

♥ heartspeak



Every morning when you wake up, the sun rises in the east, and every evening it sets in the west. It's been this way for thousands of years. Everything around you — life, warmth, and the seasons — proves the sun's presence. Your senses tell you, and your faith, that the sun exists.

But imagine this. One night a man tells you something he's really convinced of: In the morning the sun will not be there because it has ceased to exist.

You argue with him and try to show him all the ways that the natural world proves the sun exists, but he doesn't give up.

Though you know you're right, you still ask yourself these simple questions: *Why did he say this? Does he know something I don't? Why is he convinced that the sun is no more?*

In our culture, many people believe that the God of the Jews and of the Bible no longer exists. They feel that human beings are way above God, that God couldn't be involved with them. But if you don't recognize God through faith, you can't believe the physical evidence that proves He exists.

Why are people so sure that God is dead, especially if I'm a witness of His love and power and salvation through His Son? If I have done the job that Jesus asked me to do, then why are they so convinced God isn't alive?

Wait . . . have I done my job? Have others seen the true love of God through me, or have I been hiding it within the church walls?

Guys, if you believe that the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word, that the sacrifice of His Son is the

only way to salvation, and that God has given everyone an opportunity to know Him personally, then there is nothing that anyone, anywhere can believe that will stand mightier than that. Period (2 Peter 1:21; John 16:13).

How can we do our part to stop people from believing that God is dead? By proving through our actions and words God's beautiful, powerful, awe-inspiring love. I know that God isn't dead because I feel Him inside me even now. I must share this with the world (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

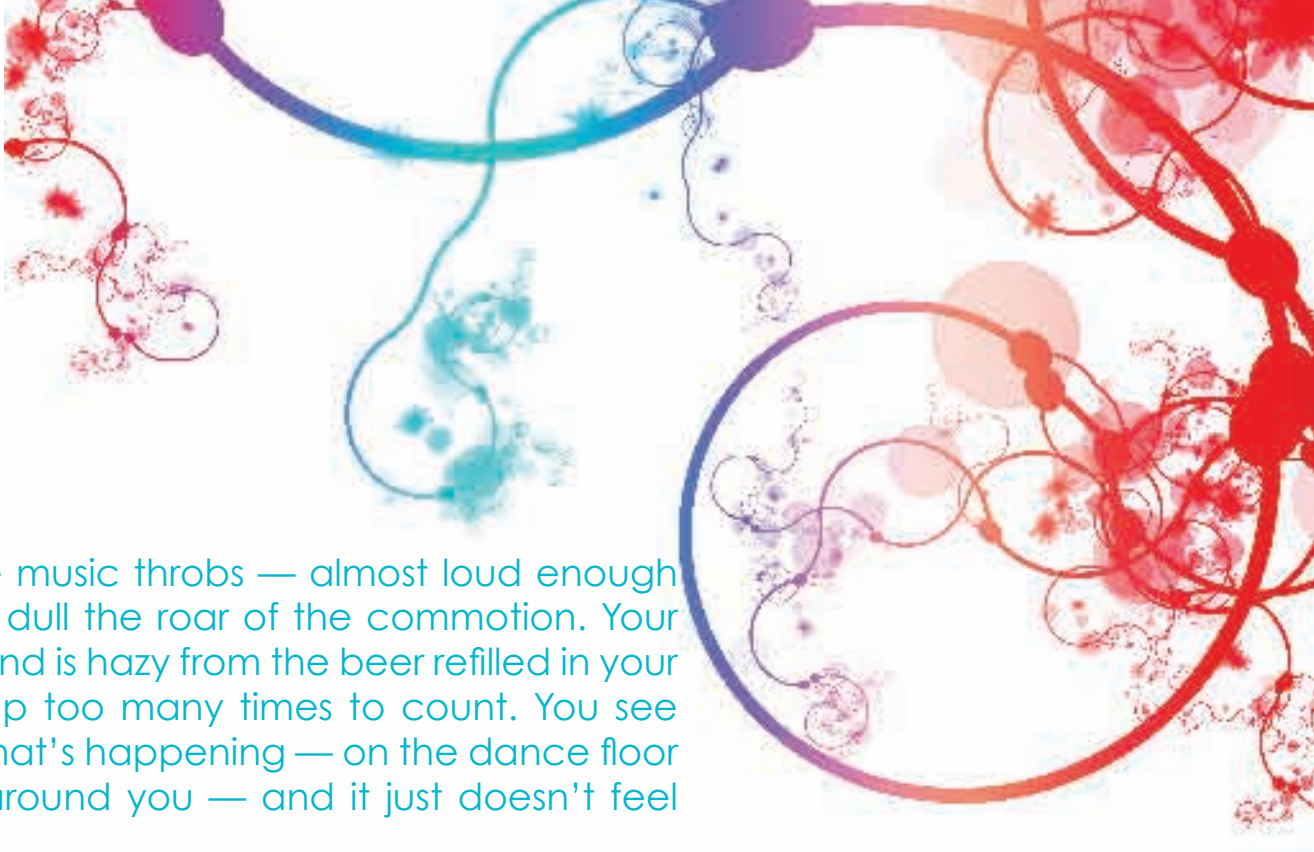
"Why blame the dark for being dark? It is far more helpful to ask why the light isn't as bright as it could be" (Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*, p. 75).

BY MICHAEL MANCHA
PHOTOS BY PAUL RUIZ



life of the party

BY AMOS BALLESTEROS



The music throbs — almost loud enough to dull the roar of the commotion. Your mind is hazy from the beer refilled in your cup too many times to count. You see what's happening — on the dance floor and all around you — and it just doesn't feel right.

Like it goes against everything you believe. Deep down your conscience tugs: *This isn't where you're supposed to be. Why are you doing this?*

These thoughts might make you pause nervously, but you quickly wash them away with another drink. Then another thought comes to you, and it sounds like what everyone else is thinking: *This is fun.*

Can you relate to this scene? You can especially if you attend college. When I think of college, three things always come to mind: learning, freedom, and partying. More and more, partying heads the list because it's seeping out of the campus scene into all ages and settings of youth.

What's wrong with partying anyway? Nothing, according to many youths. They see parties as a way to meet people and find new friends. The truth is that while everyone is dancing and drinking, doorways to drugs, sex, and other harmful things open up that can ruin your life.

When you hold an alcoholic drink at a party, what are the odds that it will be the only one? The very fact that you're holding it makes a bold statement that you're willing to fit in with the crowd. And if you do what you know you shouldn't do, that may be a sign that your will is the weakest one in the room.

When you refuse to avoid temptation like this, then leave the title "Christian" in the pew; it doesn't fit. And you're in real danger of missing out on eternity in the kingdom (Galatians 5:21). The same goes for people who lead others into that kind of wild life (Habakkuk 2:15, 16). They will end up with the same shame they've poured on another.

To some people, drugs are neither black nor white but somewhere between — a shade of gray. Morality gets twisted. God doesn't decide what's right and wrong; they do. You've heard the statements: "If it doesn't hurt anyone, then it's fine." "So long as I don't bother others, what's the problem?" "I'm old enough to decide what's best for me." God disagrees.

At a party, people can't see beyond what's happening now. Their judgment becomes fuzzy. Things like premarital sex or driving when drunk happen more. The minute you lose the ability to make a reasonable de-

cision, you double the chances of destroying your life or that of someone else. Then, the long-term effects that you failed to see come crashing down.

That's when you see what sin really is: selfish satisfaction. You plunge from a high to an inconceivable low. There is no constant high to sin; it's just an ever-deepening rut of lows. In the end, there is no upside to sin; it always ends in regret.

When you oppose the will of God, you find yourself battling against the nature of God in you. You're hoping that when the dark road stops, there might be a worthwhile ending, but there is only one end to this constant feeling of being unfulfilled that you try desperately to fill with meaningless things — and that is God.

If you find yourself in this situation and the alcohol no longer drowns out your conscience, ask God to speak to you. And be ready to do what He says.

Amos Ballesteros is a 19-year-old writer from Crystal City, TX.

NEWS FROM THE FUTURE

Conroe, Texas Youth Conference

April 11-12

Contact: Jason and Rose
Rodriguez; jandrrodriguez@att.net
or 832-797-9916

The "Spring Thing" Rally

April 17-19

Nampa, Idaho CoG7
Contact: Laura Perez; lperez40@
hotmail.com or 208-468-8970

National Youth Week/ Hunger Lock-in

April 17-19

For a full list of events, go to
<http://nfyf.cog7.org>.

Inside the NFYC



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NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK/HUNGER LOCK-IN

April 17-19 are our suggested dates. If this weekend doesn't work for your church, pick any weekend up until June 30.

This is a great way to get involved in foreign missions — without the travel! Fifty percent of the money raised goes to support one of our sister conferences abroad. Packets have been sent to all local youth workers and are available online at <http://nfyf.cog7.org>. For more information, contact Kurt Lang, NFYC director, at nfyf@cog7.org.

WHAT'S IN YOUR INBOX?

If it's like mine, it gets full of junk e-mail from who-knows-where. How about putting some good stuff in there, like Youth Flash, our weekly e-newsletter. Great devotion ideas, new Web sites, jokes, cool quotes, and more. Sign up at <http://cog7.org/mailman/list-info/youth>.

While you're at it, sign up on our cell phone texting list, and we'll text you a daily verse, joke, thoughts to ponder — a little something each day to remind you how good God is! E-mail your number to nfyf@cog7.org.

FRESH ENCOUNTER

Are you meeting Jesus daily? Or have your encounters been few and far between? At the Conference Convention youth program in Corpus Christi, Texas, July 6-11, you'll encounter great speakers, an awesome worship team, and fine friends to help you celebrate or renew your connection with Christ. Look for more details at <http://nfyf.cog7.org>, and DON'T MISS THIS!

GIMME FIVE!

Up high? Down low? Right in your local church you'll find this show!

Sponsored by the National FYC, Gimme Five encourages youth groups to develop a well-balanced program based on the five purposes of the Church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and service. Materials include a program packet, poster, and a journal booklet to record your activities throughout the year and so people twenty years from now can see how cute you were as a teenager! This is a great resource for any church, no matter the size of your group. For a copy of the '09 materials, e-mail Kurt Lang at nfyf@cog7.org.

If your group hasn't sent a copy of your '08 journal for the Gimme Five awards, contact us today on how you can participate. We want to honor your accomplishments!