

Our 2005 Readers' Choice Award Winners

Vol. XX, No. 16 August 15, 2005 PUBLISHED BI-WEEKLY

RADIO INK

RADIO PROMOTION MANAGEMENT & MARKETING MAGAZINE™

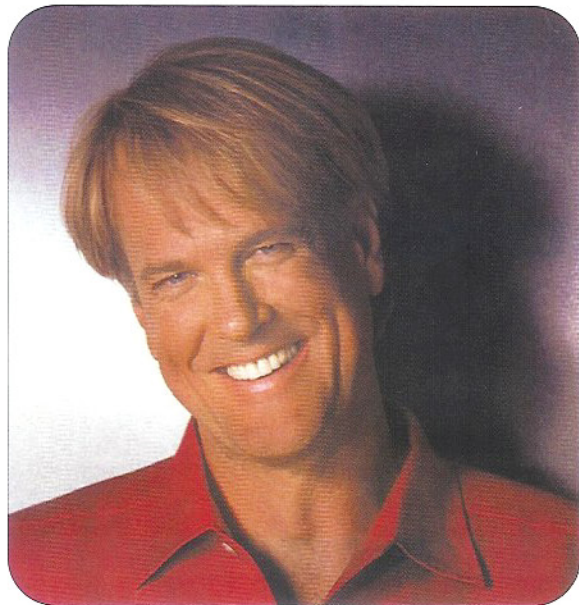
**Far From The Glare Of TV,
John Tesh Has Found
*A Purpose-Driven Life***

U.S.A. \$9.95 | CANADA \$10.95



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18 Far From The Glare Of TV, John Tesh Has Found A Purpose-Driven Life

"The only thing that made me come alive when I was a little kid was playing piano," recalls John Tesh, who left his position as co-host of Entertainment Tonight in 1996 to pursue a career as a full-time musician. Now, as host of *The John Tesh Radio Show*, he provides listeners with guidance and information they can use in their daily lives. His three most recent music releases were all hits on the *Billboard* Pop and Christian Music charts.

27» 2005 Readers' Choice Award Winners

The Readers' Choice Awards recognize the syndicated/network programs that members of the radio community consider the best in the business. Radio executives, managers, programmers, and sales reps were polled to determine which programs and personalities are working best on their stations, and which they would like to steal from competitors.

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34,997

...the number of useable ideas in Radio Ink to date

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POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Radio Ink, Box 2, Winter Bch., FL 32971-3002. Periodicals postage paid at West Palm Beach, FL, and additional offices. Subscriptions: Mail subscription rate. One year \$159. Canadian and European subscribers \$249 for one year. All subscriptions, renewals and changes of address should include address label from most recent issue and be sent to the Circulation Department, Radio Ink, 224 Datura Street, Suite 1015, West Palm Beach, FL 33411. Copying done for other than personal or internal reference without the express permission of Radio Ink is prohibited. Address requests for special permission to the Managing Editor. Reprints and back issues available upon request. Printed in the United States. Bulk Business: Mail paid at West Palm Beach, FL • Third-class enclosure paid in Columbus, WI. Permit #73.

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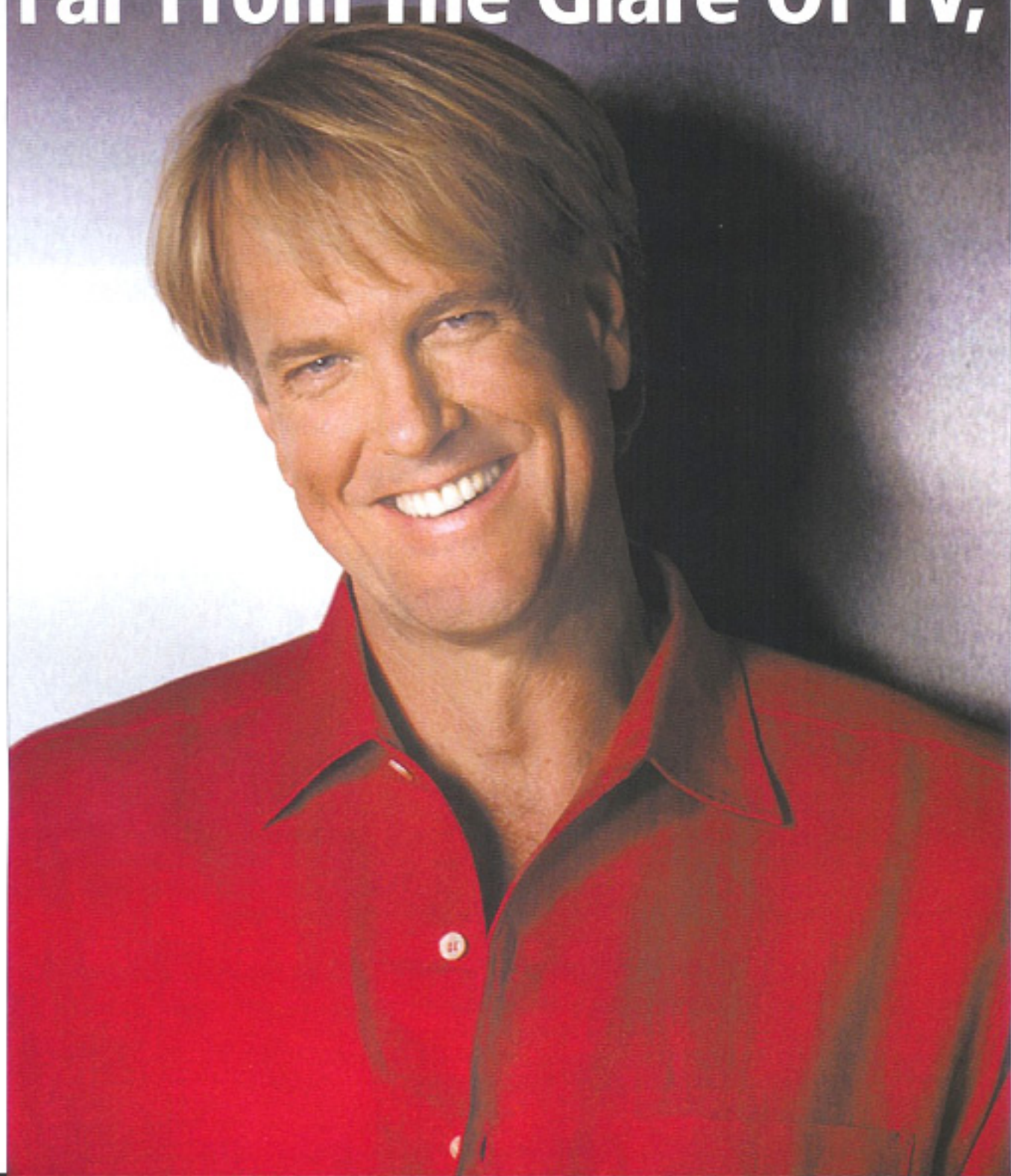
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Far From The Glare Of TV,



John Tesh

Has Found A Purpose-Driven Life

By Reed Bunzel, Editor-in-Chief

What's a man to do when he's the host of a wildly successful daily television program, married to a lovely and talented actress, father to baby girl, and a fixture in such venerable check-out line publications as *People* and *TV Guide*? If you're John Tesh, you do the unexpected: You toss in the television towel, sit down at a nine-foot grand piano, and take your show on the road — literally.

That scenario played out for Tesh in 1996 when, after 10 years as co-host of *Entertainment Tonight*, he surprised his many fans by leaving the highly visible position to pursue a career as a full-time musician. "The only thing that made me come alive when I was a little kid was playing music," he recalls. "When I'm on stage playing a grand piano, I feel useful, because people connect to it."

The decision to leave *E.T.* was hardly rash or impulsive; in fact, he says it was driven by an inner need to do more with his life than read celebrity birthdays on the air. Even during those years when he was smiling for the camera every day, Tesh found time in the day to work on his music. While many in his TV audience were unaware of his fondness for the piano, he played a limited number of concert dates — which ultimately led to one cathartic evening in the Colorado Flatirons. "Ten years ago, in a driving rain storm, with my wife and two-month-old daughter in the audience, my life changed forever at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre," Tesh remembers. "The public

television program we filmed that evening went on to become one of PBS's most successful fund-raising specials ever, and it enabled me to make a giant leap out of television and into the world of music — my first love."

Once free of his daily television commitments, Tesh nurtured his entrepreneurial side, and developed a radio program that has made him one of the most-listened-to voices on the air. The *John Tesh Radio Show* focuses on "Music and Intelligence For Your Life," providing listeners with guidance and information they can use on a daily basis. The concept has proven so powerful that many listeners prefer his show over television. "I'm at a time in my life when I want my own personal reality show to be aimed at helping others," Tesh says. "Planting seeds and encouraging people with the program and my music is a method with which I am truly comfortable. 'Music and Intelligence For Your Life' is a safe haven for family listening. Children, men, and women of all ages can gain something from the show."

An advocate for the power and encouragement found in worship music, Tesh's three recent releases — *A Deeper Faith*, *Christmas Worship*, and *Power of Love* — all were hits on the *Billboard* Pop and Christian Music charts. He has won six Emmys, two Grammy nominations, and an Associated Press Award for investigative journalism. When he's not out on the road with his grand piano, he lives in Los Angeles with his wife, actress Connie Sellecca, his 11-year old daughter Prima and 23-year-old son Gib.

For *Radio Ink's* third-annual Readers' Choice Award issue, Tesh shares his thoughts on life, purpose, Christianity, and the power of music.

People know your work on *Entertainment Tonight*, your piano compositions, and your radio show. How did you end up working in such varied fields?

To quote from Harold Whitman, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." The only thing that made me come alive when I was a little kid was playing music. I loved it. It was so important for me that when I played in my rock-and-roll band, I got so nervous I broke out in a full sweat.

But that's not what you did when you started out...

No. My whole life, I wanted to be a performer, but my parents made a decision for me. They were farmers from North Carolina, and they said, "You're going into textile chemistry at North Carolina State." I did what they told me to do, and a friend said, "I know you want to bring up your grade point average. I'm in a great

job at a commercial station, WKIX in Raleigh, which was the station Rick Dees was at. I made up a fake audition tape at the campus radio station. It was a newscast, and I pretended to be all the different characters. "This is John Tesh, you're listening to WKIX 2020 News. Here's Henry Kissinger talking about détente today." Of course, I didn't have an actuality of Kissinger, so I would slip into my Kissinger voice and say, "Today the White House did something that is so important..."

I sent the tape to the radio station. Two days later, I got a phone call from the news director, who was on speakerphone, and I could hear people laughing hysterically. He said, "Anyone who would go to these lengths to try to get this job deserves it." That was my first job in commercial radio, and I wasn't even on the air. My job was to show up on Sunday mornings and play the religious tapes. Still, whenever there was a fire, I was there with my Mr. Microphone filing a report. I was the first guy on the scene, so eventually they put me on the air.

How did you make the leap from radio to television?

I took a job in television in Raleigh developing the film, back when they

church four days a week. I got to the point where I hated church. To me, it was boring sleep time. When I got to college, I said, "Forget it — I'm not going to church anymore." I lived the hedonistic lifestyle and did whatever I could to get ahead. Believe me, that sort of approach doesn't make you a lot of friends.

When did you begin to see beyond that approach?

About 14 years ago, I met my wife Connie. We had lived similar lives: She was a famous model, and I was on *Entertainment Tonight*. She gave me a scripture that read, "What does it profit a man when he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" That's really where I felt I was.

For people who don't want the Christian explanation for the transformation in my life, it's basically this: I was doing stuff that made me happy and made me money, but I wanted to find the purpose in my life — what was in my heart, and what I think we've all been made for. I wanted to help other people, to be useful. When I'm on stage playing piano, I feel useful, because people connect to the music. This radio program is the most useful thing I've ever done in my life.

I'm not the focus of the show — the content is. It's similar to *Entertainment*

course called Television and Radio 101." Sure enough, there weren't a lot of tests, and it was really creative. I was bitten by the bug really badly.

Did your parents understand how severely that bug bites?

I changed my major without telling my parents, which I don't recommend. The whole time I was at NC State, I was in the practice rooms for hours and hours, playing piano and working on my songs. I just wanted to be a performer.

But you got into broadcasting instead?

I got a job at the campus radio station introducing progressive rock songs. This was when Yes, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Jethro Tull, and Grand Funk Railroad were all so big. After that, I got

didn't use videotape. One day, the anchorman took off for Las Vegas, and they had no one else under 70 years old to fill in for him. I went in front of the camera and worked the teleprompter with my foot. From there, I went to Florida and then to Nashville, where I ended up doing what I really wanted to do: record music and play in jazz clubs. Eventually, I went to New York.

Christianity obviously plays a strong role in your life. Have you always been a spiritual person, or did this come to you at a particular stage in your life?

I've lived both those lives. I was born into the Methodist church. I have two uncles who are Baptist preachers, my father ran the Sunday school, and my mom ran the women's auxiliary. I was in

Reading celebrity birthdays on television? There's not much of a ministry in that.

Do you think radio people understand the power of the forum they have on the air?

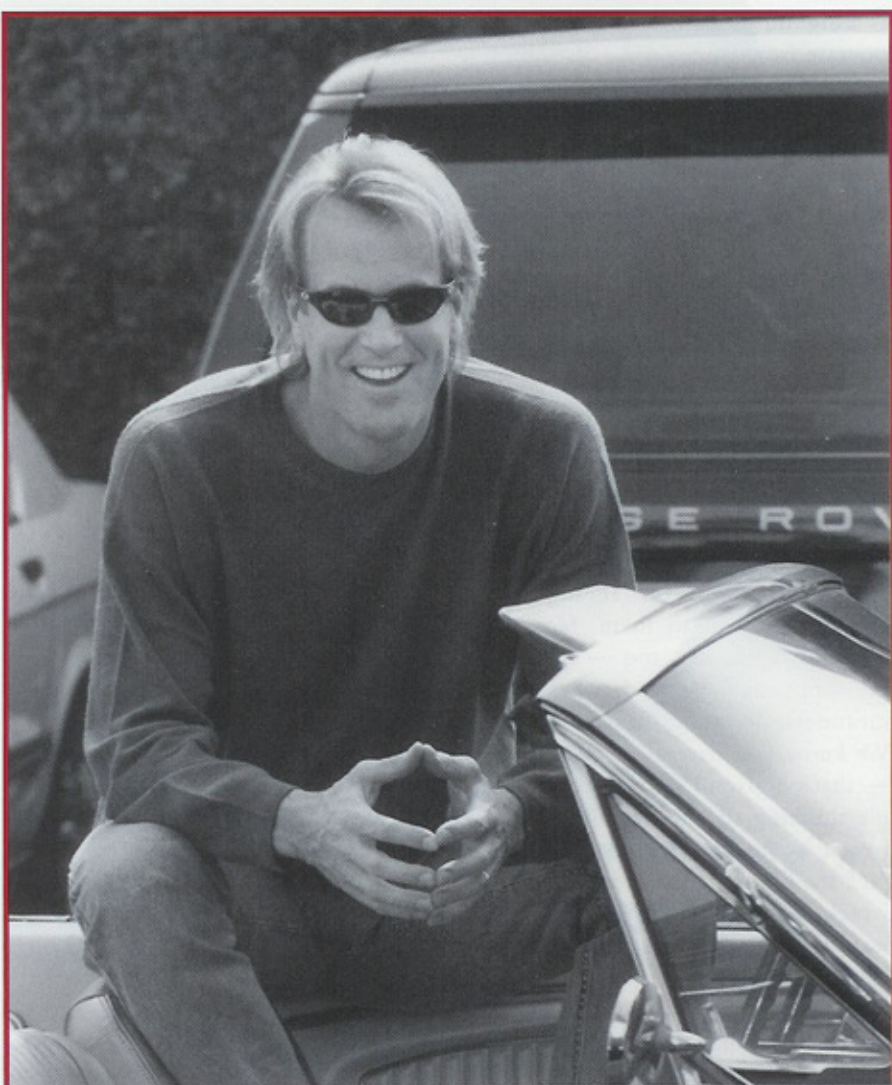
Not really. Not long ago, I had a conversation with Mancow in Chicago. I said, "You know what, dude? You're a smart guy. You have an amazing platform here — don't screw it up. You don't have to be conservative or liberal, but you have to be encouraging. Kids are listening to your show." I've had this conversation with Howard Stern, too, but all he wants to do is talk about your crotch.

Many people think of you as a Christian who plays great music and does a radio show. Others say you're a musician with a radio show, who happens to be Christian. How do you describe yourself?

I just happen to be a Christian guy. My belief — one of the basic beliefs of Christianity — is that I have a lot of work to do. It's not like Tom Cruise and the Scientology guys, who say, "You are in control of your own destiny." With Christianity, I am a sinner, and I have a lot of work to do. I need to attempt to live my life with great humility, and try to win the "I am third" award. That's the largest award at my kid's camp: God first, others second, and me third. It's really hard to do. The guy I'm trying to become is the guy doing this show. What we've created will enrich peoples' lives, even if it kills us. But I'm not trying to proselytize to anybody.

How important is it for you to make a difference in the lives of others?

The other day, I sat down in the make-up chair at Conan O'Brien's show. The make-up woman — who for five years has only said, "Hey, John, how's it going?" — told me, "You know what? I lost 10 pounds because of your radio show." She said her kids hadn't been talking to her, but she's back with them now. And I thought, "Okay, I'm done — shoot me through the head." The only thing I ever got on *Entertainment Tonight* was,



Tonight, in that I was never as important on that show as the content.

"Can you get me Phil Collins' autograph?" With the radio show, we find ourselves in a place where we're actually of use.

Where did the idea of "Intelligence For Your Life" come from?

My wife is a businesswoman; she runs a skin-care line, she's an actress, she's the mother of an 11-year-old and a 23-year-old who's moved back in with us, she cooks three meals a day. She's Italian, so it's all part of her make-up. I knew she was starved for information, because *Prevention* magazine and *Women's Fitness* and several newsletters were always stacked up by her desk, and she never got around to reading them. So I decided this show should be a newsletter on the air. I remember walking past the giant

newsstand at the corner of Van Nuys and Ventura Blvd. where there's literally a magazine for everything, and I thought, "Imagine standing in front of this newsstand. Suddenly, you put your arms out, and every article that you need for your life flies into your hands. Then, someone who sounds like me whispers it in your ear, surrounded with music."

Still, it's not a very sexy name for a radio show ...

I told [director of affiliate relations and associate producer] Scotty Meyers, "I've got this name for a show — 'Intelligence For Your Life.'" He did

an "ah-ha" thing that was less than encouraging. Executive producer Betsy Chase, who was doing our weekend countdown show, said it's way too clunky. I told them, if you say it enough, it will be great.

The show is on 200 stations now. What are you doing that works?

I'm not the focus of the show — the content is. It's similar to *Entertainment Tonight*, in that I was never as important on that show as the content. Of course, now the content on that show has gotten so disgusting that no one can watch it. But content

is king on my show — and we all operate from our hearts. I also think it has to do with finding that niche that nobody has found. It's a real statement of the times, where people are trapped in their cars and they don't want to hear the disgusting crap anymore. They don't have time to get the information they need to be a better parent or to quit smoking or to lose five pounds. That's what we do.

Do you focus on women's issues, or are some topics likely to attract men, as well?

There's no question that we attract women, but we also get a lot of men. In Hartford, we're on a rock station, which is amazing. We're not like those love-song shows on at night; we counter-program to them. Most men — and I'm like this, too — can't stand the sappy stuff. Instead, we say, "No meanness, no crying, and no whining. We know you have a problem already — that's a given." We don't want people thinking they're listening to a car wreck; we're here to tell you how to pick the best car so you don't have that wreck. The metaphor is strong: We want to make sure you protect yourself from the guy you're going to have a relationship with before you get into that relationship. As Rick Warren, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, "It's easier to stay out of temptation than it is to get out of temptation."

Reaching adults is one thing, but how do you target young people whose lifelong behaviors are just being formed?

Our Seattle station just got their trends, and they were so excited because they went from number 17 to number 3 with teenagers. I said, "Is that possible?" and the general manager said, "Absolutely. You started from scratch with these people, and there are no preconceived notions of who you are." Let's be honest: I was the guy on *Entertainment Tonight* with the PBS new-age-music career. People think, "Oh, please — it's the male Kathy Lee." Leno and Conan make fun of me. But I've been off *Entertainment Tonight* for almost 10 years now, so the teenagers who were 5, 6, and 7 when I left there have no idea who I am. To them, I'm John Tesh, the radio guy. And they listen.

Describe a perfect day in the life of John Tesh.

A perfect day would begin with an hour and a half of workout boxing. Then I would write music for a few hours, then do the radio show, and then go on stage to play songs with my daughter singing in the choir. And it happens — not every day, of course, and the concerts are mostly on the weekends. I love doing the radio show; it's compelling for me. But the one thing that totally makes me come alive is being on stage. This past week we did a couple of per-

“I am very careful not to do any preaching on the radio show. Based on what I say on other shows, people know who I am. I'm in a messianic church, so I understand Jewish believers and Muslims and agnostics and atheists.”

formances in New York — I love doing live TV, I love doing Conan. But being behind a nine-foot grand piano with an orchestra is really where I live.

Much of your music is decidedly worship-oriented — but do you ever just jam with your own music, or old rock-and-roll stuff?

We do a lot of different stuff. Later this month, we'll be at a church in Dallas, where we'll do both. I try to stay out of the churches, but we bring people in who wouldn't normally come to a church. If we're in Vegas, for instance, we'll do a secular concert at Caesars — instrumental songs, stories about family, goofy stuff about *Entertainment Tonight* and the Olympics. At the end of the concert, we'll say, "Listen — three of us in this band are in church worship groups, and we're going to stay for another hour and play some songs. You don't have to stay, but we're going to put the words up on the screens and have a fun time. This is not your typical church service; it's just us doing music. If you want to stay, it's

absolutely free." Maybe we'll lose 10 people. That's what our ministry is.

Do you bring your ministry to your radio show?

No. I am very careful not to do any preaching on the radio show. Based on what I say on other shows, people know who I am. I'm in a messianic church, so I understand Jewish believers and Muslims and agnostics and atheists. When we hire people at this company, maybe 30 percent of us are Christians.

How did the Sellecca-Tesh Foundation come about?

My wife will be happy that you asked. Six years ago, Mother's Day was coming up and I asked Connie where she wanted to eat. She said to me, "I don't want to go eat. I want to go to senior citizen homes, and I want to bring the mothers some flowers." I asked her if we needed to get permission to do that, and she said, "I don't care." That is so Connie. Now, since the kids have to do what Mom wants to do on Mother's Day, we loaded up on roses and went to nursing homes. We showed up and said, "Happy Mothers' Day." I ended up playing the piano, of course, while Gib danced with all the old ladies and Prima tried to teach some of the old men how to hip-hop dance. The saddest thing was how many of the women did not even know it was Mother's Day. From this experience, we realized there are so many people who are forgotten; that's why we call them The Forgotten Generation.

How did a project that started with roses end up with music?

Research on people who haven't spoken in five or 10 years shows that when they hear a song they recognize, they can sing along with it. That's what the hope of this foundation is. In the process of giving out the roses, we realized what music was doing. As part of this foundation, we decided to hire music therapists to go into these homes to perform Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett songs. Of course, when we're in there, they'll be playing us Led Zeppelin and Grand Funk Railroad.

Is that something to look forward to?

No. In fact, the idea scares the heck out of me. It's not fun to go into nursing homes. I think part of it is that we know that's where we're headed, and we say, "I'll get there — later."

If you did your radio show on television, would it have as much impact?

I think we could make this work on television. It would be a half-hour or hour syndicated show. We've talked about doing it the same way, with me on camera doing "Intelligence For Your Life," one- or two-minute things, and then playing videos, which MTV doesn't do anymore. But then I start thinking about how it would take me away from the time I spend on the radio show, which means it would take away from the time I spend with my family. I don't want to freak anyone out about the spiritual side of Christianity, but I firmly believe that God placed this show in my path to give me a voice to connect people to wonderful and encouraging information. I don't think it was placed in my path to make my life busier. If I take the next step to go back to television — which would be the tempting thing — it would be a house of cards.

What have you always wanted to try?

We were just in New York City and went to see some Broadway shows. I told my wife, "When the kids have left home, I want to be the singing dad on Broadway. I want to be that guy who sings, '...and yesssss, you will accomplish thaaaaat!'" I've been a Klingon, I've been the host of CBS sports and *Entertainment Tonight*, and I've reported on the Son of Sam killer in New York. Now I want to be the dad in a Broadway show. My wife just looks at me and shakes her head.

Do you think most people weigh the concepts of purpose and temptation when deciding what to do with their lives?

No. I'll walk up to someone I don't even know and ask what the deepest desire in their heart is, what makes time stand still, what would you do if you didn't get paid for it? Ninety percent of the people cannot

answer the question. It's scary. When you get to the point in your life that you figure out what that is, you never have to worry about money.

With so many different media and messages today, how difficult is it for a person today to identify who they are and what they want?

It's really hard. I just did a piece on how the average under-45 employee wastes two hours a day at work surfing the Internet for stuff that's not related to work. We've done

"I've been a Klingon, I've been the host of CBS sports and *Entertainment Tonight*, and I've reported on the Son of Sam killer in New York. Now I want to be the dad in a Broadway show. My wife just looks at me and shakes her head."

pieces on how dangerous multi-tasking is for teenagers. There's a great scripture in Proverbs 23 that says, "Above all else, guard your heart." Be careful about what you see and who you talk with, be careful about gossip, be careful with anyone and anything you surround yourself with. I know that sounds like Christian doctrine, but think about it: Kids who watch an hour or more of television a night are 30 percent heavier than kids who don't. Teenage girls who date boys two years older or more than they are have a 35 percent greater chance of doing drugs, having a tattoo, or getting pregnant. On the other hand, in families that eat together at the dinner table at least three times a week, the kids have a 40 percent better chance of getting grades above B. You can be as good a person as you want, but if you're in

the wrong environment, you don't stand a chance. On the radio show, we try to connect people to this information.

How have 9/11 and the threat of terrorism affected your spiritual outlook — and how does that come through on your show?

This may sound a little "Constantine-ish," but there are four or five of us in the office who practice spiritual warfare. We absolutely believe that Satan and evil spirits are alive on this planet. We believe that's what happened with 9/11 and the London bombings. People become compelled to do evil things. It is not okay just to sit around and pray and say, "God protect me." You not only have to command that the evil be out of your life, but you have to figure out how to make that happen. God forbid anything should ever happen to my daughter, but I don't just sit around praying, "God, protect my daughter." If I'm in a restaurant and my daughter wants to go to the restroom, I am the CIA. I walk into that bathroom, I check it out, I say "okay, it's clean." I'm sorry, but that's the life we have to live now.

We're affecting peoples' lives with this show, and I think everybody wants to be in that position. I just turned 53, and I'm thinking about what's going to be filled in between "1952" and whatever the end date on my tombstone will be.

Do you think most people worry what those "tombstone reviews" will be once their lives are over?

They should. I have a friend who's been behaving badly in his marriage. He has step kids, his marriage is falling apart, and he's handling it wrong. His kids hate him, and it's a big mess. So I said, "I know everyone has tried to do therapy with you, but you just need to think about one thing — and be selfish about this. How do you want to be remembered? When these kids get up at your funeral, do you want them to have something to say about you, or are they not even going to show up?" Ultimately, what is the point of insisting you're right when your legacy is that you were wrong? ☹