

EXCLUSIVE: Evangelist Mattie Montgomery Talks Dutch Sheets, the Metal Mission Field and Prophetic Evangelism

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Mattie Montgomery is the founder of Awakening Evangelism and former vocalist for the metal band For Today.

How did the Lord take your testimony and turn it into this ministry?

So I’m still trying to figure all that out. I grew up in a Christian home, sort of. My father died of cancer when I was 8. And for the next decade, I struggled with anger, lust, self-destructive behavior that manifested themselves in a lot of different ways. At around 15 or 16, I stopped going to church, stopped being interested in the things of God. I had never seen anything real there. I’d seen a lot of hypocrisy. I’ve seen a lot of white, upper-middle class people coming together on Sunday mornings to pretend like everything’s OK with them.

But then, at 16 or maybe a little older, I started to realize there are other philosophies, religions, worldviews out there. I started to study Islam. I started to study Rastafarianism

and Buddhism, Taoism, and then I went off to college and continued to study some philosophy and world religions.

The summer after my freshman year of college, I decided to stay on campus and work. I was still studying and I was reading a lot, and I [was] learning a lot. I was reading about Buddhism. I had finished reading about Islam. I had finished reading about Taoism and all of these philosophies. All these ideas had at least some simple ideas about the way we should live, the way we should treat each other, the way that we should care for our community, the way we should take care of ourselves.

There was one haunting thought that prevailed in the back of my mind throughout this entire exploration, this time of exploration that I was on: What about the times that I have failed to do that? In these books I was reading on Buddhism and even in the Tao Te Ching of Taoism, there are these beautiful ideas about purity and love and mercy, and humility, and patience, and I just could not shake the fact that I had not been those things in my life. I had not been patient. I had not been humble. I had not been merciful. I had not been kind. I had not been loving. I had been selfish and arrogant and destructive to myself and people around me.

I'm realizing that the moral standard that religious leaders or philosophers all around the world have set is essentially the same and yet all of us has fallen short of that. Every human being has fallen short of that, and if you try to abide by the standards of Allah, in the Quran, every person falls short. If you tried to abide by the standards of Buddha, every person falls short. If you try to abide by the Tao Te Ching, every person falls short.

The horror of this one thought which I could not shake, and this one thought was "What am I going to do about my guilt?"

In the summer of before me sophomore year of college, I did

something real crazy.

I said, "God, if you're real, I don't want to just read about You in books. I want to know who You are."

And almost immediately it was like my whole world got flooded with the sudden awareness of God's intense and overwhelming nearness to me. I sat there on the steps of the dorm of my college, shaking and weeping in the presence of God.

It felt like at the same time, the awareness of my own sin and the awareness of his acceptance of me, in spite of my sin, became just overwhelmingly available, accessible to me. All I could think about is that I don't deserve to be close to you. But I'm close to you. Honestly it just felt like I was being washed in the blood of Jesus.

The best way I could describe it is, it was like, as this moment continued on, I became suddenly very aware of the great host of heaven, the supernatural. I became very aware of the Spirit of God. I became very aware that Jesus was alive. And he's not just the hero of a book I read when I was a kid.

It felt like waking up in a room full of strangers. It was terrifying, very unnerving and disconcerting. But I was finally aware of what I had been surrounded with my entire life. I could finally see what I was looking for.

I think that's the moment that God conquered my heart. And I'd love to tell you that I went to church the next Sunday, and that it's been all sunshine and rainbows ever since. The truth is, the next day, I quit my job. I put all of my worldly possessions inside my car, and I gave the keys to my car to my best friend and I hitchhiked around the United States for a month.

I slept on park benches, took food out of dumpsters. I just went west. I slept on a park bench in San Francisco for a week, was down in Los Angeles for a week as well. I spent the

rest of the summer just searching, trying to find this God that I had just encountered. And it was a process. I came home from that trip knowing that God is real, knowing that He's a protector and provider. I had found this God. But I was disconnected from church, disconnected from discipleship or leadership or mentorship in my life.

I came back to college, tried to live after that encounter the same way that I did before it. I think the thing that changed is that sin just didn't fit me anymore. It was like trying to put on a shirt that had shrunk in the wash. God had so transformed me that the things I used to be proud of now made me feel disgusted with myself.

The things that I used to love I now hated. And so I think that's the moment, like I said, that God conquered my heart, and I spent about the next year and a half just in school. Not in college. I mean, in school with God. Waking up early every morning, getting in the Bible.

Eventually, I got into a church back home with my mom, and I would go to church every time the doors were open: young adults' meetings, conferences, men's group meetings, small group meetings. You know, every church service, every Bible study I could get to I would just go grab people that have been walking with God for 40 years or more to tell you what you what they've seen him do.

And so I just go grab these people and say "Hey, tell me about the most amazing miracles, everything."

And I would just listen to their stories.

"Tell me how God has displayed his glory in your life."

I spent about the next year and a half just doing that.

Just listening, learning, trying to absorb how do I hear God's voice? How do I walk in a real relationship with Him?"

Then in September of 2007, what had been happening is that the closer I got to God, the more this thing of music started to kind of explode in my heart. I was never much of a musician. I played drums a bit growing up. But I went to college on a soccer scholarship. So I thought, *That's my ticket, right?* But the closer I got to God, the more he began to take soccer out of my heart and replace it with music.

I had played in the band in high school, but never anything serious. But in September 2007, I mentioned to a friend of mine, "Hey if you ever know any bands are looking for a vocalist, let me know. But I just want to preach Jesus. So they've got to be guys who love Him."

Couple weeks later, she called me and she said "Hey, this band, For Today, their vocalist just left. They're not signed. They haven't been touring. But they do love Jesus."

So I ended up linking up with these guys. And that's a whole story itself. And in September of 2007, leaving for a 30-day trial tour to see if our personalities meshed and if they liked how the shows went, and that 30 days turned into almost 10 years that we were in the band. I thought we'd put out one album and do a couple tours, get to meet some cool people.

We ended up playing thousands of shows on every populated continent, preaching the gospel to millions of people, putting out seven albums, signing to three different record labels, just doing so much more than we ever could have possibly imagined. And so much more than I think we ever even could have possibly asked for. I've seen God move in incredible, incredible ways.

You boldly proclaim the gospel at your shows. How is that different from what a lot of musicians, even those who say they love Jesus, do at their own shows?

I think that we sometimes as artists, we tend to view our music like a product to sell instead of like an expression of

who we are or an overflow of who we are. I think that's a mistake that a lot of young artists make. They go into the studio and they ask themselves, *What's going to sell albums, what's going to get people to go like them?*

And as a result, you end up releasing something that's inauthentic, and that's something every artist struggles with. It's something honestly every creative struggles with. When people write books, when people preach sermons, when people paint paintings, when people do graphic design, whatever you're creating, the temptation is always to look at what everyone else is doing and to emulate that.

But the difficult thing about being in the music industry is that the music industry is OK with you being positive and uplifting and inspiring and encouraging.

But when you draw a line in the sand and say, "Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father, but through Him," then suddenly it gets a little bit divisive, and you know, alienating and exclusive, and people don't like those words, because it might mean fewer album sales.

I think the reason our band stood out in that regard is because we said early on, "We are here to preach the gospel. And if it ruins our career, we're willing to do that. And if it makes it so no bands ever want to tour with us, we're willing to do that. It's a sacrifice we're willing to make to be able to preach the gospel. I'd rather preach the gospel to 10 people than blow an opportunity to preach the gospel to 10 million."

You know, I'm thankful for bands that have Christians in them that play their music for millions of people. And that's probably a good thing. But I think if God's given me a talent, then the best thing I can do with that talent is to give it back to him. So that's a decision that we made early on in our ministry, that we would pull no punches with the gospel and

people could take it or leave it.

But it didn't hurt our career. I remember early on in our career, we actually had a Christian record label turn us down because they said we were too preachy, and there's no way they could market a band like ours. I don't want to say their name because they're still around. They're great people, bless them. But that was just a funny part of our our journey.

The hardcore scene is such an untapped outreach field. What kind of miracles did you see as you began to proclaim Jesus?

Oh, man, the list is long. I wrote a whole book about them called "Lovely Things in Ugly Places," right at the end of the band. I wanted to sit down and answer some questions because we've seen some incredible things.

I think, for me, the most, the most beautiful miracle—I mean, we saw cancer leave people's bodies, we saw blind eyes open, deaf ears healed. We saw God do impossible, amazing miracles—But to me, I mean, the most beautiful and incredible miracle is salvation.

And to see to see people come into a concert, planning to kill themselves after the show—I mean, in fact, there's one girl who's become a friend over the years, who's this amazing girl who's actually a missionary in Africa right now, her name is Kelly, and Kelly lived in New Hampshire. We played a concert, and Kelly was planning to go to this concert, have one last concert and go home and take her own life.

She was outside in her car toward the end of the night. And our guitar player walks out there; he sees this girl sitting in her car alone crying, and he goes up and he speaks to her, starts to encourage her, and he leads her to Christ. She finds hope in Christ, and she cancels her plans of suicide and becomes this amazing, radical Jesus-loving girl, and now she's a full-time missionary in Africa.