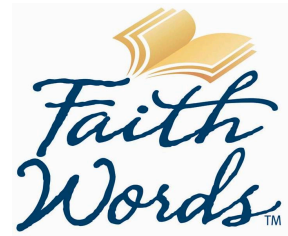


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From Prodigal Son of Fallen Preachers to Punk Pastor,
Jay Bakker Recounts His **Fall to Grace**
and Makes a Stand for Full Acceptance of Gays in the Church

Jay Bakker, son of televangelists Jim and the late Tammy Faye Bakker, recounts his rocky road from prodigal son, through lost years of alcoholism, to a profound understanding of grace in his new book, ***Fall to Grace: A Revolution of God, Self & Society***, written with Martin Edlund (FaithWords, \$19.99, January 12, 2011). Proclaiming the revolutionary power of grace to transform individuals, religion, and the world, Bakker makes a stand for extending Christian love and compassion to everyone—including full acceptance of gays and lesbians in the church.

Jay Bakker was 11 years old when his parents “set the standard for televised crack-ups.” Embroiled in a financial scandal at their popular PTL ministry, the Bakkers became a media spectacle, including being parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. Devastated, Jay lost his childhood faith and turned to drugs and alcohol. By the time his father got out of prison after serving five years of a forty-five year sentence, Jay was 18, a tattooed and pierced “skater brat”—and a raging alcoholic.

Fall to Grace tells the story of how Jay became a “grace fiend,” an evangelical punk preacher with a simple message for outcasts of all stripes: “I tried to please God by living up to the rules, and I couldn’t do it. But God loves me and accepts me anyway. He loves you too.” Today, Bakker shares this message as co-pastor Revolution NYC, a Brooklyn-based non-denominational church with a strong online following. He speaks to congregations, political rallies, and other audiences all over the country and has been covered by publications such as Time and New York magazines.

Drawing on compelling scriptural evidence, especially the writings of the Apostle Paul, Bakker challenges Christians to reassess their understanding of salvation, to put love above religious law, and to stop using “clobber Scriptures” to beat people over the head and drive them from the church. “I began to recognize how these old rules get updated to frighten and intimidate each generation anew, how they continue to drive many of us to feel we’ve failed completely and turn away from the church and even God,” he writes.

Preaching grace opened Bakker’s eyes to other kinds of suffering, and started him thinking about how Christians have mistreated the gay community. “If grace was real, then there was no excuse for acting that way toward *any* of God’s children,” he writes.

Bakker sees the divisive issue of homosexuality as a “grace test” for the modern-day church. “Just as former generations in the church had to overcome their ‘God-endorsed’ racist and sexist attitudes, so we have to overcome our narrow-mindedness on this issue in order to experience the full potential of grace,” he writes. In championing gay rights within the Christian community, Bakker builds on the legacy of his mother, he writes, recalling how Tammy Faye became a pioneer in extending an open hand to the gay community and became something of a gay icon in the process.

Though Bakker says he expected he would face opposition “from Christians who were deeply invested in a religion of fear, judgment and damnation,” he has been surprised by just how intense this opposition can be. He does not shy away from calling out Christian leaders such as Rick Warren, who cowed to political pressure and backed out of meeting with Bakker and gay Christian activist Mel White when they visited his Saddleback Church. “According to Warren, I’m a walking contradiction. I’m an evangelical Christian pastor. I believe that Jesus died on the cross, rose in three days, and that in doing so he forgave us our sins. But it is precisely because of these beliefs that I am compelled to stand up for my gay brothers and sisters in Christ.”

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In ***Fall to Grace***, Bakker shows that “with grace comes the inspiration to start living out the crazy, impossible teachings of Christ: to love God above all else; to love your neighbor as yourself; to love even your enemies.” He describes a “revolution in three parts: our understanding of God and religion; our understanding of ourselves as God’s children; and our relationship with other people and the world as a whole.”

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Jay Bakker, 35, is the son of Jim Bakker and the late Tammy Faye Messner, who ran the PTL television ministry until it came crashing down in the late 1980s. Bakker co-pastors Revolution, a church that meets in Pete’s Candy Bar, a bar in Brooklyn. The author of *Son of a Preacher Man*, he is the subject of a Sundance Channel documentary, “One Punk Under God: The Prodigal Son of Jim and Tammy Faye.”

Martin Edlund has written about pop culture, religion, travel and politics for the Wall Street Journal, Slate, the New Republic, and the New York Times, among other publications. He currently works in global health for an organization fighting malaria in Africa.

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