

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Song/Video: "Firework" - Katy Perry

By Walt Mueller

Background/summary: This is the third single release (October 26, 2010) from Katy Perry's sophomore album, *Teenage Dream*. The album has garnered a 2011 Grammy nomination for "Album of the Year." The song—which Perry says is her favorite on the album - charted at #1 in the U.S., making Perry the first female artist in 11 years to take three singles from one album to #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. She says the song was inspired by her desire to be put in a firework after she dies and shot across the sky over the ocean, and by an image from Jack Kerouac's book, *On the Road*, where people are fizzing and full of life.

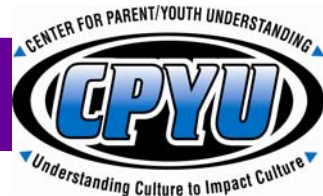
Discover: What is the message/worldview?:

- The song is an up-beat and danceable anthem that calls young listeners to rise above their difficult circumstances and celebrate themselves. Perry begins by asking three questions that are certain to grab the attention of outcasts who feel alone, powerless, and vulnerable: "Do you ever feel like a plastic bag drifting through the wind wanting to start again?", "Do you ever feel so paper thin, like a house of cards one blow from caving in?," "Do you ever feel already buried deep, six feet under scream but no one seems to hear a thing?" She then transitions to the message of tapping into the power within by asking, "Do you know that there's still a chance for you cause there's a spark in you?"
- As Perry sings to the outcast, the video tells five visual stories. There's a young adolescent caught in the midst of a family where the parents continue to fight while he tries to shield his young sister from the discord. There's an overweight teenage girl sitting poolside at a party where everyone is stripping down to their underwear and diving in. Her self-conscious nature causes her to decline invitations to do the same. A defeated young leukemia patient sits sadly in her hospital room, scared to show herself and her hairless head to the world. A young man is bullied and harassed by a street gang. And finally, there's a young and lonely male wall-flower who sits alone at the dance while everyone else pairs up .
- Perry encourages her listeners and the video subjects to overcome and tap into the power to change—a power that lies within: "You just gotta ignite the light/And let it shine/Just own the night/Like the Fourth of July." She tells them that they are "a firework" that should start to burst to show the world what they're worth. Perry says that doing so will "make them go 'oh, oh, oh!'", leaving them "fallin' down-own-own." Listeners are told that they themselves might be the reason "all the doors are closed." She encourages them to "open one that leads you to the perfect road."
- The video's subjects heed her advice and each one steps up to change. As they do, fireworks burst forth from their chests. The young son angrily pushes his fighting father and mother apart. The overweight girl strips down to her underwear and jumps into the pool with a confident smile. The hospital patient walks out of the hospital and into the world. The bullied boy holds the bullies at bay by performing a series of entertaining magic tricks. The boy at the dance bravely approaches the object of his affection—another male—and they embrace and kiss.
- In the end, a host of outcasts joins Perry in the courtyard of Budapest's Buda Castle. Together, they sing, dance, and shoot their Fireworks into the sky in a joint celebration of the power of self.



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



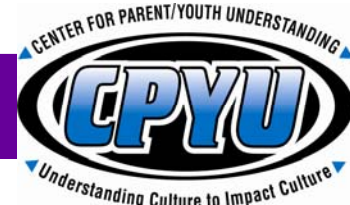
Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- Perry is correct in trumpeting the message that all human beings have inherent value and worth. However, she finds the source of this worth in self. The Scriptures teach that our value and worth come from someone and something much better—a God who loves us, who created us uniquely in His own image, and who loves us so much that He redeems us from the mess we’ve made of ourselves and our world.
- Perry is also correct in calling her listeners to shine with great joy as a bright light in a dark world. But our purpose in shining bright should not be to prove our own value and worth or to draw attention to ourselves. Rather, the Scriptures tells us to let our lights shine to bring the hope of the Gospel to the world and to bring glory to God, rather than to self (Matthew 5: 14-16).
- Living in hope is a theme and reality of the Christian life. Those who are “in Christ” not only have the hope of eternal life, but the hope that God uses all the circumstances of our lives—good *and* bad—for good (Romans 8: 28). Perry points to the fact that mourning turns to dancing and suffering can bring about great good when she sings “If you only knew what the future holds/After a hurricane comes a rainbow.” The Scriptures teach us that God uses suffering to bring about great good in our lives (Psalm 119: 67&71).
- The song visually mirrors current attitudes regarding sexuality. Living in a pluralistic and tolerant world requires us to accept and even celebrate sexual practices that the Scriptures call “sin.” Perry not only promotes same-sex sexual freedom, but has dedicated “Firework” to the “It Gets Better” anti-harassment campaign that celebrates LGBT youth. Christians need to differentiate between sin and sinner, speaking out against the imprisonment that comes with indulging sin, while *always* discouraging the inhumane harassment of individuals.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- “Firework” functions—like all culture elements—as a map and mirror in the lives of our kids. As a map, it shapes their values, attitudes, and behaviors. We should talk about the song with kids, pointing out where the song “maps” life in the right direction, and where it sends them down dangerous paths. As a mirror, it offers deep insights into the issues and struggles kids face in today’s world. As a result, “Firework” is a song that we must view, dissect, and discuss with parents, youth workers, educators, and pastors. . . praying that such discussions would lead to a deeper understanding of kids, how to care for them, and how to point them to the places where God’s Word intersects with their deep needs.
- Identity formation is the great overriding task of adolescence. “Firework” is rooted in the search for identity, meaning, and purpose in life. Consequently, it’s a great video to show to students. Follow-up by asking them questions about the song’s message, where they are going to find their identity, and what it means to find one’s identity in Jesus Christ.
- Youth workers and parents should use “Firework” as a discussion prompt on a variety of issues including sexuality, ethics, morals, family breakdown, authority, compassion, justice, love, body image, identity, bullying, peer pressure, etc. Begin by showing the video then asking students about the song’s message, points of agreement/disagreement, and how God calls us to live as His people in His world.
- The song is connecting with kids for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that Perry begins by asking questions. Taking the time to ask questions of students then to listen to their answers is a way that we show our compassion and concern. Questioning opens doorways to understanding, conversations, and deep relationships through which we are able to lead kids on the journey to new life in Jesus Christ and spiritual growth.

Dr. Walt Mueller is the president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.



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.