

# Good Little Christian Girl— but Never Good Enough



BY TARA JOHNSON

*In a visit to the Hardriders Biker Church near Little Rock, Arkansas, Plain Truth editor-in-chief, Greg Albrecht, met Christian singer, songwriter and performer, Tara Johnson. She shares a message of freedom in Christ from human expectations and demands with churches and small groups. Her own inability to say “no” and her addiction to activities—“doing everything for everybody”—drove her to the brink of physical and emotional breakdown. By God’s grace she was able to break free of her compulsion and find healing in Christ. Tara and Greg agreed that her story would be helpful for Plain Truth readers.*

I have a story to tell. You wanna hear it? Too bad, you’re gonna hear it anyway. My story is similar to a little boat out on the big, turbulent ocean. You see, I grew up as a preacher’s kid. One thing you notice as a “PK” is that we, as Christians, seem to pick each other apart sometimes. I don’t know why, but

we seem to delight in tearing each other down.

Growing up, I somehow got it in my head that God was happy when the church was happy. And in my mind, the church

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was happy when I put on a good, little Christian girl face. I smiled no matter what was going on and worked really

attention of lots of people in the church, but inside I was filled with a lot of resentment and a whole lot of anger.

Unfortunately, this people pleasing grew into a bad habit.

Before I knew it, it had morphed into the only way of life for me. I remember even being scared to say which foods

pleaser is that enough is never enough. I felt like I was paddling fast and furious and going nowhere. Nevertheless, I remained the "it" person in church: the first person someone asked to teach a class, work on a committee, scrub the bathrooms...you get the idea. I would do it all, while continuing with a smile and a mask of perfection.

### **The Breakdown**

In 2002, it all came crashing down. I was going to the



hard to keep everybody around me happy. I got really good at acting perfect. I caught the

I liked if it contradicted everyone else's opinion! The hard thing about being a people

University of Arkansas at Little Rock with a full class load, working part-time in the music

office and teaching two classes at my church. I was also performing for college and church events nonstop and was busy with numerous events for my church's youth committee, as well as teaching piano from my home.

Pretty soon I began gaining weight and it seemed like I could never get enough sleep. I lost interest in things that I used to love. I felt exhausted, worn and detached from everything going on around me.

After one particularly bad day, I had an emotional breakdown. My husband found me sobbing on the bathroom floor and I remained there until 3:00 a.m. I just couldn't do it anymore. I will never forget that night—I felt like I was drowning. The next day I went to my doctor—a wonderful Christian. I cried on his shoulder for a while. He told me, "Uh, Tara, you're depressed." I was shocked. I couldn't be depressed! Good

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I told the doctor, "Yeah, well, I know I'm pretty busy—but all the things I do are *good* activities." He smiled a little and said "Well, they may be. But *why* are you doing them?"

Time seemed to freeze as I realized that I couldn't give him a good answer. At that moment it seemed like everything I knew about my service for Christ capsized.

My doctor told me that he thought the heart of my problem was that *I couldn't say "no."*

He prescribed antidepressants to get the serotonin built back up in my brain (hey, my brain needs all the help it can get!). He also told me to read *Boundaries*, a book by Henry

Cloud and John Townsend. I highly recommend this book, especially for those who struggle with saying "no."

### **People-Pleaser or God-Pleaser?**

He also had me do something unique—study the Gospels, focusing on the way Jesus dealt with people. Did Jesus take vacations? Did he give until he

dropped? Did he try to protect people's feelings? When I studied from this perspective, you know what I learned? Jesus is not a people-pleaser. He is a God-pleaser.

The Lord had caught my attention. I realized I had been a hypocrite and a liar—acting one



way, and feeling another. I had feared telling people "no." I had feared their anger and disappointment—and I was terrified that they would discover I was not perfect.

***[My doctor] had me do something unique—study the Gospels, focusing on the way Jesus dealt with people. Did Jesus take vacations? Did he give until he dropped? Did he try to protect people's feelings?***

I was in effect telling God that what everyone else thought about me was more important than what he thought. I was so ashamed.

When I confessed this sin to God and asked him to show me how to please him, he began teaching me every day! I have learned so much about him and our relationship is vibrant and joyful again.

### **Learning How to Say "No."**

I am really good now at questioning my motives, and I'm learning how to say "no." It's hard, and it's something that I will probably always struggle with, but Jesus is showing me more each day. I am learning that my self-worth is not dependent on whether or

not everyone likes me. When God sees me, he sees his Son—I am beautiful and loved for exactly who I am, even with all my faults and goof-ups.

I confess my feelings to God openly now, too. We've all been there—somebody cuts you off in traffic and gets your blood pressure boiling. When something like that happened to me in the past, I would fuss at myself—"I can't get mad. I can't get mad. I'm a Christian and Christians are supposed to have self-control."

Now I pray, "Lord, I would love it if you would send that numbskull into glory! But if that's not your plan, help me to deal with this in a way that brings you honor and glory."

That's the difference. It's not like I can hide my thoughts from him anyway. I have learned that with my Savior, I am always safe—safe to bare my deepest sins and free to fly from that old man-made prison I used to live in.

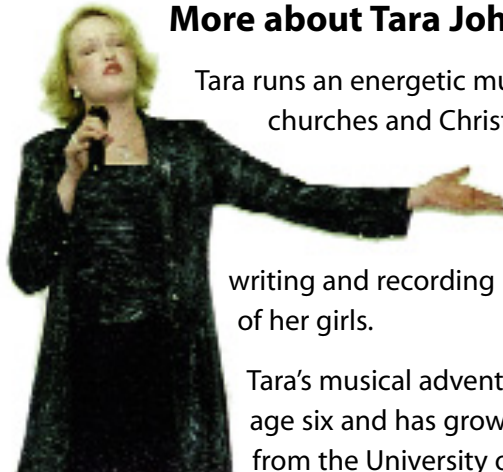
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In 2004, I signed with Incubator Records and Creative Group. I go from church to church, sharing my story, swapping some laughs and worshipping the Lord with other believers.

I have learned that my struggle is a common theme in churches. I have met people who were at their breaking point, who were "serving the Lord" with all the wrong motives—and even a few people who were suicidal and desperate for someone to understand their pain.

God is so good. He has taken

## More about Tara Johnson Ministries



Tara runs an energetic music ministry—visiting churches and Christian groups—sharing her personal story and her music. When she's not on the road, she is writing and recording music, and taking care of her girls.

Tara's musical adventure began with piano at age six and has grown to include a degree from the University of Arkansas and acclaim for her songwriting skills. Her candor with an audience and wry sense of humor makes everyone feel like Tara's best friend.

Tara explains, "The purpose of my ministry is to illustrate to believers that our actions are not as important as our motives, and only when we recognize and admit our fallenness can Christ transform our character and bring about freedom from internal conflicts that create fear, guilt and personal irresponsibility."

"Maybe you're like me, and you're tired and resentful from trying to do everything for everybody. Maybe you're a hypocrite and the only ones who know it are you and the Lord. Maybe you're exhausted from trying to be perfect. It's time to ask the real reason why you serve. Just ask, like the old acting cliché says, 'What's my motivation?' God's love is unconditional. No one is perfect and the amazing thing is that God delights in us, despite all our flaws and mistakes. You can have the joy in serving which you once knew. Ask him to forgive you for being a people-pleaser, instead of a God-pleaser."

If you're interested in finding out more about Tara's music, or having her visit your group, visit [www.TaraJohnsonMinistries.com](http://www.TaraJohnsonMinistries.com).

this terrible time in my life and used it to help others. Now, I get to tell others that God loves them unconditionally and that there is no need to hide anymore. □

*Tara Johnson lives with her husband, Todd, and their daughters*

*Bethany Faith and Callie Elizabeth in Alexander, Arkansas. In addition to her music ministry, Tara reads 2-3 books a week, enjoys basketball, aerobics, shopping and eating chocolate (almost to the point of gluttony)! Visit her website at [www.TaraJohnsonMinistries.com](http://www.TaraJohnsonMinistries.com).*