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Make Love, Make War; that's a strange title for a book by a confirmed pacifist. What's behind it?

The title comes from a puzzling picture I had in the middle of worship at our local church. I saw what looked like one of the scenes from the hippie movement; young people holding up a sign that read: MAKE LOVE NOT WAR . . . and as I watched, the sign morphed to become: MAKE LOVE MAKE WAR . . . and now it was no longer young people holding the sign . . . it was Jesus. It got me thinking that everything going on around us and inside us is all about LOVE (just like the hippies, we often focus on the wrong kind of love) and WAR. For some reason . . . a clever strategy of our arch enemy I'm sure! – our modern world tries to reduce our calling to be nice . . . which doesn't work so well in a universe that is in open rebellion with its Creator! It's true that I was raised a pacifist (One of the Anabaptist groups – the Mennonite Brethren) but I do believe that God gives governments the sword to restrain evil. Sadly that power is so often brutally abused. But this book is not about politics and pacifism; it's about our personal calling to be worshippers.

You've included songwriting tips at the end of each chapter so is this a book just for worship leaders or is it for a wider audience?

This book is for a wide audience of people who want to know more about what a life of worship looks like. It's full of stories – stories from my life as I have pressed into knowing God . . . and stories from our family and raising our 6 children including some with special needs. I share how and why my worship songs were written and what was going on in my life that led me to write songs like 'Come now is the time to worship'. It's also a book of conversational theology – I take people behind the songs to explore the theological foundations of a life of worship. We wrestled with where to put the songwriting tips – at one point it was in the back – but I felt like it would serve the worship leaders and songwriters better by connecting them to the song they emerged from.

In the book you say, "Becoming a worshipper means becoming a warrior". Some people might have a problem coming to terms with this so what do you mean by it?

Be a warrior is not about putting on some body paint and screaming as loud as you can! It's about doing whatever God gives us to do in the power of the Holy Spirit. I am a shy, thoughtful and creative person – and so one of the things I have learned is that God anoints all of us with different ways to invite and invoke the presence of God into the middle of any situation. I happen to do that as I sing and make music. But the call to be a worshipping warrior is not for a few who can sing and play a musical instrument; it's for everyone! We are all meant to step into our destiny as warriors by singing (God loves all of our voices and doesn't evaluate our performance!), declaring and praying out the truth of God and his word. What's so amazing about the Kingdom of God (and so many of the stories in the Old Testament) is that God's warriors are not usually chosen for their incredible physical strength . . . sometimes God's warriors are weak physically, but they know the fiery power of anointed intercession and willing obedience.

We have had the 'intimacy' songs and the 'justice' songs recently but is the church ready to enter a period of 'warfare' in it's worship again; is that what the Spirit is saying to the churches?

There is a great need for songs that stir our hearts in the battle . . . and to awaken our hearts to battle. BUT . . . I actually believe that often it's singing something like 'Purify my heart'. God's ways in warfare are not the world's ways – and so God's warriors are chosen based on purity of heart, not for the size of their muscles.

How different have you found the process of writing a book to that of writing songs?

When you write a song you gather up all the scriptures and information on a certain theme and then you try and reduce it to a few key phrases that you can sing. Writing a book is almost the opposite – you now have some breathing room. The real challenge is over a period of time to keep focusing what you are saying – without getting too repetitive. It was actually my wife Joyce's idea to use 12 of my songs as the structure – shaping each chapter around one of my songs. It was a real learning and invigorating experience and I still have much to learn. I hope I get a chance to do it again sometime!

You're a proud Canadian so how do you feel when people refer to you as an American worship leader/songwriter?

I groan inwardly a little. I have many American friends whom I love . . . but if I were given the choice, I feel more at home in the UK or Europe than in the US (and I can see the US from my home – I only live a couple of miles from the border!) Canadian culture is like a bridge culture between UK & Europe and the US. We understand both (at least we like to think so!) But more than being a proud Canadian, I am clear that I am a son of the Kingdom of God – so my allegiance and identity does not come from a flag but from my Father.

In addition to writing your first book you've just finished writing your first musical 'Prodigal God'. What's it about and will you be bringing it to the UK any time soon?

It's actually not my first musical. I wrote one in the mid 90's called Father's House. It ended with a collapse and we lost a 'boat-load' of money so it's a little crazy that we are trying again!

Prodigal God is the story of the prodigal son told through the eyes of the elder brother. Putting the word 'Prodigal' alongside 'God' has raised the eyebrows of a few Christian leaders. Did we write a musical about the God who went away and returned? Well no . . . one of the prime meanings of the word prodigal is 'wastefully extravagant'. We have not written a musical of heresy – though there may well be controversy over some of the creative choices we made . . . but then we would be in good company because Jesus stirred up stuff with the stories he told too!

My writing partner is Christopher Greco from Boston. We co-wrote the storyline inspired by Luke 15 and then I wrote over 20 new songs and Christopher wrote the dialogue. So that people can get a sense of what

the musical will sound like, we are currently offering 5 of the songs for free at our website: www.prodigal-god.com

You spent a period of time at South West Vineyard church in London in the 90s, have you any plans to visit UK in the near future?

I love visiting the UK – it's like my 2nd home since living in New Malden for 2 ½ years in the late 90's. I was involved with 'Worship Central' last summer in London – but at this point, nothing is confirmed.

Many of your songs have become firm favourites around the world but which is the most special song to you?

That's a tough question to answer – because for most of us creative types it's the last song we wrote because we meet with God in the creative process. Just this week I wrote a song called "In the bereavement of my soul" from the Dead Sea Scrolls along with my sister in law Dorothy Peters, a Hebrew scholar, for an event coming up in Toronto on Oct 31/09 (where the Dead Sea Scrolls are on exhibit). I have a song that I co-wrote with Paul Baloche called 'Welcome to the place of level ground' – I have sensed such life in this song and I think it's going to be a blessing to other churches when I get a chance to record it in 2010. It's the song that is most special to me now.

But of my known songs, Faithful One has to be one of the most special to me. Recently there was a Christian orchestra in the UK that recorded it – and my wife sat me down in my favourite chair and put it on without telling me what it was. It was an incredible feeling to hear the melody that I wrote in a time of personal distress being interpreted by an orchestra. What a gift! And what a gift it is each time one of my songs touches someone else – it's always a miracle to me as all I am doing is personally pouring out my heart to my Father.