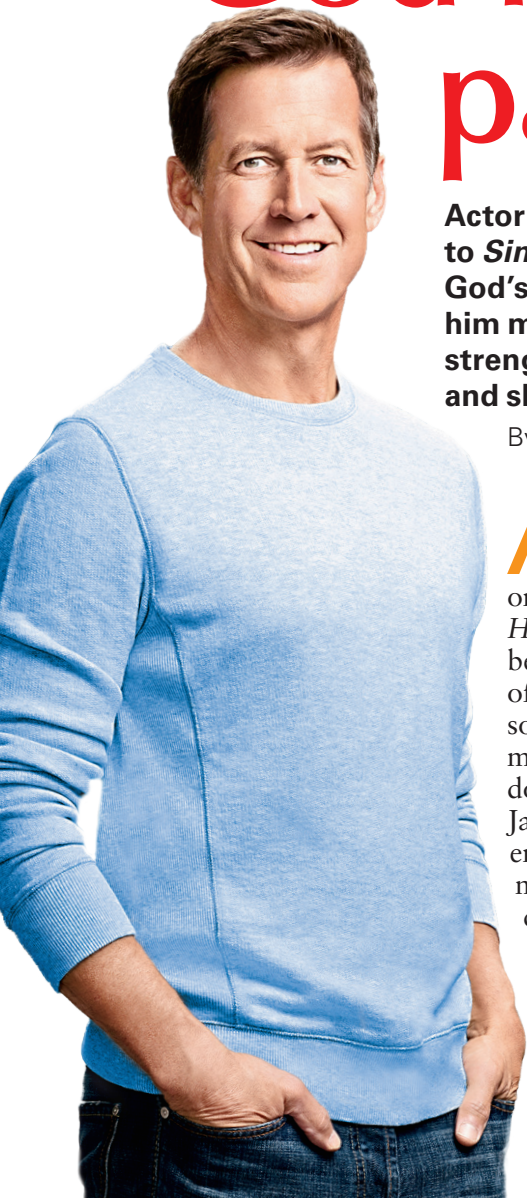


"God knows parts of



Actor James Denton opens up to *Simple Grace* about how God's love and grace has helped him make difficult decisions, strengthened his relationships and shown him true beauty

By Gina Roberts-Grey

After eight years of starring as the easy-on-the-eyes plumber, Mike Delfino, on the hit show *Desperate Housewives*, James Denton has become known for his portrayal of charming, handsome—and sometimes scandalous—leading men. But what many people don't realize is that the real James couldn't be more different than his on-screen ladies' man persona. Not only is he a devoted husband to his wife, Erin, of 15 years and a self-proclaimed "Mr. Mom" to his two children, he's also first and foremost a man with a huge heart for God.

the deepest my heart"

As the son of a Southern Baptist Deacon father and a mother who wrote for LifeWay Christian Resources, James says that God has always been a big part of his life. "I sang in the youth choir and attended church twice on Sundays—it was a very typical evangelical upbringing," he describes fondly to *Simple Grace*. "My parents didn't drink alcohol or curse, but they also didn't judge me if I had a beer now and then," he adds with a chuckle. "They taught us by being good examples—like Jesus did—and they made Him part of our everyday lives. As a result, as I grew, so did my relationship with Him." Here, James shares how his deep-seated love for the Lord has shaped the most important role he'll ever play: himself.

GOD KNOWS US BEST

In the five years since the finale of *Desperate Housewives*, James has starred on various television



In 2016, James had "the chance of a lifetime" to costar in *For Love & Honor* with his 14-year-old son, Sheppard

shows, including Hallmark Channel's upbeat series *Good Witch* (season 3 premieres April 30), and the Hallmark original TV movie *For Love & Honor*, alongside his 14-year-old son, Sheppard. James beams, "Working with my son was truly the best time of my life." ➤

➤ But James admits that not all the parts he's taken on have been family-friendly—some have even contradicted his Christian beliefs. “I’ve played a couple of characters who said or did things that I’d never say or do in real life, and I’ve definitely wrestled with that,” James shares. “Cursing or saying the Lord’s name in an unflattering, sarcastic or angry manner makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up. So doing that on camera—even if it was to support my family—was difficult to come to terms with.”

Through prayer and reflection, James was able to understand that his relationship with God wasn’t conditional on his career choices, but rather on the love he had in his heart. “I don’t believe God’s love for us fluctuates by the day, by the job, by the mistakes we make,” James says. “So those times I’ve played a not-so-squeaky-clean guy, I’ve had to believe that God knows my heart and loves me based on who I am, not the actions of the fictional people I portray.”

Looking back, James says he also came to realize that playing those unsavory characters may actually have been part of God’s plan. “I think art is a way to



James and Beth Stern cohosting the 6th Annual American Humane Hero Dog Awards in 2016—a project that’s close to his heart

hold up a mirror to society and reflect the good *and* the bad that’s out there, and God can use it for good,” he explains. While we all play many roles in our lives—parent, employee, spouse, church member—James says he believes that no matter what, God knows and loves us for who we *really* are deep down.

GOD HELPS US LOVE OTHERS BETTER

James hopes that his faith touches every aspect of his life and tries to make it part of his day-to-day in every way—especially in how he interacts with

loved ones, friends and even strangers. “I try to have my relationship with God shine through in how I treat people,” he explains. “My dad used to say, ‘Nothing matters but people!’ I try to remember that because it helps me be more considerate and compassionate. It helps me to pay better attention to people, how they may be hurting and what they need. I hope that love comes through in every interaction.”

James adds that this “love thy neighbor” filter is especially useful when parenting his 14-year-old son, Sheppard, and 12-year-old daughter, Malin. “I definitely rely on God’s incredible patience to inform how I interact with my kids—I need that reminder on a daily basis with a teen and a preteen,” he says with a laugh, noting that being a dad reminds him just how important it is to have understanding and grace. “When I see how forgiving, patient and loving God is with His children, it makes me try harder with my own kids to follow His example.”

GOD SPEAKS TO US

To overcome difficult and heartbreaking seasons, James relies on a specific way of praying: “As a child, I was taught to open a prayer with a recognition and thanksgiving and my conversations with the Lord are still shaped that way today,” he explains. “I’ll say thank you for everything I can think of—from the health of my family to the chance to coach my daughter’s

basketball team—and it highlights my blessings and shows me that things aren’t so bad.” Then James asks God for forgiveness

to start fresh with a pure heart.

Through this daily prayer combo of gratitude and confession, James says his relationship with the Lord grows stronger by the day and that he is able to hear His direction more clearly. “God mainly speaks to me through beautiful things and through my kids—they still have innocence and I see in them how I’d like to be,” he shares. “That’s when I feel God’s goodness the most, and I know no matter what comes, I can turn to Him.” ☯

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