

Texans discover redemption in reality TV_22105

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Texans discover redemption in reality TV

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Jeff Johnson once thought reality television shows have no redeeming qualities.

Then he ended up on one.

Johnson, who leads worship for Crestview Baptist Church in Midland and for the youth ministry of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, auditioned for this season's *American Idol*, just to get "the experience."

He was so confident he would get cut in the first round, he tried out the day before he was scheduled to lead worship.

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That plan failed. He passed several rounds of eliminations and received a trip to California, where he competed against singers from around the nation. It was then he realized the show provided “an opportunity to be a missionary in a different way.” It was a chance to share the Christian message to millions of TV viewers.

Worship leader Jeff Johnson's appearance on American Idol opened doors for ministry.

Johnson was eliminated shortly after he arrived in California. But by then, he said, God had accomplished his purpose. The program showed him talking about being a minister and praying with other contestants.

“When I got cut, I knew it was God's will,” he said. “I had hundreds of people praying for me.”

Johnson is one of several reality television personalities with Texas Baptist ties who said their faith played into their actions on the small screen.

Jason Illian, who speaks to Christian organizations across the state, said he saw his appearance on this season's *The Bachelorette* as a mission opportunity.

He believed it was an opportunity to share a different model of doing relationships. Illian is most well known as the contestant who confessed he

was a virgin in the same episode he was eliminated.

"My friends who will never come to church, come to a Bible study, do any of that will watch *The Bachelorette*," he said.

A person's characteristics are magnified through the reality television editing process, Illian noted. Slight arrogance looms large. But if an individual demonstrates faith, that also is enlarged.

Christi Proctor, a Baylor University alumna and member of First Baptist Church in Lorena, takes a slightly more subtle approach to her faith as a designer on *Trading Spaces*. She shares her faith through her actions.

Trading Spaces is a show where two neighbors decorate each other's homes with the help of several interior designers, including Proctor. The pastor's daughter believes she is making an impact by showing she cares and by bringing people closer together.

"There are so many people out there who want to be cared about," she said.

All three Texas Baptists said they have received positive feedback about their efforts.

Johnson and Illian said they have received many e-mails and notes from Christians who support them sharing their faith.

American Idol also opened more opportunities to lead worship.

Johnson now receives more than 80 phone calls a day, compared to about two calls each day prior to the television appearance. He has done many radio interviews. He said God has answered his prayer to expand his ministry.

Proctor stays in contact with some of the people she helps on her show.

Recently, a woman stopped Proctor in an airport to tell her the show inspired her to remodel a room with her daughter.

"I love the people," Proctor said. "I have met some of the most beautiful people across the U.S."

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