

The Stoning of Soraya M.

Mpower Pictures | Starring Shohreh Aghdashloo, Jim Caviezel, Mozhan Marno, Navid Negahban

I must first warn you: This film is based on a true story. A woman is executed publicly by stoning—and, yes, her death is portrayed in graphic scenes. Obviously this movie is not for children. But if you care about the global oppression of women, or the current crisis of freedom in Iran, *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is a must-see.

The story begins when a French-Iranian journalist named Freidoune Sahebjam (Jim Caviezel) has car trouble outside a rural Iranian village. While Sahebjam waits for his car to be repaired, a woman named Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo) begs him to listen to her story. He records it. That tape becomes the basis of both Sahebjam's 1994 book and this movie.

Words of Repentance From Ted Haggard

In an interview with Charisma, the fallen Colorado pastor reaches out to the Christian community and asks for forgiveness.

After Colorado pastor Ted Haggard admitted to an embarrassing moral failure with a male prostitute in November 2006, the Christian community wasn't sure what to do with him. Some people wrote him off and kicked him to the curb. A few wept and prayed for the pastor and his devastated wife. We all

tried our best to move on—knowing that the American church had suffered a big black eye through the ordeal.

I didn't know what to say to Haggard when the news broke two and a half years ago. Like so many others who had read his books, listened to his sermons and admired his church, I felt betrayed. I sent one brief e-mail to let him know I was praying. After he appeared in the HBO documentary *The Trials of Ted Haggard* earlier this year, I decided to ask him if he would talk to Charisma about his healing process.

Ted and Gayle Haggard

Charisma sits down with Ted Haggard and his wife, Gayle, after living through a very public scandal that took a toll on their lives and their relationship.

Charisma: You probably feel as though you've been to hell and back since your very public moral failure in late 2006. How are you doing spiritually these days?

Ted Haggard: My visit to hell on Earth as a consequence of my own actions was both devastating and eye-opening. It took a tree to fall on me, but I did get the point. As a result, my spiritual life is undoubtedly stronger now. I am becoming the man I always prayed to be in my heart and my actions.

Becoming worse than a leper in the eyes of others has deeply humbled me, to say the least. But I am thankful because it has enabled me to experience Jesus relentlessly pursuing me. Knowing He came for the unrighteousness, and that He came after me and rescued me when I was helpless, is incredibly reassuring. In my new life, the Scriptures and the ministry of the Holy Spirit are more powerful, and my relationships with

other believers are healthier because they are based on the righteousness of Christ in us rather than our own goodness.

Time for a Reality Check

God has prepared and anointed a new generation to carry His message.

✘ Some people twitch or roll their eyes when you say the word “Pentecostal.” The term conjures up outdated images of either (1) slick-haired, Bible-thumping preachers who spew saliva on the unfortunate souls seated in the first three pews or (2) scowling women with their hair in buns who know how to scare away visitors with glossolalia.

Say goodbye to worn-out stereotypes. Back in May I saw the future of the Pentecostal movement when my wife and I attended the graduation ceremony at Emmanuel College, the liberal arts school in northeast Georgia that was founded 90 years ago by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. What we witnessed was a refreshing reminder that God has raised up a new generation of young people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

There were no spitting preachers on the stage that day. And the most unique hairstyle in the audience was the one sported by my future son-in-law, Sven, who graduated with my second daughter, Meredith. Besides Sven’s dreadlocks (a style he adopted three years ago as an act of consecration to God), other things about Emmanuel’s graduation ceremony made it obvious that our movement is experiencing an extreme makeover:

- **It is racially diverse.** Although modern Pentecostalism began in the racially mixed Azusa Street revival, the walls of

religious segregation have been pretty thick until recently. I was glad to see African-American, Asian and Hispanic students getting their diplomas at Emmanuel. Students graduating from college today have the greatest opportunity ever to dismantle racist structures.

•**It offers authenticity.** I've had several opportunities to address students at Emmanuel during the five years that my two oldest daughters attended there. I've eaten meals with them and just hung out in their dorms. And what I've seen is that young Christians today aren't interested in three-step formulas or money-focused "claim your blessing" sermons.

Today's Christian college students are nauseated by blow-dried evangelists, manipulative offerings, faked healings, goofy buzzwords and all forms of religious hype. What they crave is reality—honest relationships, healthy mentoring, passionate worship and daring faith that is reflected through brave actions, not just words.

•**It aims to impact the culture.** The speaker at Emmanuel's graduation ceremony was way outside the traditional Pentecostal box. Bonnie Wurzbacher, a senior vice president at The Coca-Cola Company, used examples from her own life as a female executive in corporate America to challenge the students to blaze a new trail beyond the confines of church walls. She reminded them that whatever their chosen careers—in education, business, government, law, the arts or full-time ministry—all are sanctified ways to serve God when He is at the center of their lives.

•**It inspires sacrifice.** Just a few days before Emmanuel's graduation, a 22-year-old senior named Brittani Panozzo died in a car crash. She was supposed to have graduated with Meredith and Sven, but Brittani's life ended abruptly when she accidentally swerved into the path of an oncoming truck. Her death shook the campus—but her brief life also inspired her peers.

At a memorial service held four days before graduation, students were reminded that Brittani spent her last semester on the mission field in South Africa. She had planned to move to Bangladesh to work with orphans. Her dream was that Emmanuel would one day sponsor a 24-hour ministry center.

So many young people today have Brittani's fervor—and a reckless passion to challenge injustice. They know Christian ministry isn't just sermons and prayer meetings; it involves rescuing exploited girls, digging wells and helping kids learn English. And today's emerging church leaders are willing to forfeit the suburban house and three-car garage for a chance to change the world.

Watching Meredith, Sven and their classmates graduate reminded me that while the gospel is timeless, our movement needs a regular reality check so we can stay updated and genuine. I'm thankful that God has prepared and anointed a new generation to carry His message to a love-starved world.

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The Charismatic Movement: Dead or Alive?

We can quibble over when the previous wave of the Holy Spirit ended. But what's important is that we follow God's presence into a new season.

Some readers were offended when I declared in an [online column](#) a few weeks ago that the charismatic movement is dead. One woman even accused me of heresy, since—in her words—I believe “the age of the Holy Spirit has ended.” (I didn’t say that.) Others on the opposite side of the spectrum asked why I waited so long to state the obvious. All this discussion prompted me to address the issue further.

I am not a coroner. But I do believe the historic period we call the American charismatic movement ended a while ago. By making that pronouncement I was NOT saying that (1) the Holy Spirit isn’t moving today; (2) the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit aren’t available to us any more; or (3) people who are associated with this movement are all washed up.

Reality Check: The Case for Relational Christianity

Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul modeled accessibility and had close bonds with their disciples. That’s the way we should do ministry.

A friend in Alabama recently told me about a preacher who came to his city in unusual style. The man arrived at a church in a limousine and was whisked into a private waiting room behind the stage area. The evangelist gave specific instructions to leave his limousine’s engine running (I guess he wasn’t concerned about rising gas prices) so that the temperature inside his car would remain constant.

This evangelist then preached to a waiting crowd, took up his own offering and retired to the waiting room for some refreshments. Then he left the church with his entourage without even speaking to the host pastor.

From the Deep South: A Cry for Racial Healing

While in south Alabama—one of the last strongholds of slavery—I was reminded that only the true gospel can bridge the racial divide.

If I had been a black slave in Alabama in 1860 I would have been worth about \$3,000 on the auction block because of my gender and height. Taller men cost more.

That's one thing I learned this week while visiting a museum in Mobile, Ala., where some of the last slaves were sold in the United States. The museum also offered a sobering recreation of the interior of a slave ship, showing how Africans were stacked like cord wood and chained to each other in the frighteningly narrow hold.

Why I Can't Perform a Same-Sex Wedding

Go ahead: Call me intolerant. I still believe the church must protect the marriage altar.

This past Saturday I stood on a church stage in Gainesville, Fla., and performed a wedding in front of 100 guests. The bride, Christina, was stunning in her billowing white gown. The groom, A.J., was beaming with delight. Tears flowed freely during the ceremony—especially during communion when a talented singing duo performed “The Prayer,” the wedding anthem made popular by Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli.

Thankfully there were no awkward moments—no fainting groomsmen, lost rings, squawking loud speakers or candles lighting dresses on fire. It was a picture-perfect moment in June, the month we’ve come to know as ideal for weddings even though summers in Florida are sweltering. I was grateful that I made it through my sermon without crying—since weddings involving friends or family can choke me up.

A Special Word for Women: Ruth’s Journey from Shame to Significance

If you think your past has disqualified you, take courage from the life of this Gentile widow.

It is truly profound that Ruth’s name appears in the royal genealogy of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Matthew tells us: “Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king” (Matt.1:5-6, NASB).

In Old Testament times women’s names rarely appeared in

genealogical records. Women were invisible. They were not valued for their gifts or talents; they simply faded into the background—even though they worked hard, served their husbands and raised children. Women had no voice.

Wind and Fire: The Double Portion of Pentecost

The genuine power of the Holy Spirit is not just about miracles—we must also embrace holiness.

Very few evangelical Christians today observe the traditional church calendar. Sure, we know when to celebrate Christmas and Easter, but more obscure holidays like Epiphany or All Saints Day have long been forgotten—usually because we consider them “too Catholic.”

But we have a strange way of treating Pentecost, which happens to fall this year on May 31. Even those of us who wear the Pentecostal label rarely commemorate it, either because we forget to count the weeks after Easter or because we don't place any importance on a date that gets lost somewhere between Mother's Day and Memorial Day.