

Favor With God

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. **—Luke 1:30**

Raving for Jesus? Nashville Band Pumps Techno

Technopraise is encouraging teenagers to rave for Jesus with its latest single. But can we really rave for Jesus?

If you don't have teenagers in the house, you may not have heard of raving. Simply put, raving is dancing to techno music. A rave is essentially a club party with a live DJ spinning techno music while teens dance. Raving has attracted a drug element with some teens using ecstasy or LSD at the parties.

"Some Christians believe that raving is inappropriate worship," says Yuri Mamchur, a Russian-born music producer and the founder of Technopraise. "Christians who think that dance beats and Jesus don't belong together have missed parts of the Bible. The book of Psalms encourages celebration of God through all means available to us. Jesus' first miracle was making sure a party didn't stop."

The music video for the new song, "Hands to the Sky," shows Johnny Hammer, Technopraise's 13-year-old exclusive artist, and Alexis reviewing last summer's radio hits. Discouraged by the songs' inappropriate sexual and drug-related content, they join their friends and sing an original dance song. Throughout the video, kids play sports, roast marshmallows and rave at a

Christian nightclub concert.

Mamchur says Technopraise wants kids to see that Christian music can be contemporary and cool. He argues that Christian kids are asking for upbeat, danceable music. His response: Let's rave about Jesus.

"Technopraise gives me the chance to inspire kids around the world," says Hammer, trained in violin, classical piano and vocals. "Kids my age are surrounded by many negative things—bullying, violence, drugs and early sex. We're exposed to some gross stuff. I love our new song because it encourages kids to let their inner light shine and share their love for Jesus with others."

The blonde-haired, blue-eyed 8th grader lives in Washington state, has a 4.0 GPA, writes original songs and says his priorities are "time with God, school and family."

"Jesus is my best friend—someone who is always watching over me," Hammer says. "I talk to Him during hard times and thank Him for all the great things He's given me. I think it's awesome to be a Christian teenager, and I want all the kids out there to not be ashamed of their faith, to follow their dreams, and to let the world know about Jesus during this Christmas season."

What do you think about Christian raves?

Knowing God

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing

the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. **-Exodus 20:3-6**

Who Is the Baby

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? **-Acts 9:5**

Unemployment Applications Drop to Nine Month Low

The number of people applying for unemployment benefits has dropped to its lowest level in nine months.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that applications were down by 23,000 to a seasonally adjusted 381,000. That's the lowest number of applications since February.

The four-week average, a less volatile measure, fell for the ninth time in 11 weeks to 393,250. That's the lowest average since early April.

Some economists say the report is another sign the job market is slowly improving.

"There have been numerous indications that the labor market is healing and today's jobless claims report only reinforces that view," Dan Greenhaus, chief global strategist at the trading

firm BTIG.

Two weeks ago, the unemployment rate fell to 8.6 in November, according to the government. However, the unemployment rate dropped last month, in part because more people gave up looking for work.

Once the unemployed stop looking for work, they are no longer counted as unemployed.

Congress continues to debate whether to continue the extended benefit program, which expires at the end of this year.

The Labor Department estimates that about 1.8 million people could lose benefits by early February if the program is not extended.

Francis Chan Says Christians May Be Praying Wrong

Are you praying the right way? If you aren't sure, you might want to take a lesson from Francis Chan.

The author of *Crazy Love* and other best-selling Christian books argues that some Christians aren't praying the right way—they are too focused on their own needs rather than God's mission. As Chan sees it, it's no surprise that there are so many ineffective prayers that don't get answered. Scripture, after all, warns about this.

"James 4 says a lot of times you'll ask and you don't receive because what you're asking for you're asking to spend on your own passions and no one warned me about that," Chan said in his latest video in the Basic series.

A seven-part film series produced by NOOMA filmmakers, Basic is Chan's response to his frustrations with the modern-day church. In the video, Chan challenges believers to examine the roots of the church and get back to the basics of prayer.

An always transparent Chan shared how he once thought he could just ask God for anything, as if He is a big genie in the sky. Now, Chan realizes he has to be more careful about his prayers, and he encourages other Christians to be more careful also.

"I would just start opening my mouth and talk to God about whatever, and there's some truth to that. But I noticed in the Bible there are also some warnings that we have to be very careful how we approach God," says Chan, former pastor of Cornerstone Community Church. "For example, Ecclesiastes 5 says guard yourselves, guard your steps when you go near to the house of God, and it says draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools who do not know that they are doing evil."

As he looks at the way the disciples prayed in the days of the early church—and as he looks at the way Jesus taught us to pray—Chan says he realizes it's a lot different from what he was taught. In response to this revelation, Chan has been diving back into prayer studies for the past few years. In the video, he shares insights from the Lord's prayer.

"Think about these phrases now that we've been saying for years that maybe we didn't mean, We used to say 'Give us this day our daily bread.' We're asking for our daily provision. Truth is, I think, if God just gave us our daily bread, many of us would be angry," he says. "That's all you're going to give me? You're just going to give me enough to sustain me for today? What about tomorrow or next year or 10, 20, 30 years from now? I want to know that I'm set up. And yet Jesus says just pray for your daily provisions."

Chan also explored Jesus' next petition about temptation and deliverance from evil.

"Haven't you prayed that at times in your life when you were actually still holding on to some temptation? Maybe you weren't even ready to let go of all of your sin and yet you're saying it," Chan says. "It's like your words weren't matching up to your heart."

Chan says the verse of Scripture in the Lord's prayer that scares him has to do with forgiveness.

"We're saying 'God forgive me in the same way as I have forgiven others.' That scares me because I know I've prayed that while being angry at other people. I know I've prayed that prayer while I was still unforgiving," he says. "So now when I'm telling God forgive me in the same way as I forgive other people, see, we need to be warned about this kind of stuff."


What If Bethlehem Had Smartphones?

Matthew and Luke are the only Gospel writers who wrote about Jesus' birth, and we aren't sure who provided them with firsthand reports. Jesus' mother was among the earliest Christian disciples, so we assume she shared her story with them. All details were passed down orally, without the aid of technology. There were no radios, televisions, tape recorders, iPads, walkie-talkies, cameras, cellphones or fax machines in first century Israel. The only form of "instant messaging" required a guy to run from one king to another over a period of days.

I wonder: What if the key players in the Christmas story had access to wireless devices? Pardon my literary license as I imagine the script:

Facebook update, 01/15/02 B.C., posted 4 hours ago

Elizabeth > Mary

So glad you can visit us! Zacharias is still not talking (so weird!), but his eyes brightened when I told him you were on your way. We are still in awe of God's goodness to us. I feel so old to be a mom.  Zach says he knows the baby is a boy. We plan to name him John even though our relatives disapprove!

Text sent 01/21/02 B.C., 5:28 p.m.

Mary > Joseph

Arrived safely at Elizabeth's. She is such a blessing. Still can't believe what is happening. It's like a dream. Luv you!

Text sent 03/21/02 B.C., 9:02 a.m.

Zacharias > Uncle Levi

The baby's name is John! No more discussion!

Tweet sent 11/30/01 B.C., 2:49 p.m.

nazareth_carpenter Joseph, Son of Jacob

Just got bad news. Must go to Bethlehem 4 census. My wife is not in any shape to travel. Why did Caesar have to pick THIS TIME 2 tax us all?

Facebook update, 12/20/01 B.C., posted 30 minutes ago

Mary > Elizabeth

Looks like it will be a three-day trip to Bethlehem. The roads are bumpy and my back is so sore. I'm glad you had your baby

before me—you give me courage! And you are NOT old! So glad to hear Zach got his voice back. Pray for us!

Text sent 12/22/01 B.C., 7:36 p.m.

Joseph > Uncle Melchi

Just arrived in Bethehem. This town is crazy. Can you put us up in your place? Sorry for the inconvenience. We'll stay anywhere—inside or outside.

Text sent 12/22/01 B.C., 7:41 p.m.

Uncle Melchi > Joseph

Just come on. We've got room. I will move the animals inside if it gets cold.

Tweet sent 12/25/01 B.C., 3:04 a.m.

nazareth_carpenter Joseph, Son of Jacob

It's a boy! And he doesn't look anything like me! (I wonder why? LOL)

Tweet sent 12/25/01 B.C., 3:32 a.m.

JustAShepherd Simeon, Son of Gershom

Whoa! A bunch of angels just showed up here on the hillside! Shimon took photos but he was so scared! Will try to post later. Gotta run!

Facebook update, 12/27/01 B.C., posted 2 hours ago

Mary > Elizabeth

So much to tell you. Jesus is fine, Joseph is exhausted and now I am the one who feels old! You won't believe what we had to use for a crib. Oh, and we had some really interesting visitors the morning after the baby was born. Shepherds! As if we needed more sheep around here!

Tweet sent 12/28/01 B.C., posted 30 minutes ago

JustAShepherd Simeon, Son of Gershom

The photos Shimon took of the angels didn't turn out. Too blurry. I wonder if anyone will believe our story now.

Sheep_Keeper, FlockMaster and 45 others retweeted **JustAShepherd**

2 hours ago

Tweet sent 12/30/01 B.C., posted 1 hour ago

Flockmaster Shimon, Son of Hezron

Photos or no photos, it's true! A king was born here last week! Angels don't just show up here everyday. #whathappenedinbethlehem

Facebook update, 12/31/01 B.C., posted 3 hours ago

Caleb, Son of Geshan > Simeon, Son of Gershom

Bro, I haven't had much sleep since that night. What does all this mean? Why did that angel come to us? It's not like we're anybody special.

Facebook reply, 12/31/01 B.C., posted 2 hours ago

Simeon, Son of Gershom > Caleb, Son of Geshan

I know! I can't stop talking about it and my wife thinks I'm crazy. I can't get those haunting words out of my head: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased!" One day I'm going to write a song about what we saw.

* * * * *

Of course there was no access to Facebook, Twitter or iPhones when Jesus was born. Yet the story of his birth immediately

went viral, and the message the angels told the shepherds is still spreading globally. I encourage you to use every form of technology available to let others know that the baby born in Bethlehem is the Savior of the world.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter at leegrady. His most recent book is 10 Lies Men Believe (Charisma House).

Macy's Transvestite Problem Not Isolated to Single Incident

Apparently, the Macy's in San Antonio isn't the only one with transvestites looking to change clothes in the women's dressing room.

Liberty Counsel reports that another Macy's employee has contacted the group to tell her story about repeated issues with men using the women's fitting rooms. The individual asked to remain anonymous out of fear of losing her job.

The employee said she constantly has to ask men to leave the women's fitting rooms. What's more, she has been asked numerous times by mothers who have daughters in the fitting rooms to please ask the men to leave the women's dressing rooms.

With the Christmas shopping season in full swing, customers around the country are sending Macy's a message that such a bizarre policy is not acceptable.

One woman posted on Macy's Facebook page that her family

normally spends \$2,000 at Macy's and she is planning to boycott the store. Others are shredding their Macy's credit cards and closing their accounts.

"Macy's policy that allows men to use the women's fitting rooms makes no sense," says Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel. "This policy has put at risk every woman shopper who enters one of these rooms. While attempting to cater to a radical LGBT agenda, Macy's has alienated almost the entirety of its customer base."

Indeed, the chorus of voices opposing Macy's disturbing dressing room policy is growing louder as more troubling incidents are coming to light. The message will become increasingly clear that the majority of the American people are not in line with the radical Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender, or LGBT, agenda.

The story of Macy's LGBT policy which allows men to use the women's fitting rooms came to light when Macy's fired Natalie Johnson from its San Antonio store after she politely told a clearly identified man that he could not re-enter the women's fitting rooms.

Reaching Mormons: Building Bridges

Georgeann Dillard, senior pastor of Delta Foursquare Church in Delta, Utah, will never forget the day in 1996 when, not long after her husband's sudden death, a Mormon friend frantically drove his truck into her yard, jumped out, and said: "You are living the things we are told to do and can't do."

The minister was shocked. She only knew this gentleman casually—he had been her husband’s friend—but her husband had clearly been able to build a bridge of friendship and communication with this man, despite the myriad of doctrinal differences between Mormonism and traditional Christianity. The man had been watching their lives carefully. And now the fruit of that spiritual labor was blossoming.

This story vividly illustrates what is perhaps the biggest key to effectively reaching Mormons with the gospel: building authentic bridges of friendship. Outreach to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Georgeann insists, is not something effectively accomplished through a mass evangelism campaign. It needs to happen one-on-one, in the context of friendship, over time.

“We focus our evangelism on developing genuine, loving relationships and friendships with the people of our community,” Georgeann explains. “This allows the trust necessary for sharing the love of Jesus in a genuine way. This one-on-one method has been the most successful because of the specifics of Mormon culture.

“We don’t single out men and women with specific outreaches,” she continues. “We befriend and genuinely love these people. They often become the dearest of friends. It is usually the consistent witness of a normal life committed to Jesus and His love that seems to speak the most.”

Live Your Faith

Tony Maupin Jr., co-pastor with his wife, Carol, of Shiloh (Idaho Falls Foursquare Church) in Idaho Falls, Idaho, would agree. He recounts the story of two brothers, Warren and Brent, who came to Shiloh 10 years ago and gave their lives to Christ. They had been raised as devout Mormons.

Brent, at age 61, passed away recently, but when Tony asked Warren why he and his brother had decided to become

Christians, his answer was clear: "Because the people at your church lived what they believed—and they loved us." Warren's two adult children and their spouses have also made decisions for Christ.

"I've lived virtually all of my life in eastern Idaho, an area that is predominately Mormon," says Tony. "I've served with committed Mormons on public school boards, and served Mormon bishops as customers as an independent businessman. Many of my friends, neighbors and relatives are Mormon.

"I have yet to see one committed Mormon argued into the kingdom of God," he asserts. "What I have frequently observed are many who have come to faith because someone loved them, prayed for them and shared their faith with them."

Shiloh has, from time to time, joined with other evangelical churches in the area to sponsor a speaker who address audiences regarding Mormonism and traditional Christianity. This can be educational and beneficial when the speaker is a former Mormon who understands the issues and genuinely loves Mormons. Still, evangelism is most effective within personal relationships.

Take the Long View

Pete Akins, senior pastor of True Life Center (Cedar City Foursquare Church) in Cedar City, Utah, lives in an area that is so steeped in Mormonism that any type of grand public outreach or staged attempt to evangelize would be culturally insensitive, if not outright offensive. That's why the church he pastors with his wife, Cami, doesn't focus on such evangelistic efforts, he says; they focus on getting to know and love their neighbors and co-workers.

Doing so requires a long-term vision, an important key that anyone who wants to reach a Mormon friend needs to keep in mind. Change isn't going to happen overnight.

"My wife and I asked the Lord to give us 20 years in our city

so that we could earn the right to speak into their situation,” Pete says. “Mormons are amazing people who have strong family values and a deep sense of commitment to their church. My heart breaks for the works-driven society and the misguided concept of who Christ is.”

Pete tells the story of a former Mormon man who is now a pastoral leader in his church. When he came to True Life Center, he was disillusioned with church altogether. Because Mormons are raised to believe their church is the only true church, and that if they ever leave it they are lost, as there is no other truth, such disillusionment is common among those who exit Mormonism.

But when this man encountered True Life Center, he found it to be a place where he could learn and grow. He was free to struggle openly with his questions.

“He attended a men’s camp with us, and the Lord opened him up to dimensions of life that he never even thought possible,” Pete recalls. “It is great to know that God can—in His own time—do what He intends to do in the hearts of people when we don’t run them off and accept them where they are, no strings attached.”

Love Your Neighbor

Our Foursquare pastors who minister in areas of the country with high Mormon populations offer helpful tips we should all be mindful of when it comes to interacting with Mormons we encounter and befriending those who may live next door or work with us.

“Love is essential,” affirms Georgeann Dillard. “Seek to build a genuine relationship first. Do things together and enjoy friendship.” She notes that Jesus wants to show Himself to be powerful and available to the seeker, so we should get His perspective and be empowered by the Holy Spirit, moving in the spiritual gifts.

Pete Akins echoes these sentiments. “Pray that the Holy Spirit would accomplish through your friendship what you cannot with an adversarial approach,” he suggests. “Enjoy the dialogue that springs forth as two friends talk about what they believe, value and practice. Listen to them and appreciate what they say; that is what friendship is about.”

Tony Maupin Jr. advises that we should study and understand Mormon doctrine, but that when we meet Mormons, we shouldn't make Mormonism the primary issue.

“Let God's love making its appeal through you set the agenda,” Tony says. “Be kind to them. If you aren't a Mormon, they're expecting you to challenge them, and they already have the stock answer rehearsed. They already know you're different. What they really want to know is why.”

Used with permission of Foursquare Church. Read the original article here.

How to Handle an Enemy

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

–Galatians 5:22-23