

An Appeal to Tyler Perry to Return to Pleasing God

A number of years ago, entrepreneur and movie mogul Tyler Perry was interviewed on CBN. He concluded by saying his phenomenal success would continue as long as he did the following: "If I keep sowing good things, keep doing my best and keep trying to please God, that's the only harvest that can come to me."

Because of my respect and love for our multi-gifted brother in Christ, I write this commentary in hopes it will bring about a course correction to his current trajectory. Although imperceptible to some, his career has recently drifted off course. My sincere prayer is that he will read this and make the necessary adjustments.

Tyler Perry's new film, out just in time for October 31, is *Boo 2! A Madea Halloween*. This comedy sequel features our Christian brother garbed as a burly grandma in his infamous Madea role. Made for \$25 million, the film is bringing in big bucks, like most of his past films.

Tyler knows the formula to draw an audience, yet something continues off track in both the filmmaker's personal life and in the contents of this latest offering. While Medea is yukking it up in character on screen, Tyler's character off screen is slipping in ways that concern multitudes who love and admire him.

Back to the Beginning

Tyler Perry grew up in Louisiana, strongly influenced by his God-fearing mother, who took him to church regularly. He said in his 2010 biography that it was his "refuge which brought him contentment." This was critical, because the man that he thought was his father was an abusive man with whom he

struggled terribly, eventually bringing him to a place of attempted suicide.

Young Tyler left home, changed his name, didn't complete high school and explored a career in writing. Eventually he authored a play, *I Know I've Been Changed*, performed at a community theater in Atlanta, Georgia.

The musical was a financial failure. At 22, Perry spent his \$12,000 life savings in the endeavor but it left him depressed and destitute. He found himself homeless for six years and literally slept in a small Geo Metro car (as a six-foot-five man) or at pay-by-the-week motels full of crackheads.

During these years of adversity, he prayed, persevered and continued to perfect the play with the biblical themes of forgiveness and dignity. God eventually opened a door to re-stage it and take the production on the road, where his touring enabled him to gain a devoted following among African-American audiences.

In time, Tyler Perry launched into film, and by 2011, his work had grossed over \$500 million worldwide. TV shows developed, and Oprah Winfrey had him on her show multiple times. He signed an exclusive multi-year partnership with her and OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) as his empire grew.

Forbes named Tyler Perry the second highest-earning man in Hollywood by 2010. In 2017, his net worth was over \$600 million. He sold his Atlanta house for \$17.5 million, purchased 1100 acres for his company, plus a 58-acre estate for his mansion.

In 2019, he begins his long-term deal with Viacom for an original drama and comedy series. Truly life has been extremely good to this hard-working, "rags to riches" man who promised, "If I keep sowing good things, keep doing my best and keep trying to please God that's the only harvest that can come to me."

Disturbing Developments

In the CBN interview, Tyler spoke of being “saved” and how he had to “forgive on his way to success.” He shared how struggles “kept me humble” and how “God reminds me of this.” He also mentioned that “prayer warriors hold him accountable,” and though he was not married at the time, “I’m so very careful with what I say because of children.”

All of the above is commendable but some recent developments are a cause for concern on two fronts.

1. Films going from obnoxious to offensive.

Early on, I like millions enjoyed Tyler’s comedic films featuring the Madea character. Sure, she was a bit over the top and annoying, but almost all of it was in good-natured fun.

Not anymore!

We stopped patronizing the previously, family-friendly franchise awhile back. Now it’s been brought to my attention that allegedly his latest offering, *Boo2!* had an R rating from the Motion Picture Association of America until Perry made changes to raise the bar.

Do we really need more celluloid products that further coarsen our culture, embarrass parents and portray characters in a foul, immoral manner? One person who saw this current flick said the family in front of him walked out.

This movie features teenage girls’ escapades at an all-night Halloween party with frat guys in a house where 14 youth were murdered. The storyline serves up “wholesome” family fun including: getting drunk, smoking dope, “hooking up,” crude double entendres, profane language and repeated misuse of God’s name.

In this day and age of raising awareness on “Weinsteinish”

exploitation of vulnerable females, do we really need more in-your-face portrayals of men's lust-driven sexual advances while rattling off references to [prostitutes] and "days as a pimp"?

Sure, Madea and her comrades will try to fetch them, but honestly, do we have to sink so low for entertainment? Slapstick and silliness are one thing, but seduction, sensuality and sin are still another.

Producers don't have to resort to cheesy, unrealistic productions to communicate authentic stories and life lessons. Anyone remember the fantastic film, *Blindside* that was nominated for an Academy Award Best Film?

C'mon Tyler, don't let Hollywood lure you away from your roots and religious foundations. And while we're serving you with some constructive criticism because we honestly love and deeply care about you, there's a second concern.

2. Departing from pleasing God to promiscuity with your lady friend.

Almost everyone knows that the best indicator of success for children is an intact nuclear family with a married father and mother. With the state of the black family in serious decline and the number of African-American children born out of wedlock now at a shocking 72 percent, there is a critical need for visible black leaders to regain the moral high ground and be godly examples.

Mr. Perry often refers to the trauma of his dysfunctional childhood experience with the man who was not really his father and who mistreated him. How might his life have been different if he was reared in a home with a godly father and mother married to each other, obeying biblical standards, committed to doing the will of God?

Not long ago, unfortunately, Tyler began veering off God's

clear path for men and women regarding marriage and family. Millions who look to him as a role model for their lives and their children were shocked. He and his girlfriend, model Gelila, are reported not to be married but rather living together ("lifestyle fornication"). In 2014, they had an out-of-wedlock baby boy, Aman.

The same article says Oprah Winfrey is one of their son's godmothers. Tyler says that the best advice Oprah's given him is this: "Just live in the moment. Just be present in what is going on in your life." He says, "For me, I just want to make sure that I'm enjoying it as much as I can."

Here's the deal: Material success and New Age advice from people like Oprah Winfrey have influenced Tyler Perry on a dangerous and deceptive path. For millions of us who have followed his career and pointed scores of our youth in his direction, now is the time to pray for his turnaround to once again please the God who has so richly blessed him.