

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Song/Video: "Not Afraid" - Eminem

By Angelina Deola

Background/summary: This is the first single off of Eminem's most recent album, *Recovery*. With his performance of a medley of "Not Afraid" and "Love the Way You Lie" at the 2010 VMA's, and with *Recovery's* sales of 2.7 million as of October 4, 2010, it seems that Marshall Mathers—Eminem—is back, and in his own words, he's "kind of a big deal." His single, "Not Afraid," is starting Eminem's comeback career, winning him "Best Hip-Hop Video" and "Best Male Video" at the 2010 VMA's.

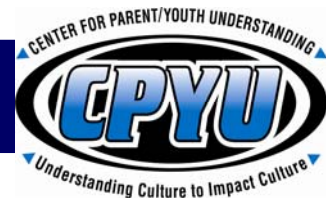
Discover: What is the message/worldview?:

- The video "Not Afraid" takes place in Newark, NJ (casted as Manhattan) as well as the basement of a run-down house. According to Mathers, the song is an anthem "about not bein afraid to... stand up and face your demons."
- The song's topics include: overcoming drug addiction, putting your life back in order, dissing other rappers (a rather random verse that even avid Eminem bloggers are unsure of its meaning), f-cking the world, and rallying to Eminem as the one who has been through it all and who can lead others to overcome as well.
- Eminem is the hero. He stands for himself, claiming that "It was my decision to get clean, I did it for me / Admittedly I probably did it subliminally for you / So I could come back a brand new me, you helped see me through." Even though he gives some credit to his fans for helping him to overcome, the only other people represented in the video are the faceless ones Eminem passes on the street. Thus, the video as well as the overall theme of the lyrics present individualism as a virtue, focusing on the self to overcome.
- There is a surprising amount of spiritual and even Christian imagery in both the video and the lyrics of "Not Afraid." The idea of forsaking darkness for light found as a major theme in the Gospel of John is also found in the video, specifically when Eminem breaks out of a run-down basement into the light of the city.
- Mathers also mentions "demons" several times in the song, even suggesting that he has yet to overcome them completely. He raps, "But I think I'm still tryna figure this crap out / Thought I had it mapped out but I guess I didn't / This f-cking black cloud still follows me around / But it's time to exorcise these demons / These motherf-ckers are doing jumping jacks now."
- In a YouTube video that goes behind the scenes of the video for "Not Afraid," Mathers says that the reason he walks down the street surrounded by reflections of himself is because that is who he is trying to run away from: himself. Thus, even though Eminem is the one who is glorified, he is the cause of mayhem as well—not only for the world, but for himself.
- Eminem is made to seem almost immortal in this video. Eminem crosses a busy street without getting run over, and later he jumps off the edge of the city (which is portrayed as cut-off, representing the edge of the world) only to fly to the top of the sky-scraper he was rapping from earlier in the video. As Mathers stated in an interview on his website eminem.com, he is feeling better



CPYU grants permission for this article to be copied in its entirety, provided the copies are distributed free of charge and the copies indicate the source as the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.

©2010, The Center for Parent/Youth Understanding



than he's ever felt. In a way, he is invincible. He calls people to him, saying, "I guess I had to go to that place to get to this one. Now some of you might still be in that place. If you're trying to get out, just follow me, I'll get you there."

Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- Eminem's lyrics of "Not Afraid" almost mimic those of Jesus himself, who simply told Levi the tax collector, "Follow me," and later justified his calling of and eating with such a sinner as Levi by reminding the Pharisees that he came to heal the sick and call the sinners. Eminem comes so close to getting the message right, except instead of pointing people to Christ, he points them to himself and glories in his own power.
- The video employs symbolism that has been around since before the birth of Christ. Namely, the idea of breaking out of darkness and into the light was most notably used in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," and the theme carries on in biblical literature as well as other sources of Western Literature. Thus, it is notable that Eminem chose to use such potent imagery in his video. Also, the use of mirrors is a creative way to depict how Mathers feels he is being chased by himself (and perhaps he is inferring that his demons are found within as well).
- The consistency of Eminem is questionable. His producer, Rosenberg, said in an interview with *Billboard* that Mathers was being intentional about reaching the radio audience with his new album, *Recovery*. Eminem said himself that "Relapse," his first comeback album that slumped in sales, was not as appealing to a wider crowd (perhaps because of its serial killer themes? See lyrics to "Stay Awake"). Whether this song is more for his fans, for the masses, or simply for sales is questionable. Also, the song's relatively inoffensive nature and hopeful outlook (as compared to his other songs) really does have the power to gain the trust of youth and parents alike.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- "Not Afraid" could be used in a myriad of ways, from sparking a discussion about individualism and the habit of making idols of ourselves, to taking note of how Eminem equivocates himself with Christ, calling others to follow him.
- Also, it seems that there is a particularly honest moment in the song, specifically when Eminem admits that there is still a dark cloud following him around and hints that he still hasn't figured it all out. This is the cry of all people who have yet to find peace and salvation in Christ. To quote St. Augustine, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord." Even one of the most popular rappers of our time references the darkness, a darkness that threatens even his great strength. It is important not to lose sight of this universal need for Christ, and to realize that even Eminem, who calls himself "a pretty big deal," still doesn't have it all figured out.
- The ideas of being haunted by the self and of facing the demons specific to our lives expressed in "Not Afraid" are not particular to Marshall Mathers. This song could be used as a springboard to recognize what demons are already in our lives, and to give serious attention to God's grace so that we are not haunted by our own selves.
- Whether this song is an authentic representation of Marshall Mathers or not, Eminem's music reinforces the need to pray for him, for the healing of his past and present.

Angelina Deola is a writing intern for the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding. She is also a student at Eastern University studying writing and youth ministry.

To access additional 3(D) reviews, to learn more about today's youth culture, and to order copies of *How to Use Your Head to Guard Your Heart: A 3(D) Guide to Making Responsible Media Choices*, visit our website at www.cpyu.org.

