

Harper Lee's Death Isn't the One That Breaks My Heart

Within hours, one man and one woman crossed from this life into the next.

From an outsider's perspective, one was mourned prolifically while the other had next to no fanfare.

But for me, the loss most headlines ignored cut far deeper than the death of "Great American Novelist" Harper Lee.

Can I be real with you? I read Harper Lee's words once, because school made me. I took my notes, aced the test, wrote some poems and never looked back. I'm from Alabama, so admitting that in writing is a cardinal sin.

But Gilbert Morris, who met his Creator on Feb. 18 at the ripe, ol' age of 86, developed my faith, sense of adventure and love for pen meeting paper.

I first picked up a Morris book in middle school, swept away into adventures of expansion the moment my bottom hit the bean bag. Suddenly, a desire to live vicariously through his strong women of faith replaced my worries of puberty and grade-school hierarchy.

Morris' characters influenced my faith in almost unspeakable ways. Twelve years later, I know how to fight spiritual battles because of how his heroes and heroines took on Voodoo. I'm pursuing faith over career because his characters glimpsed at the blessing of following God's destiny. I avoid romantic entanglements with nonbelievers because he revealed the heartache in 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Morris wasn't driven by an agenda, but by the inspiration that comes when faith intersects your passion. His was

storytelling.

And so mine is, as well. To my knowledge, he never penned a how-to book about living according to your faith, but rather, the legacy he leaves behind is a prime example of Matthew 7:16.

In each story, he wove Scripture with doubt, the sovereignty of God balanced with the heart's desires. His prose revealed vulnerable men and women who didn't need to discover themselves through the world because they knew their identities in God.

Morris' fiction proved the truth of God giving us our best lives, our best adventures when we choose to follow God. Those same adventures, though, were layered with heartache and the revelation that a life of faith is not for the weary who want the easy path.

Quite frankly, I learned more about God, Jesus, Christianity and service in Morris' collections than I did in Sunday school.

Current events tell us that American Christians want to be comfortable, that we'd rather agree with the world than rock the boat. Even among—or perhaps especially among—evangelical circles, the idea of pursuit of self persists above pursuing God. At all costs, in his books, Morris' characters denied themselves for the cross. Granted, many were fluffy romance stories, but the take-homes still align with the Bible.

Today I'm devastated because readers lost someone who wrote spiritual parallels in a digestible manner. But tomorrow, I'll remember how he inspired men and women like me to pick up the pen and show those around us what life is like within the faith. {eoa}

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