

Interview with Peter Furler November 2004

After five million career sales, 19 No. 1 hit singles and continual record-breaking attendance at concerts, the four-time Grammy nominated group *Newsboys* is finally attracting mainstream media coverage. But it's obvious after only a few minutes with songwriter and front man Peter Furler that his life is not defined by accolades but by a profound adoration for Christ. The changes in Peter's personal life over the last few years have undoubtedly served as an impetus for the *Newsboys* latest CD *devotion*, a thought-provoking combination of new worship songs. In this interview with *Servant*, Peter talks with Phil Callaway about the struggles of his marriage, his career, and his faith.

Servant Magazine: Hi Peter. We really appreciate you doing this interview; I know this is a busy time for you, that your new tour starts tonight. Servant is a ministry of Prairie Bible Institute in Alberta, Canada. Where are you living?

Peter Furler: In Franklin, Tennessee, just out of Nashville.

Well, congratulations on the new album and the upcoming tour.

Thanks. We're just heading back to the venue now. We don't normally sound-check that much but we're checking today because we're throwing in some new songs off the CD.

How would you characterize the album?

I guess from a stylistic standpoint it's a little more up-tempo than *Adoration*. It's a little bit more cohesive and definitely it has more continuity. *Adoration*, you had a couple of live songs and I don't think you'd call it experimental but we were definitely dipping our feet in the waters, you know. *Devotion* didn't really feel like we were making another record; it felt like it was just a continuation. We weren't trying to model anything from our past. We just recorded what we felt like recording.

I read somewhere that the Newsboys "have less flash, more content" now. Is that accurate?

I don't know. I think sometimes content can be more flash, you know what I mean? So I'm not sure. More content? I would hope so.

Are you finding that those who bought your early music are staying with you through this?

Yeah, we've definitely found that. That's probably the one thing that surprises me most about the band is that it has a very loyal following. It's strange because a lot of times there'll be bands that have had mainstream success and we'll be playing the arena and they'll be playing the theatre down the road. It's just because we do have a real loyal following. Over the years it's sort of grown. I think we're finding now that rock and roll's growing old. It's in an interesting place in history. When it first came along it was huge but now the youth have grown old, some of them

are 60 years old. You've got the Rolling Stones on stage still rocking out, so it's a family sport. We're seeing a lot of that. A lot of moms and dads and kids. And a lot of them who were fans of the band 18 years ago at 15 or 20 years old, now they're in their late 30s and on, we're seeing them with their kids at the show. Maybe that's across the board, maybe it's not just *Newsboys*. But I think we are music that appeals to a wide range.

When someone comes to a *Newsboys* concert are they going to hear some of the original tunes?

Yeah, there's stuff from ten years ago and ten days ago. A little bit of both. We enjoy playing the songs that people have enjoyed. We're not going on stage just to play what we want to play. The songs that we're playing, we're enjoying and they happen to be sort of hits down through the years. Some bands stay away from the hits. We've found that the hits are actually the most pleasant to play, which is good.

Well, you've had a whole lot of them through the years and it's wonderful, the doors that have opened to you. I was going to ask you about the topic of *devotion*, the title of your album. Was there a particular time in your life when you were driven to your knees in devotion, or a major spiritual change in your life?

Yes, it's probably been in the last four years. You can believe that Jesus is the way but your life's really lost and you believe He's the truth but you don't have as much truth in you as you need. And you can believe He's the life but you're not really living the life He called you to and your life is not that much different than anybody else. I don't mean better or worse, you just don't look that much different than anybody else. And that's kind of where I was, even though I was in a Christian band and that takes a toll on relationships and your family. So it got to a point where the toll was too hefty. It was one I couldn't afford on every count. I guess you come to a place where you fall to yourself or you fall at the feet of Jesus. So for me it was not just a matter of needing a revelation of why Jesus came but four years ago I found I didn't really have any foundations in my life even though I grew up in the church. So every time a storm would come, my foundation was really built on sand and like the Word says you'll be swept about and swayed by people's opinions and swayed by yourself and all the things like battles in your mind and being subject to your imagination. That person doesn't have the Word in their life. The Bible is something I didn't have. I respected it but I really didn't have a knowledge of what it was there for. So I began to ask God for that, to lead me and guide me in that. There are some things He loves to give and grants us swiftly and a love of His Word is one of them. Revelation of His Son is another. So as I started going through the Word and applying it to different parts of my life, I found it was living and active. I started to realize that I really wasn't walking in fellowship with others and I didn't have a spiritual family and He led me to that. Things started to change and I began to see how the Body works together and why there's so many people running from it. Not unbelievers, but people running from

the great things God has because it's scary and you have to really let go of every part of yourself to find it.

How much running away from the faith has to do with us as believers and what we model?

Well, that's exactly it, really. Jesus said to go into all the world and make disciples in every nation and we need to ask ourselves how are we following? We always wonder if we can trust God. Well, I think it should be, Christians, can we trust you? Are you worth following? Do people see your faith being lived out? That doesn't mean you've got to be walking around with your nose in the air. It's a vibrant life led by the Spirit of God. That Spirit unifies people and leads and guides them and those who have a knowledge of the Word and a relationship with Him. We started to see that happen within the band. God moves corporately, it's not just us, and we'll cause others to push through to see what's on the other side of just basic Christianity. They'll push through to see if God keeps His promises.

What does true devotion look like, Peter?

Devotion means getting a little closer. It's the forefront, the first thing, the thing all your decisions are based on. You can be devoted to yourself, worried about how people see you and in the end you put yourself in front of God instead of just living to please Him and allowing Him to be the first part of your day, the one who goes before everything. That's really what it is, making that unconditional, there's no condition that comes before you and the Creator.

When you look at the current emphasis on worship, are you concerned that it may be another trend or a fad?

No. It will outlive Rock and Roll, I promise you that, because in the end in the Bible it's people singing Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. Rock and Roll has only been here for a short time and it's got more of a chance of just being a trend. True worship? Not at all. Don't worry. If it's a trend, it's not even real worship. That's infatuation or an emotional high. It's like coming down to an altar and walking away no different than when you came. We've had enough altar calls in America. We need to make disciples and the only we can do that is if we are one.

How vital is it that the people who are leading worship are walking close to Jesus?

It's really hard to lead if you haven't been there yourself or you don't know where you're going. It can be crucial but at the same time I believe even the rocks, all creation knows better than we do, so I don't worry about that so much. Jesus said if you're not against me you're for me and there have been times--I can remember when I first started out playing drums in a youth group. My life was in disarray and disorder and yet we were singing songs to God. He really looks at the heart, you know. You can have some kooky leader up there whose heart is not really there to worship God but there still might be somebody in that crowd who's taking it in. I don't really know, I think it is important. We're meant to be skillful, the

Psalms talk all the time about leading people skillfully. But it's not everything, otherwise it depends on man to lead you to God.

Are groups like the *Newsboys* just preaching to the converted?

Converted to what?

To Christianity?

There are so many Christians who don't know the Word, who are not in fellowship with other believers and have not found a spiritual family or had a revelation of why Jesus really came beyond that He died for our sins. So if that's who we're preaching to...Our goal is really trying to make disciples and to be worth following.

Is there any talk about the band pursuing a more mainstream music ministry or is that not where your heart is at all?

No, I really don't think about that. There's so much to be done, there's a really ripe harvest out there and so few workers, you know? We really have a heart for the church and its people and equipping them to go out to the mainstream.

What do you see God doing through your music?

We've seen people of all ages gaining a love for the Word and establishing a foundation in their lives. We've seen people recommitting their marriages; we've seen God do whatever He wants to do at any place and any time He wants. And it has to start with us too. We're seeing restoration. We're judged by our fruit and we're looking for lasting fruit, not just an emotional kick or numbers.

You admitted a few years ago that your marriage was in trouble.

We have no authority to be on stage if our family life is in a mess. We won't really have anything to say. I mean, I've never met anyone who was glad their marriage didn't work out. It's just not the plan that God has. I figured out the right reason to love one another is out of respect and reverence for Christ and what He has done, and you do these things as unto the Lord, for Him. You separate yourself in a holy way. So I had to find that, and until I did, things were a bit of a mess.

What helped you along the way?

Because I'd been out providing for the family, when I came home I thought that I was owed something. And really that's not the attitude that Jesus had. I had a real revelation that we can think we're loving people, but we're actually doing it for the wrong reasons, to get something out of them. We can love people because we think it's the right thing to do or to keep the peace. That's not the right reason. We're to love one another as unto the Lord and give up our lives and our little petty rights, not to get something but out of respect for our Creator and out of respect for Jesus and what He did. So that's what I had to learn. Our lives can be very selfish and it's about giving up ourselves and our ways and respecting our wives and putting them above our business and our ministry, not just because it's the right thing to do but as unto the Lord. In Ephesians it says that our prayers will be hindered if we don't treat our wives right. That was the essence of it. That's not a formula, but it's something I have to practice.

So there was a point when you felt, or your wife felt, that you weren't cut out for marriage?

I'm not exempt from the attacks of that same force that comes against everything that the Kingdom of God stands for, and a marriage is part of the kingdom of God. We're joined, and in God's eyes we're one. The word says, '...and let nothing come and separate.' Divorce is not restoration.

What do you believe now about marriage?

I believe that no matter what you're going through in your marriage, especially if you have children, you're better off to stay in that marriage. Do it even as a sacrifice unto the Lord and you will start to see mighty miracles happen in that marriage. You'll start to see it in the children and the next generation. It's about turning deserts into springs of living water...that's what that church is for.

How difficult is it to nourish a marriage when you're on the road, when you've achieved a level of success and you're in demand?

Well, you know what? It's actually quite easy because now it comes first, where before it didn't. I was putting ministry first, and thinking she doesn't understand, this is supporting her and putting food on the table. But that's not what she needs; she needs a husband. She needs someone to love her and cherish her and to be involved in everything and to know what's happening in my life because she's such a huge part of it. I had to put her first with actions. That means not just calling her four times a day, it means not touring as much and realizing that marriage is more important than music, than ministry, because marriage is ministry. A lot of ministers get tricked. That's why there's so much divorce in the church because we're deceived. I have a theory that a man is meant to worship God and put Him first and seek His kingdom and to love his wife as unto the Lord and everything after that is just so secondary. All these things will be added and I'm just not worried about the next gig any more, it's just not my priority. We have to have actions. So it's changed our idea of touring. Before we would do 65 shows in 90 days. Now I play Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and I'm home Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Four weekends and the tour is finished, just 16 shows. We've been leasing a plane so we leave about 4 in the afternoon and we're home about midnight from the show. It costs us hundreds of thousands of dollars a year but that's a small price compared. It's a principal. It's not my idea, it's God's way and we are just trying to be obedient to that. He's blessed us immensely through it. He's restored my marriage and it's been a tremendous year. It's a battle, it doesn't mean it's all easy, but now I have some biblical principles in line and I've just got to keep putting them into practice. Sometimes it's hard but I have to trust God that His ways are not my ways, they're better and He's got the A-plan. So I do that and man, He's opened up some awesome doors and restored my marriage where I saw no hope, to be honest with you.

If you could characterize your marriage before it was restored what would you say about it?

It was all about me and my rights and you don't know you're deceived in a lot of areas. And that was a classic, being in a Christian band and in a ministry and doing all these other things in the name of ministry. I was in the Bible every day, I was reading books, I preached on stage—it was crazy. I had a form of godliness but with no power. I had no authority to speak because I had no victory myself. Even then I was praying, Lord, lead me and guide me and draw me close to you and teach me your way. So we're seeing great things in our marriage that I would have NEVER thought could have happened five years ago.

Are you able to travel together at all?

Whenever she wants. Yeah, that's been an open door for her. She did travel with us for the last four years but being on the road is very wearing and she can get run down real quick and that's not good. It's really her choice. She knows she's welcome any time she wants.

Tell me something that you do to build your marriage or just something that you love doing together.

I'll give you an example. There's a book called the Purple Book and it's just come through our church. We're giving them away free, it's a biblical foundations book. It's not so much about what you believe; it's about what God says about what you believe. It's a book for everyone from scholars to children. And we've been doing that, we're sort of on a campaign for that. We're going through it every morning just to be refreshed and it's been awesome just to get into the Word and to pray together.

So you and your wife pray together?

Oh, yes. We speak about the things of the Lord. She's an awesome woman. She's not supernatural. We can build images to look up to, but often they don't really exist. As I've got to know my pastor better, this guy I've always seen preaching on stage, he's just a man and we can hang together now. So we can build up these idols in our mind but they're just images and we should throw them out. We're just real. Some mornings we don't really feel like it, but those are the times when we probably really should. It's a struggle, a battle, so this book's been really helpful. We have a prayer in the morning, give the day to the Lord, ask for His blessing for our family and friends and for Him to guide us and bless our marriage and that it would glorify Him. And we pray together again before we go to bed. It's not some big thing, but I wouldn't stop now because I can't afford to.

What would you say to couples who are in difficulty now like you were four years ago?

I'd say don't go through it alone. You need people around you who have people around them. There's no room for lone wolves. I would not be under a pastor who's not under other people. We have leaders and head pastors but my pastor walks with other pastors and has people in his life that he's had for 15 or 20 years and that's a sign of a man who's under authority. Jesus didn't do anything out of the will of the Father and He understood that. The centurion noticed it and Jesus noticed it in him. That's an awesome thing. That's not bondage, but exactly the

opposite—it's freedom. So now my wife has someone she can go and talk to if I'm out of line and that's freedom for her. Thank the Lord she hasn't had to use it yet, but we certainly could have used it four or five years ago. The first thing, I think, is you need to ask God to bring people into your lives and then you submit to them. If you're being led by the Spirit you'll know who they're meant to be and you'll surrender to them as unto the Lord. The first key is to do things for each other even if you're angry and you feel you're right. It's not about your rights. Jesus gave up His rights. He had the rights to call down the angels but He didn't. He gave up His rights for us. He's our model as husbands. When we give up our little petty rights, not to keep the peace but as unto the Lord, we'll see miracles happen. We have to trust Him in that. So these are the things I've found that worked. Get in that mode because you're going to have to live in that mode. It's not a quick fix. You know what would happen if we were willing to push through to the other side instead of heading for divorce and not knowing if we could have restoration? I have seen it happen when I thought there was no chance, no hope. God's ways are not our ways and He can do the impossible, but we have to do it His way, to walk in fellowship with other believers and to be men that walk in the Word and know the Word and be sons of God because we're lead by the Spirit of God. These are the things that we need to have and without them you don't stand a chance. You're going to be going from wreckage to wreckage. You're going to be causing wreckages and you're going to be in the middle of them yourself. So that's what I've found—not a quick fix but a new path. Few find it. We can have some basic principles but it's not enough. We have to be obedient to them and it will affect everything we do. It affects our children. We've got to think about this. A husband has been put in the life of a wife to unlock the keys of life and help her to flourish and lift her up and encourage her. Now I can see more clearly what the enemy wants and so I try to run the opposite way now and that's usually a good sign. You can accept divorce and be like everyone else, not restoring the desolate, not being a great father, not handing things on to the next generation—you can just drift along or you can get serious about it and find the true blessings that are out there.

How many years have you been married?

Coming up fourteen.

Way to go. As a traveling guy you're out there a fair amount. What steps do you take to protect your purity?

We walk in pretty tight circles. I'm not out here alone. It's as simple as that. I go through the same struggles as every other man does but I'm not alone in it so that's probably the best thing. I've got the sword of truth, I've got the helmet of salvation, I've got this armor and people to help me put it on.

How important is the church in your life and ministry?

The only hope for racism, and marriage, and poverty, is through the church. And when I say that, I don't mean it's not always how you've seen the church, or how people have seen the church. I'm talking about God's plan for the church and how

His order works. There will be many in the end who will say, 'Lord! Lord!' but Jesus will say, "I didn't know you" and so that means there are lots of phonies out there. But I think it's just about finding where the real salt is.

What's next for you guys?

Well, I can tell you this: We won't be up on the rooftops with our bags packed waiting for Jesus to come back; there's work to do. Our job is to restore and to be the pillar of truth and integrity in the world. The only way we can shine a light in this world is if it's really operating in our lives. That light can't be man made.

What has helped you in restoring the devotion to God in your life?

Having the knowledge of God's Word, and having it be revealed to me. It can't just be words on a paper. It's got to be alive and living and active in my life. It's got to be penetrating, dividing spirit and soul, joints and marrow. It's got to be judging my thoughts and attitudes, revealing to me that nothing is hidden from the sight of God, and that everything would be uncovered and laid bare before him to whom we must give account.

How much has accountability helped mature your faith?

It's huge. I've been finding men who not only offer me accountability, but really encourage one another to love more and to do great things. It's about knowing the face of Jesus on the earth. I've got men in my life that I just don't want to disappoint because I love them so much, and I've made a commitment to them. And my wife is starting to meet women who are great women in the Lord and are not phony. It's actually their actions that we're seeing first, and so it's becoming really cool. It's more than just sitting around talking about other people. It's how can we pray for this person...let's see if they'll come along to this study and meet together. It's empowering. Even if you only do it once or twice a week your life starts to change.

How would you define true success?

That I'm still married and there's a process of restoration in my life. That's real success. That I was devoted to the kingdom and God's purpose, not my purpose. My purpose is finding out God's purpose and doing it. All the other stuff's dross and it won't make it through the fire eventually.

How would you like to be remembered?

I'm not really sure I care that much, probably just by my wife as a great husband. That's as good as you can get. She's the one that counts

I appreciate your time. May God use you guys tremendously on this tour.