

No Impossibilities

For with God nothing shall be impossible. **–Luke 1:37**

Lowe's Yanks Ads From Muslim Reality Series

In the wake of pressure from the Florida Family Association (FFA), Lowe's Hardware Store has decided to stop advertising on a controversial Muslim reality TV series.

Lowe's has yanked its ads from *All-American Muslim*, a reality show on TLC.

As TLC describes it, *All-American Muslim* takes a look at life in Dearborn, Mich.—home to the largest mosque in the United States—through the lens of five Muslim American families. TLC explains that each episode offers an intimate look at the customs and celebrations, misconceptions, and conflicts these families face outside and within their own community.

“Clearly this program is attempting to manipulate Americans into ignoring the threat of jihad and to influence them to believe that being concerned about the jihad threat would somehow victimize these nice people in this show,” the FFA said on its website.

As the FFA sees it, one of the most troubling scenes airs at the introduction of the program when a Muslim police officer states, “I really am American. No ifs ands or buts about it.”

“This scene would appear to be damage control for the Dearborn police who have arrested numerous Christians including several

former Muslims for peacefully preaching Christianity,” the FFA says.

Dearborn police arrested Nabeel Qureshi and Paul Rezkalla in 2010 and Sudanese Christian pastor George Saieg in 2009 for preaching Christianity at the Annual Arab International Festival.

“The first two episodes start off with Muslim youth complaining about non-Muslim Americans’ perception of them as extremists after 9/11. The show then reports on these youths’ daily, weekly and monthly prayer rituals,” the FFA writes. “Many Imams who are at the head of these prayer rituals believe strongly in Islam and Shariah law. This TLC show clearly failed to connect the dots on this point but then again that appears to be their intent.

The FFA sent out email alerts on Nov. 15, 22 and 29 to inform its supporters about *All-American Muslim*. The alerts encouraged supporters to send emails to the companies that advertised during the first three weeks that the program aired, including Lowe’s.

“Individuals and groups have strong political and societal views on this topic, and this program became a lightning rod for many of those views,” Lowe’s said statement said. “As a result we did pull our advertising on this program. We believe it is best to respectfully defer to communities, individuals and groups to discuss and consider such issues of importance.”

Amid Global Recession, Giving

to Evangelical Nonprofits Up

The worldwide economic downturn is still with us. It has hampered generosity, as many givers have found themselves likewise facing hardship: pay cuts, job loss, an underwater mortgage, a dwindling portfolio as the years tick down toward retirement.

Headlines during this “Great Recession” declare that more than 20 percent of Americans have experienced their household income plummet by at least a quarter. A report from one professor at Yale University stated that the median drop of middle-class income in 2009 was more than 46 percent. The *New York Times* reports that nationwide, millions of children—many from families that not long ago were middle class—have become first-time recipients of free or reduced-cost school meals.

This level of need may not have been witnessed in America since the Great Depression. But as needs rise for the services of nonprofits, many big charities are experiencing difficulty raising money. Giving to nonprofits fell 11 percent in 2009 and hasn’t recovered, reports the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

While giving in the world is down, amid the woe is wonderful news: Donations to evangelical Christian charities rose by almost 6 percent in 2010. The second Annual State of Giving Report by ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability) showed that in 2010 contributions to ECFA-member organizations with more than \$10 million in annual revenue increased by 6.7 percent. And some giving soared. Compared with 2009, cash donations to child sponsorship gained 24 percent, orphan care 20 percent and adoption 15 percent.

Evangelicals aren’t immune to unemployment, rising healthcare costs and shrinking 401(k)s. But it’s not hard to understand why amid an overall dismal economic outlook, evangelicals continue to trust God and give to churches and parachurch

ministries.

The early church described in the book of Acts likewise was struggling amid times of persecution. But in Acts 11, the Holy Spirit revealed to the church in Antioch that a great famine was coming to the entire Roman world. The disciples there opted to send relief to the church in Judea.

Antioch's Christians were themselves subject to the worldwide crisis. But they refused to hoard for themselves. They chose to bless others in need and trusted God to provide.

In Galatians 2, the leaders of the early church stressed to Paul the importance of continuing to remember the poor, which Paul described as "the very thing I had been eager to do all along."

Today, that same Spirit is moving Christians to give even when grim economic forecasts seem to dictate the opposite response. This testament to the sacrificial generosity and faithfulness of God's people is a witness to the world.

We must continue to give, even when times are hard. Christmas is a season of sharing, our last opportunity to finish the year well. Let's end 2011 strong with generous gifts to churches and charities that are doing the work of Christ in a hurting world.

**Reaching
Understanding**

**Mormons:
the**

Sensitivities

How to reach the unchurched is one of the most talked about topics among Christian leaders today. A quick Google search for the term “unchurched,” in fact, yields more than 1.1 million results, providing links to a myriad of articles, books and blogs devoted to the subject of connecting with people who have never entered a church building and don’t know much, if anything, about Jesus and the believers who have devoted their lives to Him.

But what if the people you’re trying to reach are not unchurched, but very churched—in a religion different from historical Christianity? And, to make matters more complicated, what if the church these friends of yours belong to seems, at least at a cursory glance, to tout many of the same beliefs you as a traditional Christian hold? How do you begin to approach someone who says he or she sincerely believes in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but is part of a church system whose doctrines buck many of the key teachings of historical Christianity?

Such is the unique challenge of reaching people who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—14.1 million strong worldwide—more commonly referred to as the Mormon church. Mormons view themselves as Christians, using the broad definition of a Christian being someone who follows Christ. This conflicts with evangelical Christianity, which tends to use the term “Christian” more narrowly, meaning a Christian is someone who holds to a particular set of biblical beliefs.

Doctrinal Differences

In traditional Christianity, Jesus is God, having always existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity. In Mormonism, Jesus is a created being, the spirit-brother of Lucifer, and he was born after a physical union of

God the Father with the virgin Mary.

Traditional Christianity teaches that human life begins at conception. The Mormon church teaches that all people preexisted in heaven, as spirit-children of God the Father. Mormons also believe in an “eternal progression toward exaltation,” meaning that humans can advance toward godhood, eventually becoming gods themselves.

These teachings, as well as many others—such as the Mormon church being the only true, uncorrupted church—clearly conflict with traditional Christianity. And what adds to the complication of dialoguing with Mormons is that there is a variance of views and practices among individual members.

Additionally, Mormonism is more than just a religion—it’s a culture with a strong sense of family and history. Most Mormons know their historical roots well and are very proud of them. Minimizing or dismissing that Mormonism is a culture as much as it is a religion will undermine any efforts to reach Mormons with the true gospel message.

Sensitivity and Respect

Foursquare pastors across the U.S. who minister in areas of the country with high Mormon populations affirm the importance of being sensitive and respectful if one wants to minister to a Mormon friend or neighbor.

Georgeann Dillard, senior pastor of Delta Foursquare Church in Delta, Utah, about 130 miles south of Salt Lake City, started the church in May 1996, co-leading it with her husband. Six months later, her husband suddenly became ill and passed away. Then, five years later, the couple’s youngest daughter, only 17, died in a car accident. Despite these devastating setbacks, Georgeann stayed in Delta, knowing God had called her there and that the deaths in her family did not negate that call.

Living among and befriending Mormons has given Georgeann

crucial insights regarding the sensitivities of ministering to them.

“I think it’s important to avoid needless arguments about Mormon doctrine, and focus on the Good News of Jesus Himself as much as possible,” Georgeann tells . “It is helpful to look for common ground upon which to build when sharing with Mormons, just as you would with any seeker. The point is not to show how much you know; it’s about how much Jesus loves and cares. ... Genuine, loving relationships are important. ... If the seeker has questions about doctrinal differences, there is a foundation of trust to undergird evangelism.”

Genuine Love and Friendship

Tony Maupin Jr., co-pastor with his wife, Carol, of Shiloh (Idaho Falls Foursquare Church) in Idaho Falls, Idaho, agrees. He and his wife have served Shiloh for 22 years. Tony is also the divisional superintendent of the Mountain River Division.

“One of the best ways to engage Mormons is to plan to do so over time. Commit to genuinely loving them,” Tony says. “When they know that you care about them, the Holy Spirit always seems to arrange times when honest conversations about faith can take place. My experience is that many Mormons ... have questions about their faith. For many, the biggest problem is that they don’t have anybody they consider ‘safe’ to talk with about their questions.”

Respect for others, he adds, is a key to building bridges. He notes that a person’s convictions aren’t a proof of truth, as one can be very sincere but sincerely wrong. Still, a person with convictions should be treated with respect.

“It is my firm belief that people of sincere faith are deserving of respect,” Tony asserts. “You are acknowledging that they desire to live their lives with integrity. Respect for another is a great place to begin the kind of relationship that will allow for an honest dialog. You can respect the

person without spiritually validating his faith.”

Pete Akins, senior pastor of True Life Center (Cedar City Foursquare Church) in Cedar City, Utah, about 250 miles south of Salt Lake City, stresses the importance of building authentic relationships. He also serves as the divisional superintendent of the Utah Division, and his wife, Cami, is a disaster relief worker with Foursquare Chaplains International.

“The person is a valid relationship that needs to be enjoyed, not a goal to be met or a target to be hit,” Pete explains. “The love of Christ, and His life in us, is more powerful than any argument we could make.”

Pete says that we should avoid an adversarial approach when talking with Mormons, instead praying for the Holy Spirit’s leading in the context of friendship. Doctrinal discussions, he believes, are best handled in the context of relationships.

“Enjoy the dialogue that springs forth as two friends talk about what they believe, value and practice,” Pete says. “Listen to them, and appreciate what they say. That is what friendship is about.”

In Part 2 of this article series, we’ll take a closer look at how Foursquare churches are ministering to Mormons in practical ways, and cover suggestions for how each of us, personally, can reach our Mormon friends.

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Holiday Hiring Sees Largest Gains in Four Years

There's more good news for those seeking employment opportunities during the holidays.

November saw huge hiring gains in holiday retail, according to global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.

The data shows 423,500 employees were added to the holiday workforce, the largest November gain since 2007.

Last month's hiring surge is up 27 percent from last year.

Experts predict hiring for the month of December will be about the same as last year.

But John A. Challenger, chief executive of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, said stronger than expected sales on Black Friday and Cyber Monday could boost December employment gains, resulting in even more hiring.

Rest Assured

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. —2 Timothy 4:18

The Loneliness of Success

David led the troops in their campaigns. In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him. When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. —1 Samuel 18:13-15

Do We Have Too Many Ministry Divas?

We're seeing a real rise in what I would call "ministry divas." These are men and women who are pastors, or ministry or spiritual leaders whose focus is more on themselves than the people they serve. As a public service to our readers, the global research team at Cooke Pictures has developed a list of warning signs that someone might be a ministry diva. The following warning signs can apply to either a man or a woman:



1. He doesn't participate in worship. He only comes out to preach.
2. He's escorted on and off the platform so he doesn't actually have to mingle with people.
3. He has multiple assistants—or what some call "armor-bearers" to carry his cell phone, Bible, man-purse, etc.
4. He doesn't travel that much, but needs a private jet when he does.
5. When he visits other churches, he naturally assumes he'll get either a seat on the platform or a front row seat.
6. When he promotes his books, he always calls it a "best-seller" even though it wasn't.
7. He makes ever growing demands on the church for more free

time, bigger perks, larger personal staff, etc.

8. He spends more on his wardrobe and cars than the church spends on the children's program.

9. Divorce is OK for him, because of the ministry pressures he's under. So when it happens, he doesn't need to step down or submit to counseling—he doesn't need it.

10. When he advertises a conference in magazines or other places, his picture is the biggest thing on the ad.

Have you noticed other warning signs we should be looking for?

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Matthew West’s Heartbeat for Christmas

Even for a prolific songwriter like Matthew West, penning fresh-sounding Christmas music presented a bit of a test, albeit one he thoroughly enjoyed. “Christmas songs have been written millions of times, so I took it as a challenge to approach an age-old story with fresh eyes and with a unique perspective,” said West in a recent interview.

His freshly minted *The Heart of Christmas* succeeds admirably, garnering rave reviews from the likes of *The New York Times*: “This album, one of the year’s most inventive holiday releases, is made up mainly of Mr. West’s originals, and is far better for it. He’s a vivid and compelling songwriter, with refreshing approaches to the familiar.”

Underneath each original song and a handful of familiar carols lies a heart that beats in time with that of the Savior rather than Santa. “The true heart of Christmas is realizing that we can celebrate the birth of a Savior and that there’s hope every single day of the year,” said West.

The Christmas project caps off a busy year that included co-authoring his first book, *The Story of Your Life: Inspiring Stories of God at Work in People Just like You* with Angela Thomas; a Grammy nomination for the song “Strong Enough,” and three nights of ministry alongside Will Graham at the Jersey Shore Celebration in May.

West takes time—when possible—to give back to the ministry that changed his life. “When I was 13 years old,” he explained, “I came across a Billy Graham Crusade on television. Being a preacher’s son, I had my share of church services and typically would change the channel. But something was different this time.”

As Graham began to give the invitation, West felt God knocking at the door of his heart: “That was the day I accepted Christ as my personal Savior.”

West relishes telling the story: “I will never forget Billy Graham and the impact his ministry has had in my life.”

That is why you will find West working alongside Franklin Graham and Will Graham, and traveling to places like Colombia in support of Operation Christmas Child and *The Greatest Journey*.

In fact, one of the songs on *The Heart of Christmas* stems from West's ministry connection: "After reading the script for a *Veggie Tales* Christmas movie," he explained, "I wrote a song called 'Give This Christmas Away.' At the same time, I was spokesman for Operation Christmas Child so I had the chance to give that song to the ministry."

Another of the heart-tugging songs on *The Heart of Christmas* was inspired by a little boy whose story found its way onto West's 2010 release, *The Story of Your Life*, for which he solicited testimonies from people around the world.

"As I was reading the 10,000 stories that came in, on one particular day, I read three different stories from three different people who were telling me I needed to write a song about the same little boy," said West.

Two-year-old Dax had a rare form of leukemia and was receiving care at St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. After doctors informed the family there was nothing more they could do for their son, they went back home and decided to cherish every last moment they had with him.

West continued the story: "Dax loved Christmas lights and not knowing how much longer they had with him, his parents decided not to wait until Christmas to put up their decorations. When everyone else was putting up their Halloween and fall decorations, this family put Christmas lights everywhere."

The people in Dax's neighborhood began noticing the unusually early display and inquired about it. "Pretty soon lights started popping up all over the neighborhood," West said. "As the song says, the whole town basically stepped in and, in a show of support for this little boy, the whole town was lit up in October with Christmas lights."

West first released the song last year to raise money for St. Jude's Hospital. The video for "One Last Christmas" featured home footage of the family spending their last days with their

son.

“I still can’t watch the video because it messes me up,” West admitted. “It had over a million views last year and it was a pretty awesome thing, so that really is how *The Heart of Christmas* album came to be. It kind of grew out of that song and the phenomenon that became an online movement.”

Sprinkled among the original songs on the album are a few of West’s personal favorites: “‘Jingle Bells’ is for my daughters because they like that one. Then, to me, one of the most beautiful Christmas songs ever written was ‘O Holy Night.’ You talk about the heart of Christmas—to me those lyrics really capture it in a powerful and emotional way.”

On “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” West channels his inner Michael Bublé. “It wasn’t about taking Christmas songs and trying to make them hip and modern,” he laughed. “It was more about letting them stay the classics that they are and trying to do them justice as a singer. It was fun for me because I don’t always get to show that side of my vocals.”

Joking aside, West focused in on the bottom line for the album: “My hope is to point to some of the main themes of Christmas—the joy and the emotion and cherishing times with our family. But, ultimately, I wanted every song to point back to the hope that we have in Christ to save us.”

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