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Michael Passons: Cast Out of Avalon, Now Speaking Out in 'Safe for the Whole Family' Documentary

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Safe For the Whole Family: How to Make a Christian Superstar"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Michael Passons, a founding singer of the Christian vocal group Avalon, was cast out of the group in 2003 - and 23 years later he is telling the full story on camera in "Safe For the Whole Family: How to Make a Christian Superstar". The documentary, directed by Jason Ikeler, premiered at the Nashville Film Festival in September 2026, and was brought to a wider audience by an NPR report on 25 November. Its general release is expected in early 2027.

Passons says his bandmates came to his house in 2003 and told him he was out. The group, its management and its label suspected he was gay, and the departure was announced as his choice - while he was paid to sign a nondisclosure agreement. He says his bandmates, management and label "conspired against him to protect their bottom line".

What followed was a long silence. Blacklisted from the industry he had helped build, Passons could not even get work as a church music minister. One of the film's most powerful moments finds him as an Uber driver, coming face to face with his old fame - a man who once sang to packed arenas, now driving strangers through the same city.

Michael Passons Avalon: Cast Out In 2003

Avalon was the defining vocal group of late-1990s and early-2000s Christian pop. The group scored more than a dozen Christian radio chart-toppers, won an American Music Award in 2003 and sold gold records. At the peak of contemporary Christian music - a billion-dollar business in those years - Avalon was one of its brightest names.

That is what makes Passons' story cut so deep. He was not a fringe figure or a passing member; he was a founder, a voice at the centre of the sound. When the group decided he had to go, the machinery around him moved fast - and the agreement he signed meant he could not say what had happened untill the film gave him his voice back, more than two decades later.

Ikeler, the director, grew up in a conservative evangelical family and began contacting the artists in 2023. It is his feature debut, and it is the first collective reckoning of its kind with how the Christian music industry treated its own stars. Two Avalon members involved in the story did not respond to NPR's request for comment.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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