

Unavoidable. Pervasive. Inescapable. Secular pop music is everywhere. Even if you can get your young Christian friends to switch their listening habits from secular to sacred, they are still going to hear the top popular songs everywhere they go. In this section we provide you some

ideas to take advantage of some of the most popular secular songs. Use the opening questions, the thematic concepts and discussion ideas to spice up your Bible study, Sunday School lesson, camp/retreat meeting or outreach event message.

Artist:

Taylor Swift

Song: You Need to Calm Down

Album: Lover

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Theme

God's Kindness, Words; Power Of, Forgiveness

Teaching Point

God's kindness draws others to Him.

Opening Question

- Do you need to Calm Down?
- When was the last time that you "threw shade" on someone or posted a comment on the internet that you would never ever speak to someone face to face? ("Throw shade" is now actually listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. It means to trash talk, especially in a subtle or passive aggressive way.)

Discussion

There is much to unpack in this lyric and music video. In true Taylor Swift form, there are Easter eggs (images, messages, or features hidden in the background) and allusions galore—far too many to cover here. The stars are also abundant in this video: Dexter Mayfield, Hannah Hart, Laverne Cox, Chester Lockhart, Hayley Kiyoko, Todrick Hall, Ciara, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Justin Mikita, Tan France and the other members of the cast for *The Queer Eye*, Adam Rippon, Adam Lambert, Ellen DeGeneres, RuPaul and many of the Drag Queens from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Katy Perry, and Ryan Reynolds. This song/video is obviously in support of the LGBTQ community, and, according to many, is Swift's first attempt at political commentary.

All that said, there are some powerful messages to be gleaned.

"You are somebody that I don't know, but you're takin' shots at me like it's Patron," The tongue, or words, have power to heal or destroy. This is made clear in **James 3:9**, *"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be."* As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, *"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding a deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

Words of hate become even more insidious with the anonymity of social media, *"Say it in the street, that's a knock-out, but you say it in a Tweet, that's a cop-out."* It takes maturity to ask the question of the hater/slanderer, "Are you okay?" It's important to remember that most folks lash out at others from a place of deep pain.

The answer to being hurt is not to retaliate, but to love and forgive. We are called to love our enemies and frenemies. In **Matthew 7**, Jesus tells us not to judge, asking us why we look at the speck of sawdust in our brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in our own. Jesus goes on to say that we are called to forgive others not seven times, but seventy times

seven. Taylor even admits, *"But I've learned a lesson that stressin' and obsessin' 'bout somebody else is not fun."*

The second verse shifts from those who attack Taylor personally to her circle of friends. There is a subtle reference in this verse to GLAAD, an organization that fights discrimination against the LGBTQ community. While you may take offense at the portrayal of the protesters in the video, we would be better served to step back and unpack this frame of reference, understanding that not only is this the image most media outlets show of Christian protesters, but it is also a valid secular perspective. We are not called to judge others. We are called to bless and not curse, forgive, and love.

The kindness of God is what draws others to Him, not accusations or hate filled words. Can we be agents of change in a dark world? Absolutely! That is exactly what we are called to be. We do this by being tangible love and grace, and remembering that we must lead folks to Jesus with our words and actions, not create a wall with our words and actions that keeps them from seeing Jesus.

Verse three widens the field to those, perhaps outside of Taylor's intimate circle, who are also "girls who are killing it." These divas are portrayed by former contestants from *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Although Taylor has had some famous feuds with these female stars in the past, she now makes the assertion: *"But we figured you out, we all know now we all got crowns."* She pays homage to them with the message that there is room at the top for them all: they can all "have crowns." The video ends with Taylor, dressed as happy meal French fries, seeking out and making amends with Katy Perry, donning her hamburger costume from the Met Gala after-party.

Conclusion

Rather than getting caught up in the political and social implications of this song/video, the challenge is to focus on these verses:

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...live in harmony with one another. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone...do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." (**Romans 12:14**)

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (**1 John 4:7**)

It is the kindness of God that draws others to Him!