Beeson has signed several recording acts to the iShine record label. Several of the label's artists tour frequently on the iShine Live Tour, an interactive, multimedia experience with concerts, speakers, and break-out sessions to help the young audiences enrich their faith. They also have a TV show, *iShine KNECT* (seen on TBN), DVDs, CDs, Web sites, and books. Beeson explains how you cannot just sign an artist and release a CD and expect to speak to this generation. "iShine is about creating a context for ministry to happen."

"It's not so much about teaching them do's and don'ts but telling them how loved they are. With everything the world is throwing at them, it's important to instill how wonderful they are as individuals and to know that God wants to use them for His glory."

"I want to show the heart of God to these kids. The preteen years are so important because it's when kids start shaping their identity. If they understand how precious they are and how they are made in [God's] image, when they approach the age of having to make decisions about alcohol, drugs, and sex, it will no longer be about behavior modification. It will be about something rooted in significance and who they are as human beings. They can comprehend it, and they're asking for it. We're just not giving it to them as a church."



REDEMPTION

For Robert Beeson, the story that has been written is perhaps not one that he would have chosen, but God's greater story of redemption is being written and that is what propels him today. "I never would've expected or wished this road on anyone. But the reward I'm starting to live into is so much richer than what I thought I had. I'm finally seeing how this life is not about me — it's about God. And as I daily take myself out of the equation, I realize how beautiful this tapestry is He's woven, because it's so much further and beyond what I could've ever calculated. Still, it was incredibly important for me to walk through and keep walking through all of this so I can talk about God's faithfulness."

SINGLE-PARENT ENCOURAGEMENT

As a single father, Robert offers encouragement and advice. There are two simple things you can do to be a better parent: show up and listen.

✔ The most important thing I do is family dinner — at least 5 nights a week. Turn off the phone and sit down and talk. It is not a huge thing, but the dinner table is our connecting point.

✔ It is not important that they get to dance on time, or even that they get to dance, but that you spend time with them. It is so important to just show up. Make sure they know you are accessible and that there is nothing more important to you.

✔ With each child, you need to know her language and how she perceives life and communicates. They all have to be parented differently.

✔ Take time off work. Show up at school for a surprise lunch visit. Take her to the mall. Go for a walk or draw with her. It is incredible the difference it makes.

MORE FOR SINGLE PARENTS

Robert is working on writing a book called *Solo — Fear, Fatigue, and the Restoration of the Single Parent*. He hopes that telling his story will be an encouragement and inspiration to other single parents. "Being a single parent is incredibly scary and incredibly tiring, but there is redemption and restoration in what God can do through our lives."

ROBERT'S FAVORITE READS

- *The Shack* by William P. Young (Windblown Media, 2008)
- *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan (David C. Cook, 2008)
- *Revolutionary Parenting* by George Barna (Barna Books, 2007)



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