

A photograph of Joe Praize, a Nigerian gospel singer, singing into a microphone. He is wearing a light blue and white patterned jacket over a white shirt, a gold chain with a cross, and a watch. The background is a purple wall with large white piano keys and a red and black musical note graphic on the left.

## "Gospel Music, the Hope of this Dying World" - Joe Praize

The gospel music industry has long been underrated by souls who lack in-depth understanding of the role of Christian music in the realm of the spirit. Many rate the gospel music industry as the same with the secular industry, while some cannot fathom the impact of godly music in our present day society. To enhance knowledge, *Livinghope Magazine* got one of Nigeria's 21<sup>st</sup> century leading gospel acts to tell readers about the 'Influence of Gospel Music on Nigerian society.'

Joseph Omo Ebhodaghe, popularly known as Joe Praize, is a Nigerian gospel singer, praise and worship leader, songwriter and music director. Joe Praize rose to popularity following the release of his hit song "Mighty God" in 2007. His songs are: *Mighty God*, *Alpha Omega*, *My Praise*, *All the Praise*, *Most High*, *Miracle Papa* and more. He holds a strong voice in the Christian music industry and had a lot to say in this interview.

Excerpts below:

**LHM: What in your opinion would you consider as a significant difference between calling and the choice of music career?**

**Joe Praize:** As the Bible says many are called but few are chosen. The significant difference between calling and the choice of music is basically the Holy Spirit. He is the boss. When there is a calling, there is a caller. It will be a very smart move for the called to find out the purpose of the calling. When you are called, the caller (GOD) will direct and instruct by his Spirit on what area to focus on. The difference here is that the Holy Spirit gives the order.

**LHM: There is no gainsaying the fact that you are a popular gospel artist. What are the challenges**

**that go with being famous in the area of calling as opposed to the secular career?**

**Joe Praize:** For gospel artistes one thing that is paramount, that I always tell people, is that you must see it as a ministry. When I use the word ministry I mean, something that you know God has given to you. Of course there are challenges in everything, in every kind of business or career you embark on there are challenges. In every aspect of our lives there are challenges but you see, challenges should not deter you from fulfilling purpose. Challenges will come to you because you are actually on the road to fulfilling or on the right part.

In a football match, nobody attacks the man that is not with the ball. It is only when you are with the ball that people attack you because you have become the target. Challenges must come, but how do we handle these challenges as they come in terms of being famous and the rest of it. You must not lose your cool. You do not build a house without a foundation. When your foundation is right you will always have a good structure. When your foundation is not right, you cannot have a good structure. So when you have challenges coming to you and you do not have a good foundation, you are going to give into pressure, into what somebody is going to say on social media and into what someone is saying even in your church but if you have a good foundation, that foundation is the Holy Spirit, the Word of God.

The Bible says study to show yourself approved. When these challenges come, you would not be overwhelmed. The truth is, a lot of people have been overwhelmed by situations that came on them. For instance, you could be someone who has been praying to God to be a superstar then the fame comes and you are not ready for the fame because you are not rooted and grounded in the word of God. There is every tendency for that person to give in. You never had one million naira in your account before and it came to your account because of your various activities, you may make the mistake of saying that it was by your power and then you begin to give attention to what secular guys should give attention to. It is one thing for us to always know that the Word of God is what we should always hold on to. When that becomes our foundation, no matter the fame, we would not be moved.

**LHM: Our world is full of challenges, most of which are traceable to lack of joy, though in the midst of happiness. How does gospel music come in to find a solution to the myriad of problems faced by mankind?**

**Joe Praize:** There is a difference between gospel music and other brands. Christian music addresses your spirit even though there is entertainment in Christian music. Remember a man is not the body that is why when a man dies the body is there. A man is his spirit. He lives in the body and has a soul. Christian music addresses your spirit, it affects your soul and it regulates your body. When people go through challenges of life and they listen to spirit-filled music it addresses matters spiritually and that which it addresses spiritually makes it

possible for us to resolve. Gospel music to me is the hope of this dying world, yes whether we believe it or not. How many people have you seen saying I listen to this secular music and I was healed of cancer? But there are testimonies I have received that say, I listened to this gospel music and I became healed. This is because they address these problems from the roots. What secular music gives to them does not address the problem from the roots. Someone will say I'm depressed, play me a song and you see them drinking and smoking. When their eyes are clear, they face the realities of life but when you put yourself in a place where spirit-filled Christian music addresses issues, you will certainly be strengthened to overcome your challenges.

***"In a football match, nobody attacks the man that is not with the ball. It is only when you are with the ball that people attack you because you have become the target. Challenges must come, but how do we handle these challenges as they come in terms of being famous and the rest of it. You must not lose your cool."***

**LHM: What is your description of your journey so far between when you started in 2004 till present? What are the notable challenges and how were they surmounted?**

**Joe Praize:** When you see Joe Praize on stage, you should expect spiritual lifting. It has been God all the way and we knew where we were going from the very start. We always make sure we release music that addresses issues so people can find themselves and personalize, not music that you just listen to and cannot really find yourself. I laid my foundation and knew where I was going to. My foundation gave me a better standing to handle the fame and challenges. The word of God taught me how to be prudent in my finances at the points that seemed there would be financial challenges. God taught me to plan and save.

**LHM: There is no doubt that fame goes with lots of temptations especially from the opposite sex. How has it been and what are your coping mechanisms?**





Joe Praize

*“As a Christian there are certain things that are expected of you. When you see the opposite sex as people you could take advantage of, that means you are not living the Christian life”*

**Joe Praize:** We breathe the same air with people who do the other kind of things but the truth is we are Christians. Some people will say, but some Christians do it. No! That some people do it does not make it a norm. As a Christian there are certain things that are expected of you. When you see the opposite sex as people you could take advantage of, that means you are not living the Christian life. But when you see them as your sisters, as people who God has given you to be a blessing to their lives it would not be a challenge to you. I have been in the gospel industry for over two decades, so I do not see it as pressure. Of course there are times that I have had to make a decision, it was not hard for me because I already knew what I wanted to achieve. When you take them as your brothers or sisters it will be easier for you to understand that these people are my persons. Just the way you would not want to take due advantage of your biological sisters or brothers, the same way you would not want to take advantage of a person who is a lover of your music.

**LHM:** How can gospel artistes play the role of agents of change especially in a nation like Nigeria and the world in general?

**Joe Praize:** For me as a graduate of Social Works and Administration from the University of Jos, one of the things that we were trained on was how to become a change agent and one of the ways I do that is through my music and lifestyle. The life I live tells more about my personality.

We must understand that we have been given the opportunity by God to be a blessing to our world and generation. We may go through challenges but because we know we have been placed in the position of a change agent, we look for ways we can reach the poor and affect the next person. How do you treat your personnel? How do you treat your maid in the house? How do you treat people you meet on a daily basis? These are the things we can use to effect changes. In view of the elections, I asked myself, how can I be a blessing to some people and I said fine, I am going to get a hand mail that can bring young people together so we can think of things to do that can better the other young person because the government cannot do everything no matter the promises they make to be honest. We are looking at how we can train people. Helping people financially is not the way to really solve the problem but rather teach them how to fish, that is our focus and that is why the Joe Praize support foundation is looking at training young people on different entrepreneurial skills.

**LHM:** What can you tell us about yourself that we have not known already? How did you come about the name Joe Praize?

**Joe Praize:** I have not told any magazine that our foundation is looking at training 100 Nigerians for free in the areas of graphic design, cinematography and special make up. I just thought how best can you change the lives of people, when you cannot give them the tool in which they can become entrepreneurs. I am not a fan of people coming to show me their faces and I give them money. What is most important for me is that I teach them how to fish. We are starting with 100 youths in terms of training. Imagine if a young person knows graphic design skills and he is in school, in situations where he has no money and he knows how to do graphic designs. It will help such an individual become independent. Nobody says you have to graduate from the university before you start making your money. We are starting the project next week and will select people that are really in need of these trainings. Joe Praize was a name born out of a lifestyle. It could have been Joe Worship or whatever but for me, it was a name born out of a lifestyle, and if you type the name on google, this is the Joe Praize that comes out. It is amazing and to me it is a name given to me by God.

**By: Anne Bassey**