

## PAUL BRANDT INNERVIEW

Talking to us from Calgary, Alberta where he lives with his wife Liz.

**Phil Callaway: My daughter is pretty impressed that her dad gets to talk to you.**

**Paul Brandt:** Well, I just finished your book *Making Life Rich Without Any Money*. I'm a big fan.

**Thanks a ton. It's great to finally meet you. Tell me, how did a Christian guy become a country star. You were raised in the church, weren't you?**

I was raised in a place called The Gospel Hall and it was very legalistic with lots of rules and regulations. There were no instruments allowed in the church, just a cappella singing. When I was 13 I started playing the guitar and, hey; I was a teenager, I wanted to rock. But my mom really pushed me more toward country music because as that time at least there was some morality attached to it

**There was? Did I miss something?**

Some morality.

**How did your parents encounter Christ?**

When I was about six their marriage was on the rocks thanks in part to alcohol. They went to a gospel meeting one night. My aunt was a crazy, "born-againer" who kept asking them to come and after the meeting she asked my dad, "What is it in this world that's worth holding onto? Worth giving up knowing that you will have eternity with God?" It really got him thinking. My mom came out to rescue my dad from his sister and she asked my mother, "What is God to you?" Mom said, "God is love." My aunt said, "What does that really mean to you?" And she told her a story. She said, "Imagine you had to go across the street and get some bread and milk at the store and you left the kids home alone for ten minutes. While you were gone someone broke into the house and killed both of your daughters. But Paul escaped. He was underneath the bed and the guy didn't find him. Two years later they find the guy and try him and convict him and sentence him to death. And the judge is about to strike the gavel and you say, "Don't kill him. Take my son instead." My mom said, "Why on earth would I do that? That's crazy!" And my aunt said, "That's what it means when it says God is love. That's what Christ did for you." It rocked her world. My parents didn't talk about it that night but they couldn't sleep. In the morning my mom got down on her knees in the laundry without knowing my dad was doing the same thing upstairs and they asked the Lord into their hearts. They met in the living room half-way in between and found out what they'd done.

**How did your spiritual journey begin?**

I was six when I heard about Jesus. More than anything he was my ticket out of hell. But as I got older and got into the music business, suddenly I wasn't going to church because Mom and Dad wanted me to. I had to decide what I believed and what I thought. And I found that my relationship with the Lord really deepened a lot after getting into the music business and moving to Nashville.

### **When did an a cappella boy know he wanted to play music?**

When we were finally able to listen to outside music, even Steven Curtis Chapman was risqué. It was pretty much Sandi Patti and the Gaithers. I remember praying at 13 or 14 years old and saying to the Lord, “I really love music and I want to play music, but because I’m a Christian does that mean I have to do music that doesn’t really sound very good?” I remember wondering if I be in the secular music industry and still be an influence on people’s lives? When I finally signed a record deal it started to become the catch phrase of “making a difference” and being positive. And I found I was making music that was really nice but it really didn’t offend anybody. Morally, it was like a cream puff. I ended up leaving the record label I was with and starting my own company.

I realized that unless I was making music and taking a stand both in interviews, that it just wasn’t going to matter?

What do you mean by taking a stand?

When it seemed appropriate and when it was Spirit-led, I began to take a stand in the name of Jesus Christ specifically. All it was if I didn’t do that was just really nice music that was providing people with a sound track while they’re on their way to hell. So on this last album we just really took a stand with that on tour, Liz was on the road with me as well and we put a song on this album called “That’s What I Love About Jesus.” It’s a very simple testimonial of why I love Him for what He’s done for me. We’ve never had more oppression during the tour. It seemed like a confirmation that we were doing something important because it was brutal—the things that would go wrong.

### **How do you mean?**

Nitpicky things that would wear us down and make us more tired. Little annoyances throughout the day, production problems, issues with things that we never had issues with before. I’m not a mystic. It was obvious that something was trying to thwart our effectiveness, which gave us even more resolve and made us lean on the Lord for strength.

### **How do you live effectively as a believer in the entertainment industry?**

I love people to have fun with my music. But we’ve become cultural gluttons really. It’s like people just listen to stuff and say, “Oh, that’s nice.” They’ll watch a movie and say it’s great. But they don’t realize there are certain worldviews that are being sold to them and they’re like sponges, absorbing those views. I decided to go out there boldly and let people know about my worldview. I was playing a small acoustic set one night and a lady stopped the concert right in the middle of the show. There are 2,000 people in the audience and she’s down front yelling at me. She said, “My son is sick, I have to take him to the hospital and you still haven’t played ‘Convoy.’” I said, “We’d love to do that song for you. And the crowd kind of goes crazy, a bunch of country rednecks. But I said, “Before we play, would you mind if we just prayed for your little boy?” And you should have all these cowboy hats coming off. I just prayed a really simple prayer and asked that God would bless this woman, that her son would get better and God would keep them safe. I said, “We don’t know why bad things happen in this world, but Lord, it’s not the way You designed it.” And just left it at that and went into the song. But everyone of those people left there knowing exactly where I stood. More than anything, that’s what I want. So this album has that particular song on it. It’s been an incredible album for us. Even the ballads reflect Christian values. The Bible says God has written eternity on the hearts of men. We need to present unbelievers with the truth. And if they get it, it gives you an open door to explain to

them why it filled the hole, why that mattered to them. Movies like “Star Wars” translate because there’s the epic battle between good and evil. Movies like Titanic work because he sacrifices himself for the girl. Unconditional love, it fills the hole. People don’t understand why it’s doing that, but when we can open their eyes it can be a great vehicle.

**Won’t it be amazing in eternity to see how God weaved all these influences together?**

I feel this movement of tolerance has just overtaken our culture so much. Logic isn’t even a basis to start from any more. I think it’s up to us as Christians to take that way of thinking and put it back in people’s faces again. If you do tolerate, then why it is that you can’t tolerate Jesus? Why is He the one figure that people can’t seem to quite tolerate? And to do it with boldness, not in an in your face apologetic kind of way, but really it’s only logic. And I’ve found that getting into those discussions with non-Christians is a lot easier than I dreamed it would be because for a lot of them, their tolerance is reflecting a lack of conviction with anything. If you can kind of get inside of that a little bit, it’s a great opportunity to share what you believe. I feel like I want to that through my music and through this art of performing.

**Don’t you think people are tired of emptiness? That they’re hungry to know that somebody stands for something?**

**Have you found it difficult at times to keep your testimony in the music business?**

Since leaving the label and starting my own it’s been easier. I remember being with a major label and at that time labels were investing so much money in artists, they’d spend a million dollars on the artist before they were even on the radio, they’d spend so much just getting everything set up and for that they expect complete loyalty. I can’t count the number of times I heard, It doesn’t matter if you don’t like the song or agree with it; you’re an actor, go sell it. As a Christian I realized I was a slave to something I wasn’t supposed to be enslaved to. The only thing I’m supposed to be a slave to is Christ. And here were these people trying to exert control over what I thought He wanted me to do. I was only 23 years old, I didn’t understand a lot of this stuff, I didn’t have any background in business or being in public. So it was a real learning curve and God gave a lot of grace and protected me from so many things when I look back on it now. But it’s a bit of a tight rope walk because you’re constantly evaluating, how am I coming across to the public. When I say this, what does it say to people? Where’s the line between good humor and taking it a little too far? Those are difficult things to try and figure out and I think the only way I’ve been able to get through that is with the support of my wife—she’s an extremely logical person and she’s great at seeing things for what they are and she’s helped me through a lot of those things. And having friends I can be accountable to and throw ideas past them and say what do you think of this? If I want to sing this song, what issues do you see coming from it? Anyone who wants to do something without compromise is going to run into times when it’s difficult. You’ve decided you’re going to do things a certain way and that costs you. You give up certain things for having principles a lot of the time. We came out in 1996 with the top selling new male artist album in Billboard Magazine—a top 5 and a number one single, the first Canadian male artist to top the chart since Hank Snow. I was at the top of the game. I understand what it takes to be there and after experiencing it and seeing it I realized as a Christian there are certain things I don’t want to do and that pulls me out of the game sometimes. And that’s scary because that’s your livelihood. But the Lord has always been faithful and He’s proven to me time and time again that He doesn’t need man’s ways to make things happen. Even after leaving the label I

stood on the stage at the Canadian Country Music Awards as the host in front of 70 million people and won Album of the Year for a live acoustic record. That's not the way it happens. I stood there waiting to go out and receive this award and I never felt so humbled in my life because I knew I had nothing to do with it. What a freeing thing to be able to walk out there and thank Jesus for the provision and for the grace that He gave that project and my career. It's just amazing!

**How do the big labels respond to that?**

I don't know. The music business right now is kind of the wild west in a lot of ways. Since the Internet it's really decentralized a lot of the labels and the control they had. So I think that they were scrambling a bit too much to notice little old me. It was pretty cool to go out there blindly in faith with no idea what I was going to do or how I was going to do it, but I said, "Lord, I know you created me to influence people. They listen to me when I talk and they listen to me when I sing, and you gave me the ability to make music, so I'm going to go do that to the best of my ability and you need to take care of the details." So that was the prayer that Liz and I prayed and He answered. On a major label on the first album I sold about a million albums worldwide. On my first record on my own label I only sold 40,000 copies. But I made more money. And I got to do what I wanted to do and I got to say what I wanted to say and He's freed me to do that.

**How have you dealt on a practical level with some of the pitfalls of success that come along with this? What has really helped you in that regard?**

My wife and friends from church are really good at keeping that in check for me and letting me know when I'm taking too much of the credit for myself. I don't like to hear that message, but they're faithful in giving it to me. The other thing is that things get really complicated really quick and start to stress me out a lot when I'm not being focused on being in the Word. Even ten minutes a day, as slack as that sounds to a lot of people it's an opportunity for the Lord to speak to you and for you to be in relationship with him. And you can't trust him if you don't know him. We need to get to know who he is as much as our finite minds can. After he came back from the grave Jesus purposefully left and sent his Spirit so that he could heal us when we're sick through our brothers and sisters because he resides in us. That's why we need to be community as Christians and that's been a big part of it to me, letting my brothers and sisters in Christ be Jesus to me and ministering to me.

**How hard is it to be part of a local body when you're on the road a lot?**

Really difficult. We recently moved back to Calgary, Alberta. But we found it more difficult in Nashville where we lived for 9 years. It was a very isolating place. The Lord taught us some really important lessons about community while we were there and I think the way he did it was we got so isolated there both because of my job and because we just found it difficult to get plugged in to the culture there. And he withdrew community from us so much so that we hungered after it and really resolved that whatever it took, we would get involved in a small group and have a core group of people that we were accountable to and could just hang out with. Now that we have moved back here we are getting involved with a group at our church. We just had our first meeting the other day. It's about setting that time aside and saying this is important to me so I can't work that night. I've got to be in town. That's very hard to do in this business and I'm constantly struggling to find balance.

**You have a line in the song “This Time Around,” that says “like an hour glass that can never be turned again.” Explain why you wrote that.**

I was a registered nurse for a couple of years before I started in the music business. I cared for a young girl who had cystic fibrosis and died right around the time I stopped working at the hospital and started into my music career. And because she knew that her time was limited, she just had such a passion to experience life and experience it deeply and richly. That really influenced me because I realized when I was taking care of her that I really was no different. We all only have a small amount of time and we never know when it’s going to be done. Being in that profession brought that to the forefront with me. Time is so precious. The world takes that to mean you go out and live recklessly. But there is something to getting out there and experiencing this wonderful opportunity that God has given all of us. That little girl taught me that lesson really well.

**How have your priorities changed since you started in this?**

I’ve never done anything that has challenged what I believe more than this job. When you go out there to live your life you’re doing it in front of a camera. Everyone’s watching you and seeing if you are who you say you are. That can be a huge load but it also makes you take what you believe very seriously because when you go out there everyone sees what you’re doing. I didn’t understand that as much when I was 23, but as time has gone it’s been impressed on me more and more just how responsible I am for how I’m influencing people and that’s become a huge priority for me.

**Are there Christians who are critical of you for being a secular musician?**

For the most part I’ve had extremely positive reactions from Christians. Once they really stop and take a listen to what it is I’m doing and the spirit I’m doing it in, they’ve been very, very supportive.

**Are there things you feel you can do in the so-called secular music industry that you just can’t do if you are limited to Christian music?**

My wife is a musician as well and she has a real passion for ministering to the church through music. I think that my passion has been more about influencing people in the non-Christian community and show them why my life is different. I think there’s a place for both of them. The Christian music industry primarily ministers to the church and that’s great. But music in general is an incredibly spiritual thing. The first time it’s even mentioned in the Bible, it was created for worship. And when I get up on stage and play the first three notes of “Convoy” and walk into the audience, I see a charismatic church in that audience. They’re all raising their hands and they’re worshipping, you know what I mean? And as a Christian I look at that and think, Man, where am I going to point the praise? Because they’re pointing it at me; I need to figure out a way to turn that around in what I’m doing. So I really think from a grander scheme, being a Christian in the secular music industry is not only a way to influence people; it’s a way to reclaim music for what it was created for. The enemy wants to take everything and distort it and twist it, whether it’s food or sex, or whatever, all these good things God created he wants to twist and make into something it’s not supposed to be. I hope the Lord uses me to redeem something that’s gotten badly off track, whether that is in the Christian industry or the secular industry.

**Do you ever see yourself doing a gospel album?**

Yeah, it would be really cool to do that. That's the music, the traditional hymns, that I grew up on. Historically in secular music artists used to do that all the time and it's become less and less popular. I've thought a lot about it and I think it would be really fun.

**I've called my books 10-ounce missionaries. How do you see your CDs?**

I'll be going to Belize with Samaritan's Purse in December to deliver shoe boxes. My albums are like shoe boxes. Those Christmas gifts are a way to bless people, to give them something that brings joy and fun and excitement to them and it provides an opportunity to tell them why you did it. That's what I hope, that when people unwrap this album, they'll find all the joy and the fun and the goofiness, but when they hear "What I Love About Jesus" they see the joy that's in my life and where it comes from.

**What is it that you love about Him?**

I just kind of take all these misconceptions that people put on someone in my position, like they're a self-made man living life to its fullest, and I shatter that. I'd be nothing without him, without his love. What I love about him is that he loved me so much that he died for me and that's just the beginning. How do you describe what a best friend means to you? It's the way He hears my problems and answers my prayers and the way He gives His love unconditionally.

**When you strip away the trappings of success, what really matters to Paul?**

A semi-religious Jew asked me about my motivation. I think we all have motivations for loving our family better and making a living and supporting them and all those things. I said, well, I'm a Christian and the command that Jesus gave us before he left us to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love him with all our hearts—that's my motivation. I must keep that at the core of what I do. When I make that the center of what I'm doing my life seems so simple. It all just kind of comes together and the creative juices start to flow and everything happens the way it's supposed to.

**What would you like to be remembered for when the last song has been sung?**

For a long time I thought that a legacy was about having your name on a room at the Children's Hospital or being remembered for the money you raised for some great cause. But the legacy of all Christians should be that they pointed people to the Lord. That's how I want to be remembered.