

## THE RESISTANCE – EPISODE 30

### Josh Kelley interview – Episode Transcript

**Matt:** Hello, and welcome to The Resistance. My name is Matt Conner, and I'm your host. Today I'm excited to sit down with Josh Kelley. Josh, how are you today?

**Josh:** I'm doing good. Just hanging out on one of our very first cold days of the year, so far.

**Matt:** Are you ready for this season?

**Josh:** Oh man, I'm not. We live up here, right outside of Park City, Utah. And when it gets cold, buddy, it is cold for awhile.

**Matt:** How long have you lived there, and what's the coldest it's ever been?

**Josh:** I don't know. Somewhere pretty far below zero. We've lived here since like 2008. Really full-time since 2012, when we started having babies and decided we didn't want to raise them in Los Angeles. I sort of made a kind of a full push for us to move here full-time. I love it. I love it up here. We're sort of tucked into the middle of nowhere.

**Matt:** You said you're not ready for the cold, and yet you said you love it there. So in some ways, you have to adapt to that season, right?

**Josh:** Well, yeah. You do. And I'm a big skier. Luckily here there's a lot of outdoor winter sports and things and activities you can do, whereas like if you're obviously in like a windy city or a place that gets super cold but there's no fun outdoor winter sports, well yeah. I think we just were hoping that summer would hold on a little longer, but I think the winter's here and it's time to dust off those ski boots.

**Matt:** Well, Josh, I'd love to start where we start every episode. I just want to read the opening line from our source material in Steven Pressfield's *The War Of Art*. Steven writes this: "Most of us have two lives: the life we live and the unlived life within us. Between the two stands the resistance." So Josh, I'd just love to know, what does resistance look like for you these days, at this point in your career?

**Josh:** So the resistance basically being the in-between?

**Matt:** Yeah, the thing that keeps you from being maybe where you want to be, or who you want to be, whether that's personal or professional.

**Josh:** Hmm. Well, let me see here. There is one big one. I have been lucky to have some really good success in my career, but there's one big thing. My wife and I actually share this in common, where when I first, right out of college, actually I wasn't even done with college yet. After my junior year, I had a big hit single on Hollywood Records.

I thought in my mind, it was almost like, I thought that I was pulling one over on everybody. They're going to find out pretty soon that maybe I don't deserve this, or something like that. So one thing that I have struggled with throughout my whole career is feeling deserving of success. And I've been working really hard, and my wife and I have both been working really hard on sort of internally diving into ourselves and trying to figure out, first of all, why do you feel that way? And then how do we change that? So I can say that right now, I think I'm the best I've ever been, and I am ready for success.

**Matt:** You mean in relationship to that?

**Josh:** In relationship to that, yeah. I don't feel that way anymore. I do feel like I deserve it, and I feel like I'm supposed to be here, doing this for a living. There's nothing else I want to do, anyway. I remember when I first got a record deal, and I told my parents, and they actually didn't believe me until the song, until they heard it on the radio, which is crazy. I remember my mom being worried. One thing my little brother told her that sort of put her mind at ease, he would say to her, "You know, Josh is going to do this whether he lives in a mansion or under a bridge. This is what he's going to do." And it actually brought her some peace and comfort during those times of kind of the unknown for them and me.

**Matt:** Like knowing that that's so core or essential to who you are?

**Josh:** Yeah. Like it's what I'm going to do, regardless. Nobody's going to talk me out of it. This is what I was meant to do, and this is how I feel. And Charles knew that, because he's basically, we're Irish twins. So we know each other inside and out. And now, he's the lead singer of the band Lady Antebellum. Some people don't make the connection, but yeah.

**Matt:** For a parent who had a hard time believing that their son could be on the radio, now they have two professional –

**Josh:** Yeah, isn't that funny? And I had to actually comfort them, too, when he wanted to do it for a living and he was going to take that leap. They thought, well there's no way that both of them.... And I remember, I said the same thing. I said, "Don't worry, Mom. I've got him. He's living with me in Nashville. I'm not going to let him fall." And I actually knew that they were going to make it, too. So it's just one of those things, I think. Anything is a leap of faith.

Of course there is that sort of shadow self that says, well I should be further along, or if I didn't do this, I could have done this. If I didn't have kids, maybe I'd be playing arenas. Those things. But I have this ability, and I've done it my whole life, where I can sort of see the future. Not really in some sort of magical way, but I can, based on knowing thyself, I can see what it would look like if I had not made certain choices. To be honest with you, it always looks like more of a lonely life when I sort of cast further into the future, so then it makes me realize, no, you're right where you should be. You're making

music every day. People are touched by it. I just have to keep reminding myself, just keep doing what you're doing, man.

**Matt:** Josh, I would love to explore this journey a little bit more. When you say from the beginning I felt like maybe a pretender, like someone who didn't deserve the success that was coming your way, and then you said you had to do, along with your wife, had to do the hard work of figuring out what is informing that. What did you find there, as you began to dig?

**Josh:** Fear. I think most things are sort of based on fear. Afraid of what people will think. Almost maybe feeling like was maybe too clever and found some weird angle in. And also feeling bad if some of my peers didn't make it. Almost downplaying my success to make them feel better. I have been one of those people my whole life who has been sort of the nurturer, comforter. And in doing that, I haven't sort of put myself at ease.

I'm so used to making everybody else comfortable and feeling better and being the...what did my dad always say? He said, "You're a peacemaker." But I'm not finding peace with myself. That's one of the things in this sort of self-discovery journey that we've been on now for probably five years that I've found is listening and talking more to me. Doing more meditation for me. And I know that sounds selfish, and the fact that I'm even saying that I know it sounds selfish, there it is right there. It's not. It's actually good.

You have to take time for yourself. It's your vessel you're supposed to be nurturing. Not everyone else's.

**Matt:** Even as you said that, you find it to be, it's just reflexive to go into that mode.

**Josh:** It is. I mean, seriously, I've done it my whole life. Both Katie and I have that quality, but I also think it's good, too. There's goodness to it. I don't want anybody ever to hurt or suffer or to feel less than. I want everybody, I want morale to be high all the time, even though that's impossible.

**Matt:** You've been at this for quite a while. Then you mentioned just the last five years, doing this work. So that means for the majority of your musical career, it was not in this healthy space. Is that right?

**Josh:** Yeah, I would say so. And I can see the difference. I can tell the difference in my lyrics. I have a gospel song coming out this Friday, and it's called "Hold Me, My Lord." And in the second verse, all the other lyrics came very easily on this song. It was almost as if I wasn't writing it. I was like somebody else's instrument or something. But when it came to the second verse, I struggled on these one lines, these lines, whether I was going to keep them in the song, or whether I thought I was being too honest. The lines are, "I've been unkind, at times even cruel."

When I first had those lines, it was my second pass at doing the second verse. I was like, Oh, that's too honest, Josh. You don't need to tell people that you've been unkind and cruel and all this. And I was like, no, it's honest. This song, just because it's a gospel song doesn't mean it needs to be all like puppy dogs and flowers. It needs to be real. And the reality is that we are fallible. And even though I really think of myself as a very genuinely nice guy, there are times when yeah. I've been unkind and even cruel. This self-discovery let me keep those lyrics in the song, whereas before, years ago, I would have been too scared to leave that kind of honesty in.

**Matt:** What prompted that journey in the first place?

**Josh:** Actually my wife. She had a tough little battle with depression, and it was actually brought on by medication to stop smoking. It had a bad effect on her. So she had to kind of reset the compass and recalibrate, if you will. In that, she went through this sort of self-discovery journey, and I went on it with her. I'm also, I've always been sort of like an amateur enthusiast of quantum mechanics and science. So going down this journey was kind of fun for me, too, because a lot of it does sort of involve science and then personal health. It's amazing how everything goes hand in hand.

Now she's huge into crystal healing. She's like a total kitchen witch. I mean, there's like a different scent burning every day I come downstairs. It's hilarious. But I love it. I'm a believer, man. We think we know, but we don't know anything. So I enjoy going down these rabbit holes.

**Matt:** Was there a turning point for you, musically speaking, where you could tell that it was working itself out in a different way?

**Josh:** Yes. I stopped, I don't know if I can say this. I stopped giving a shit.

**Matt:** You can say whatever you want.

**Josh:** I literally stopped giving a shit, and it turned my live shows from something that was pretty good into something like, I can say this with all confidence. My live show is killer now because I'm being a hundred percent authentically myself. I like to mess with people. I tell jokes. I goof around. It's just me, the way that I've always been when I'm having a cocktail with my friends.

So I brought that element to the show. There's moments where I'll have people dying laughing and then five minutes later I play a personal song about one of my adopted daughters and they're crying. Being able to take people on that sort of emotional roller coaster in an hour and fifteen minutes, it just makes it so much more memorable. It took me playing in front of decent crowds to like really great crowds, and selling out shows. So yeah, it just took awhile. It took awhile to be comfortable in my own skin and feeling like my authentic self is enough.

**Matt:** You just mentioned the crowds. It just seems like a disproportional thing or something, and yet there's a direct correlation between you being more authentically you, and somehow that enabling a stronger connection to other people.

**Josh:** Absolutely. And it was immediate. I remember the day that I decided, fuck it. I'm just going to be me. And I stepped on that stage, and I just started kind of goofing around, and being me, and I just remember going, oh my god, I've got them in the palm of my hands. I was trying to be someone else before: maybe somebody cool that I liked when I was a kid or something, trying to be like that. Do their mannerisms. Those are theirs. They're not mine. I think it was probably 2014 or 15. So maybe I've been on this journey longer than that with Katie. Geez. I guess so. Wow.

**Matt:** You talked about the live show and the difference there, but what's the difference in the actual songwriting?

**Josh:** Oh yeah, just even moments like in Hold Me, My Lord. Or I think I have more to say. I'm older now, so I've seen more. I'm not afraid to write about serious matters, but I still love writing songs that are just a feeling. Doesn't have to be serious. It can be a sexy song. Whatever. A love song. I think it's more about trusting the moment. I used to think, when I was about to sit down to write a song, like all right. Let's write something radio-worthy. I don't do that anymore. I just follow the vibe now. If something feels good to me, it's going to feel good to someone else. I just keep sort of chasing the feels instead of trying to fabricate something that I think the masses are going to enjoy. That happened a lot.

I remember on my second record, the record label going, "We need another Amazing." And I was like, oh my god. That's so much pressure. "We need you to write a hit song right now." I was like, okay. It was tough. It gave me a lot of anxiety. I didn't grow up with a lot of anxiety. Usually I was a kind of in-the-clouds dreamer. But definitely being on that big stage and having all those people that I felt like, instead of feeling like a business partner with them, I felt almost like the record label was my dad, and they were telling me what to do, like you'd better do this or you're going to be grounded, kind of thing.

So I tell young artists all the time, if they come out here to write, and sometimes I produce some of these young kids. I'm like, just remember: when you get a record deal, you are their business partner. You are their equal. You have all the say. Also don't think that when you get there, you get to stop working. You actually have to work even harder. So a lot of these life lessons I've learned. When I got that record deal, I stopped all of that sort of guerilla-style internet marketing that I did to get there. I stopped doing it. And I shouldn't have.

**Matt:** By the way, congratulations on that journey that we've been describing. I mean that just sounds like hard work that's resulted in meaningful life. Obviously we all feel fear at times, but we're talking largely on the other side, for you, of being healthy and free on this side. At this point in your career, are there other fears that you still have yet

to figure out how to overcome them, or do you feel largely that you're free of most things?

**Josh:** No, not at all. No. I have for years struggled with alcohol consumption. I just love to drink. So does my wife. I've never been a crazy, out-of-control drunk or anything. But over the years, I've been able to basically, tolerance level, consume more and too much. That has over time, it bleeds into the clarity of your mind and the health of your body and your gut. Last year, I started listening to this podcast about gut health that really helped me a lot.

And then recently I've been sort of working on realizing that drinking too much alcohol has really kind of become a problem. I've been working on that. That one's actually very recent. That's something that I've been working on a lot. Kind of realizing in these days of like better health and gut health and liver health and all of that. I remember waking up one day, and realizing, this is what normal people feel like when they wake up? Oh my god. This is amazing. It's like, oh, the clarity! It's incredible.

I have a very addictive personality, so I'm trying to be addicted to being more sober now, addicted to health. Katie's got this naturopath who's been helping me a lot, too, with certain supplements. Like I said, I'm total addictive personality. So years ago, I got into cycling. I didn't just get into it. I went nuts and started doing like 200-mile races and all this kind of stuff. I lost a bunch of weight, but it didn't mean I was healthy. I was not. So just trying to find that balance, as well. It's a tough one.

**Matt:** The new album is *My Baby & The Band*. This is now, I mean if I'm going by your timeline, this would be the second sort of full album since you started this whole meditative, searching for health, diving into your story to figure that out. Since you already had one pass on this side of the mindset, I guess I wonder how getting healthier gave way to this set of songs. How does that mindset influence this side?

**Josh:** Oh yeah, it absolutely is. Because if you listen to the *It's Your Move* record, there's a song on there called "One Foot in the Grave." I'm talking about my relationship with alcohol. If you go back and listen to that song, you'll see what I'm talking about. There's even one line in there that says, basically, "Do I even deserve help from religion" kind of thing. If you go back and listen to it, I think that's in the second verse. So yeah. There's definitely, there was sort of a spiritual awakening probably before that record in 2016, and now it's married more with kind of a mind and body wellness.

And being more clear. If you listen to this record when it comes out, the last song on the record's called "Busy Making Memories." And I wrote that song right after New Year's. Huge hangover. And I was just watching my kids playing around in a room, going, hey man. You want to be around for all of this. You want to be busy making memories for a long time. So yeah, there's a different awakening.

And I think a lot of it, too, just comes with age, as well. Getting older. I think that's helped a lot. Even if I didn't go down this journey, there would have been more wisdom anyway. So who knows, man. Who knows.

**Matt:** Josh, I wanted to ask about another thing here. You've always, you've never had a problem sort allowing us into – you've already mentioned some of the problems or habits, the things that you wrestle with. You've also let us in on your family over the years. Very straightforward songs about your wife, your children, etc. Do you feel like, as an artist, that there's nothing off-limits like that? Do you feel like there are lines that you shouldn't cross?

**Josh:** That's a good question. You know, when Katie and I first started dating, and when I mentioned Katie, I meant my wife, Katherine Heigl, if people don't know that. So she became, right after we started, we actually met on my music video for a song called Only You, that I had off my second record. So we had never met until that music video, and we have been together since that day. So we really hit it off.

And then when she became a huge star on *Grey's Anatomy*, we were being followed around by the paparazzi and all that stuff so much that it's almost to the point where if you don't let them know what it's all about, then they're going to see those photos, the video footage, and they're going to assume whatever they want to assume. So I kind of wanted to take the assume out of it. And I thought, I only know how to write about things that I know. And at the time, and still is, family was very new to me. And I loved it. I loved being a dad. So I wanted to write about it.

I have a hard time fabricating things, unless somebody's like, "Hey, write for this movie." Well, I can do that, as long as I know what it's about and get to watch some of the footage. But I can't just go, today, I'm going to write about, I don't know. Let's come up with something stupid, like trading stocks. I know nothing about that. Probably never will. So I couldn't write a song about it if you gave me a million dollars. So I didn't feel like family was off limits, because they were already being posted all over the damn place. So we kind of wanted to control the narrative. And I run everything by my wife, too, anyway. She's the boss. So if she says, "Hey, that's a little too far," then that song wouldn't come out. But so far, knock on wood, that has not happened.

**Matt:** So she's never minded being the subject of several songs over the years?

**Josh:** No, she loves it. I even say in my shows, this is one of my jokes. I say, what's great about being a singer-songwriter and a writer is that whenever Katie's mad at me or pissed, I have a superpower you guys don't have. I can write her a song and all is forgiven. And I'm joking, but sometimes, it's like a beautiful diversion, that she forgets that we were ever pissed.

**Matt:** The perks of being a songwriter. That's great.

**VISIT:** [Josh Kelley](#)