

RELIGION

Breaking Away

Thousands of students gather on Tuesday nights to meet Jesus

Story by Stephanie Dube • Photos Courtesy of Breakaway Ministries



Texas A&M students worship God through songs during the first half of Breakaway.

Tonight, the heart of Texas A&M will be overflowing with praises to Jesus Christ.

Thousands of students will meet in Rudder Auditorium to seek God at one of the largest college Bible studies in the nation. The Breakaway Bible study attracts students ranging from Catholics to Protestants, from those who have a close walk with God to those who just have a lot of questions. All have one goal — to learn more about Jesus Christ.

Gregg Matte, Class of '92 and director of Breakaway Ministries, speaks at Breakaway every Tuesday.

"Students can show up in caps and shorts," Matte said. "A girls' soccer team used to come after practice with their shin guards still on and mud on their knees. We really want anyone to feel comfortable coming."

Breakaway began 10 years ago in Matte's apartment. Back then, the Bible study did not even have a name. But over time, friends invited friends, and the study outgrew apartments, libraries and churches.

Matte said the ministry can help students focus on what is important in life.

"All throughout college, students are continually bombarded with syllabuses, but most students don't take the time to ask what is the syllabus of life," he said. "Breakaway gives students the opportunity to discover that Jesus is the true unshakable foundation to build their life upon."

Today, Breakaway includes a band featuring singers, a guitarist, percussionist and keyboardist. The band leads worship for the study's first 30 minutes, and Matte speaks for the second half.

"The music and message relate directly to student life," said Texas A&M head baseball coach Mark Johnson, who gave a 10-minute testimony at Breakaway two years ago. "The audience is an active, alive group responding to God's message. It's really fun to watch."

Staci King, Class of '95 and a singer in the Breakaway band, said the band tries to use the worship time to help students focus on Jesus.

"Nothing you can invest your life in will bring you more hope than investing your life in Christ," she said. "Nothing else I put my trust in can fulfill me."

Breakaway will host a ministry fair tonight. At least 40 different churches and Christian student organizations will set up tables outside the auditorium to answer questions and help students find ministries to plug into, Matte said.

"I think it's exciting to have Breakaway on campus, especially with inviting other Christian organizations to participate," Dr. Steve McDaniel, a member of Breakaway's Board of Directors and a marketing professor at A&M said. "Breakaway is not in competition with other organizations but is meant to complement them and facilitate what others are doing."

For the first three weeks of this semester, Breakaway will be held in Rudder Auditorium at 7 and 9 p.m. This on-campus location will give new students and those who normally do not attend a chance to see what Breakaway is all about, King said. Beginning Sept. 21, Breakaway will return to its home at Central Baptist Church, which donates its facilities to the nondenominational ministry.

Breakaway Ministries includes more than the Tuesday night Bible study. Tapes of Matte's talks and CDs of the worship are sold throughout the United States and in 10 foreign countries. Almost 90 student volunteers help run the ministry.

Cliff Dugosh, assistant director in the Memorial Student Center and Class of '86, said Breakaway's popularity makes it one of the newest A&M traditions.

"Students know Breakaway is on Tuesday nights, so they even schedule things around it," he said. "I lived in San Antonio for the last nine years and came to A&M on Tuesday night seven or eight times just to go to Breakaway. It's affecting a good number of people on a consistent basis."

Michael O'Toole, a senior marketing major who volunteers for Breakaway, said God used the ministry to change his life.

"Breakaway is where I first met God face-to-face," he said. "I went to church my whole life, but once I came to A&M, I quit going."

"My walk with God was never consistent, but when I went to Breakaway, it woke a sleeping college student up. I began to grow in Jesus Christ."

Ali Still, a sophomore health

and kinesiology major, said she meets God at Breakaway.

"Every week, I know God's going to say something I totally need to hear," she said.

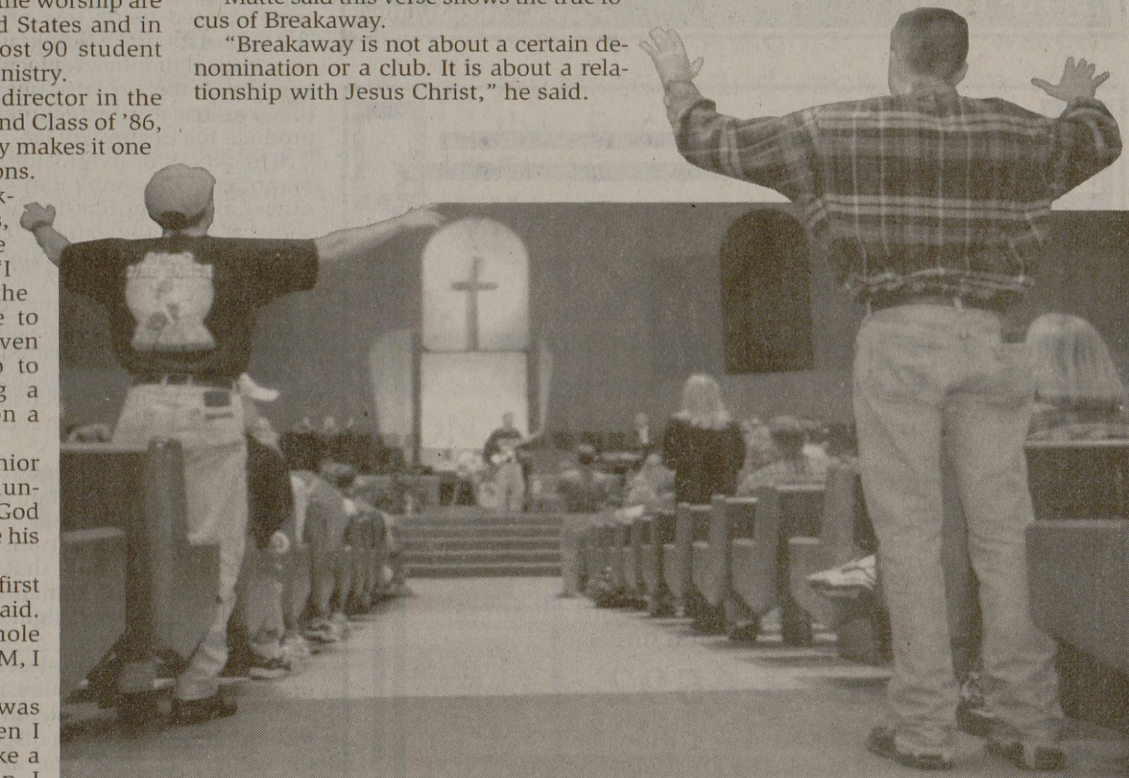
Matte said the ministry is based on 1 Corinthians 2:4-5: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

Matte said this verse shows the true focus of Breakaway.

"Breakaway is not about a certain denomination or a club. It is about a relationship with Jesus Christ," he said.



Ross King leads worship at Breakaway every Tuesday night. His band plays popular praise-and-worship songs.



The Breakaway band encourages students to have the freedom to worship however they want, from standing with their hands raised to singing in their seats.

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