

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. I'm seeing miracles like that. Just the transformation that can happen when Jesus

becomes the king of someone's life.

I think that has always been my favorite thing: seeing people who could go from being suicidal, drug addicts, people that were maybe even satanists or hardcore atheists, coming into a room where the presence of God is evident and feeling something different.

And maybe they've heard the idea. Daniel Kolenda has said for a long time that when we preach the gospel, we need to present people with an experience that needs to be explained, not an explanation that needs to be experienced. So that was our hope, and our approach is that people would come into the venue and when we started playing, they would feel something different. They would be able to sense something different. And then when I preached the gospel, it would be the explanation of what it is different about our music.

Every day, we would have satanists and atheists and people who hated everything we stood for standing there in the crowd singing lyrics to our songs that are overtly Christian lyrics, with their hands raised, rocking out with us. And then I stop to preach the gospel, and the same person that was just singing every lyric to my song is flipping me off with two middle fingers, and maybe the person right next to him is sitting there with tears running down their cheeks as their hands are raised in surrender, and they finally give their lives to Jesus. Just having the opportunity for people to be able to experience God in a way that maybe they never thought was even impossible. I think that's the greatest miracle of all.

How did your time with the band and ministering in the gospel prepare you for your ministry today, Awakening Evangelism?

I don't know if you are familiar with Dutch Sheets.

I am very familiar with Dutch Sheets. And I can tell you our audience is as well.

Oh, great. He's incredible. I love Dutch. A long time ago, gosh, seven, eight years ago, my wife and I got an apartment because God told us to. About a month later, Dutch and his family moved into a house 200 feet away from the apartment that we moved into.

I would walk every morning to go pray. I would walk in front of this vacant house. Then Dutch Sheets moved into that house. And so every day, I'd still go walk and I'd just pray for Dutch and his family when I walked in front of their house, which is a little bit creepy, but to be fair, they moved into my prayer lane. I didn't just start walking by their house just to pray for them.

Do you know who he was when he moved in there?

I did, yeah. So we got connected with them. They became family. I mean, he and his wife were the very first people to ever babysit our oldest son. So they are family to us. We love them.

And years ago, Dutch he came to a couple of our shows, which is funny to imagine, Dutch Sheets at a metal concert. But he came to some of our shows and would just pray and intercede with us and just generally be awesome. I could never get him to stage-dive. But he did come to the show.

Once after a show, he said, "Man, I'd hate to have your calling."

And I said, "Dutch, I'd hate to have yours." And we both laughed together and said, "Keep doing it." "So we celebrate each other. But the truth is, I think Dutch saw what a lot of people in the church couldn't see or wouldn't see about the assignment that we had there. And that is that it is a hard place to preach the gospel.

You don't have people running up to Todd White after he preaches at a conference, girls running up asking them to sign their bra. But that was the stuff we would deal with. You

don't have people offering cocaine and alcohol in the green room at the Passion Conference in Atlanta. That's not a normal thing for ministers to deal with. But it was a nightly occurrence for us.

Honestly though, I think the biggest struggle is that rock stars get worshipped. Every night, you're in a room full of people who think you are the most amazing thing happening. And every night, you have to perpetually remind yourself first, and then everyone else, that Jesus is the most amazing thing to happen. And so it was a hard, sort of dry, sometimes lonely way to do ministry.

I mean, we'd be on the road for seven or eight weeks at a time on tours. When I first started, we were on tour for over 300 days a year. So you don't have fellowship, you don't have accountability. You're just sort of out there on your own. Especially when we first started, we couldn't get the church to pay any attention to us. If Christians ever noticed what we were doing, it was because they thought we were possessed by demons.

I know people like that.

Oh, for sure. Yeah. Now we have these amazing charities. And we've been blessed. But when we first started, we didn't have any support from churches. There were no pastors praying for us or calling us to check in on us. So we were just alone. It taught us early on in my ministry that if you want to be an evangelist, you've got to learn to eat and walk at the same time. So I learned real early to feed myself. I had to learn real early to motivate myself and if I didn't have a pastor firing me up for preaching the gospel, then I had to find a way to get myself fired up.

There's a popular story where David encourages himself in the Lord, and then he rallies his troops to go and get—there's a story where a nation invaded and took all of their wives and

their children, and everybody's thinking about killing David, and the Bible says, "David encouraged himself in the Lord." And then he rallies these guys who were all thinking about killing him, and he says, "Let's go get them back," and they go get back their families.

So it was something we had to be really good at, encouraging ourselves in the Lord.

Now that I'm ministering to the church primarily, I think God has given me a unique perspective, in that people tend to psych themselves out when it comes to evangelism or outreach.

They think "I can't do it in my workplace. That's not socially acceptable."

And I would say, "Yeah, but I had a workplace where it was not socially acceptable for 10 years, I had these issues, and I did it every day."

Music was my job. I wasn't a gospel singer, where I had to pretend. Everybody would have liked it more if I had shut up about Jesus. But we stayed determined in our workplace.

I think in the church people say, "Well, I'm not very articulate with the gospel."

And I would say, "Well, I practiced. I was really terrible at it at first, but God had grace for me, and you get better with practice. Anything you really care about, you'll work at. And I think if we're going to work at anything, it should be the articulation of the gospel."

I think now as I'm ministering to the church, God has given me some tools from my years of experience in preaching the gospel in harsh conditions that can maybe help equip and inspire believers just to carry the gospel with greater confidence and greater urgency, with less focus on their own weaknesses, and more focus on the sufficiency or the ability of Jesus.

The last time we talked, about a year and a half ago, you gave a prophetic word that the evangelism seat is rising. Do you still see that happening?

I absolutely do. In fact, I see it being fulfilled. I'm sure you've heard about that Todd White has just planted his training center at Dallas. My wife and I, within the next year and a half, are going to be—it's not a training center, we're probably just going to call it a church. We're going to plant a local community, to just invest in local community, to begin to just multiply what God has given us, and to be able to elevate people into their calling as well.

And I think that what's happening is that God is taking evangelists, and he's giving them a burning heart for the body of Christ. And instead of the evangelist being the one who just leaves and goes and preaches the gospel everywhere else, and only spends a weekend at a time at a church, he's calling evangelists to help be pioneers and builders to help create a place that people can be launched from into the earth.

What are you seeing happening in the charismatic movement as a whole? What are you seeing in the next generation?

Well, I see two things. And really, those two things are family and worship. And here's why. Honestly, it all really stems from what we were just talking about. I guess I'll say it like this. I'll back up a few steps.

The reason that that God is reestablishing the seat of these Ephesians 4 evangelists—that is an evangelist who equips the saints for the work of the ministry—is because he's intending to pour out on an entire generation of believers a burden for souls. So it's not just going to be your Billy Graham or your Reinhard Bonnke who care about souls. It's going to be Jim from the grocery store. It's going to be your barista at Starbucks. It's going to be your stay-at-home moms and your factory workers and your high school teachers who are going to

be burdened for souls in the same way that Billy Graham was, in the same way that these great revivalists that we study in history were.

But in our generation, in an unprecedented way, God is putting the burden that He put on dozens in generations past; He's putting that burden on millions. So he's calling people like Todd White, people like me, people like Ben Fitzgerald, people like Cliff Overstreet, to do more than just get people together in stadiums.

He's calling these men to get people equipped and inspired and awakened to the urgency of the hour in which we live. Now that, I think, is setting the stage for something incredible. If you've heard about what Lou Engle is doing down in Orlando called The Send.

We are very excited about The Send.

I'm very excited about The Send! And the interesting thing to me as an evangelist is that there has been this thought—I said Lou Engle's name, and now I'm standing up rocking back and forth in the backyard of my office. I just caught a bit of importation from Lou Engle just now.

The anointing is fresh for everyone here.

That's right. It's interesting for me, because this seems backwards. I would think, *Sixty-thousand people in a stadium in Orlando, they're going to go to the ends of the earth, and I'm sure at some point, all those 60,000 people are going to raise their shoes up in the air and say, "God, I'm here, send me," right?*

And yet, in the back of my mind, I can't help but wonder where are they going to be sent from? Who's going to send them? How are they going to be covered? Who's gonna be praying for them when they go? How are they going to be funded? You know, these are the questions that are sort of in the back of my mind. And

here's why.

If there's one thing I've learned about the kingdom, it's that you never go, you get sent. When I go to a place to minister, I'll go find my spiritual father. He'll pray with me about the event that I'm going to, and then he'll lay his hands on me, and he'll pray over me for my time of ministry there.

He'll say "I send you with my full blessing. You're not in this thing alone. We're in this together."

What I'm seeing that needs to happen in our time is that we have to be better at family. If we try to send people to go preach a gospel that invites people to start a new life for Jesus but does not create a space for them to be able to operate in family, then we're preaching only half the gospel.

Let me explain it like this. Right now, statistically speaking, the fastest-growing religion in the world is the Muslim religion, which is crazy, because as long as I have lived and as many places I've been, I've never met a Muslim evangelist. I have never met somebody that came up to me on the street and said "Hey, Allah told me to come and talk to you about this."

But they have a lot of kids.

Exactly. I've never met anybody who had a tract that says "Hey, consider Islam." But all they do is have kids and raise their kids in Islam. And we in the American church, tragically, we will let our kids go to hell for the sake of doing another outreach event. We'll skip our kids' soccer games, and we'll make our entire family suffer because we've got a call on our life. We're trying to get to the next conference. We're trying to build the next thing, right? Trying to go do another prophetic ministry event, and our family is falling apart, because we are "sent."

So I think that what God is wanting to do, to fortify this

evangelistic movement, because the evangelistic movement is happening one way or another. It could be the most glorious moment ever in church history, and it could also be the most disastrous moment ever in church history.

Think about this. We have been praying for revival in America for a long time. And when we say revival, we mean like lots of people coming into the church. Now we had revival on Sept. 16, 2001. That's the first Sunday after 9/11 happened. We had millions of people come into the church that week, and by the next week, they were gone, because they came in to see if we had an answer for the brokenness of the world that we live in. And we didn't. And so they all left.

What's going to happen if this evangelistic moment that we're in comes to our generation, and millions of people are sent into the nations of the earth, and the gospel is preached with more urgency and passion and power than ever before?—and that is going to happen. It's already begun. But if that happens in our generation, but we don't do family well, people are going to come into our church, and then they're going to go out of our church just as quickly as they came in. They're going to find that what we talked about is all talk. It's the same thing that I found when I was a 16-year-old kid, and my struggling, depressed, suicidal mom couldn't find anybody to help her inside our church. So she turned to alcohol.

And I thought, "You guys talk about hope. You talk about freedom. You talk about power. But I don't see it."

There has to be a revival of family in our church; otherwise, we will undermine our own evangelistic effort. Similarly, let's take it even a step further when we talk about family. What if I told you that I was going to start a ministry today that would lead to 20 to 25 million people coming to Christ in the next 15 years? That'd be pretty cool, right? That would be a successful ministry. Check this out.

We are in a moment politically in the United States of America, where there's a very real possibility that within the next year or so, that Roe v. Wade could overturn and that abortion could become illegal. And that sounds great, and that sounds tragically to a lot of Christians like the end of the fight. But the truth is, that could be the worst thing that ever happened to our country.

Why's That?

Imagine if abortion suddenly ceased. Imagine what our country will look like in 15 years with an entire generation of kids who were born to parents that didn't want them or couldn't afford them. You'd be talking about poverty and sex and violence and abuse and perversion, and addiction, absolutely decimating our country. There is an opportunity, I think, coming to the church to be the answer for a problem we created.

There's going to be millions of children every year being born to parents that would have aborted them if they could. If that comes, there has to be a revival in adoption. There has to be a church-lead movement for adoption. And if we do that, for 15 years after Roe v. Wade gets overturned, we will have brought in 20 to 25 million people into the kingdom without doing a single conference, without holding a single service, without spending a single dollar in marketing or advertising, without building a website, without handing out flyers or putting up a billboard. Just doing family. Twenty million more people in the kingdom.

Do you have anything you'd like to say to our readers?

I am an evangelist at heart. I love seeing souls saved. I love seeing people come to the saving knowledge of God through Christ. And yet for the last year God has had me stuck on this message of worship. And he's had me saying this all over the world. Evangelism is what happens when worship breaks out of

the secret place. And what that means is this: When I go into worship, and I say, God, you're beautiful, and you're faithful, and you love me, even when I don't deserve love—that's worship, right? I'm developing language to describe God by talking to God about what God is like. That's essentially what worship is. And then when I go out into the street, I say, God is beautiful, and He's faithful. And he loved me, even though I don't deserve this love. I'm using the same language, just pointing it in a different direction.

We, I think, so often think that evangelism is based on strategically explaining our faith, and in such a way that it's philosophically sound and unable to be argued with, right? We have to be smarter than the person we're talking to. We have to know history better than they do. And we have to be able to defend the validity of the Bible and all of these sorts of things.

The truth is that I believe God is raising up worshippers. And he's unleashing worshipers out of the place of just listening to Christian music. And he's unleashing them in the grocery stores and coffee shops and workplaces and local parks. And he's letting these people not just confine their worship to the lyrics during a song but allow worship to come out of them.

When somebody at the grocery store says, "Hey, how are you today?", what an incredible opportunity to tell them how good you are, and why you are that good. Man, I love evangelism. I love seeing the body of Christ empowered to carry the gospel into their lives. But the truth is, if we do not become worshippers our evangelism will always be confined to the intellectual instead of the personal.

But when we can get into the place where we stand in awe of the beauty and majesty of God, and we carry that sense of awe with us into our everyday lives, we will see and take any opportunity we can get to lift Him up, and that is what

kingdom evangelism looks like. So honestly, I think that the two things God is wanting to release right now, kind of the two legs that I think our generation's evangelistic movement is going to stand on, are the legs of family and worship. And so I want to see an unprecedented evangelistic movement. But I think my contribution to that is going to be to disciple people who do family right and who worship like crazy. {eoa}

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