

Bridgeway Community Church
Series: Conversations of Hope
Interview by Dr. David Anderson with Israel Houghton
February 28, 2021

Conversations of HOPE

With Israel Houghton

Grammy winning Christian music singer, songwriter, producer and worship leader

DA: How did you come to know the Lord?

Israel: My white mother was 17 years old when she got pregnant with me, my father was black which created a whole lot of turmoil in 1971. She was counseled to get an abortion which she refused, ended up getting kicked out of her parent's home. When 8 months pregnant, a woman, total stranger, came up to her and told her "I don't know you but I just felt like I needed to tell you that Jesus loves you and that you're not forgotten." My mother had never heard that before but had heard the exact opposite! Right there on the corner of the street she prayed a simple prayer with this woman. My mother had been taking drugs while pregnant with me and the miracle is that she never touched another drug from that moment on. When I read Psalm 139 about being fearfully and wonderfully made, that I made it to day one let alone 40 plus years is amazing!

Psalm 139:13-16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

My mom married my white step dad when I was one and when I was 5 they went into full-time ministry, so I grew up a PK. I was black kid, in a white family with a Hispanic culture because of the neighborhood I was raised in.

I experienced the powerful presence of God at an early age and in high school really took my faith seriously.

DA: Who influenced your thinking about God and about your calling as an artist?

Israel: "Calling as an artist" sounds funny because I never set out to be an artist. I was coerced to play drums at a church with a friend who played bass and 9 months later the pastor asked me to become the worship leader there. I was 19 and have been doing it now for 30 years and I still love it.

DA: Did you ever get burned out?

Israel: "I think anybody whose done anything for any length of time with people gets burned out."

Tudor Bismark: "People like David and Samson made their biggest most gravest mistakes when they were tired."

"The biggest mistakes I made, the most regrettable things I ever did happened in a moment of fatigue and burnout and hopelessness. While you're giving hope to the world from stages...you feel hopeless. That's a terrible place to be."

DA: How did you get through your divorce...it had to be difficult?

Israel: By the time of the divorce, it was probably 12 years too late for a 20 year marriage even though peacefully co-existing. There wasn't a lot of turmoil when the divorce happened because we knew it was inevitable.

Yet in a public ministry there is a pressure for your lifestyle, livelihood and reputation to stay together and looking a certain way as a married minister(s), almost like part of a marketing plan. For the sake of our kids we were able to work through that and keep people at bay.

But it got to the place where I needed peace more than I needed a platform.

DA: Was there a time when God was NOT speaking to you or speaking to you extra?

Israel:

"The darkest times were when nobody knew anything and I am still be touted around the world as God's man of faith and power, the anointed minstrel."

Isaiah 50:11 NKJV

Look, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle *yourselves* with sparks: Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled— This you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment.

“It was when I finally brought truth to my world and said ‘I failed in my marriage’...that is when the familiar Christian cliches actually became true!

“I experienced mercy and grace that I did not know existed because I experienced them without anybody else’s manipulation or control of the grace or the mercy. It was pure, unfiltered God going ‘I love you’...just receive it.”

“In this season I’m in...nothing is cliché, nothing is a gimmick to get people to hoop and holler...this is God truly beautiful and faithful and kind and wonderful and I know it and I could never be talked out of it.”

“I wake up every single day...and I see grace in motion, literally everyday. It is one of those things that I literally don’t care if nobody else understands that. I’m living in it!”

ISRAEL ON WORSHIP:

“If you’re a worship leader...my end goal is to be looked through not to be looked at. On my best day I’m a lens to point people to Jesus. At some point, I’d love to be able to be forgotten on that stage and people going, ‘I’m connected to God right now and I could care less...who has a microphone in their hand.’...if I can just help people have an experience with God, an encounter with God, and I can get out of the way, THAT would be amazing.”

DA: Tell me your thoughts about these matters that Gracism touches on.

Israel:

Romans 15:1-2 The Message

Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. **Strength is for service, not status.** Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, “How can I help?”

When God answers our wild and crazy prayers that our music or our message goes out into the world and makes a difference, sometimes when those prayers are answered, we ask, 'well was it God or am I amazing?'

"Are we strong [Romans 15] to the point of serving others or to the point of posting online how strong we are?...We said 'we are going to be a ministry that gives more than it receives.'"

DA: Does your music cross those color lines and lift EVERYBODY up?

Israel: That's the hope! I feel like the last 5 years of political rhetoric as really set us back on those things we set out to do. But when I watch Bridgeway online and see what you guys are doing and modeling is both encouraging and prompting to see more people in that kind of church. I am hoping we can turn it around.

DA: Can you give the people at Bridgeway a word of hope?

Israel:

"What is 'we had church today' mean? It means you're connected to something that is healthy. It means that you're connected to something that is unpredictable predictable. Meaning, 'yes, we're going to leave room for the Spirit of God to move. We are going to be as fluid as we can, but we're not going to be flighty and crazy and petulant and unpredictable in a way that you don't know if we're going to be here next week or not.'"

I want to encourage Bridgeway members/attenders "that you're a part of something that has become so necessary, not just to the body of Christ, but to the world at large and to the community at large. When you can align yourself with a solid ministry with people who understand what's really going on in our nation, what's really going on in the soul of the foundation of a lot of our church systems...somebody that can cut through that and go 'this is really what matters.' You should breath and take heart that you're in the right place...you [DA] have done a good job of raising people to understand the difference between just attending church and actually be the church."

DA: What hope do people have in the year 2021?

Israel:

"I feel like there is new wine being poured out and everyone now has the choice to either put it in the old wineskin or allow God to fashion a new one this year. I believe ALL of last year was about God stripping away what we had relied upon so much...us falling in love with old ways of doing things and old methods of doing things and 'this is how church is done' is a gigantic mistake and a gigantic trap. I think what God has

done the last year...is stripping that way and fashioning something new. Those who are willing to let him fashion something new are going to see the greatest revival we have every seen.”

Matthew 9:14-17

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”