

Matthew Perry Made Us Laugh, But He Was a Tortured Soul

Matthew Perry died way too young. The beloved actor who played Chandler Bing on the hit sit-com “Friends” for 10 seasons—from 1994 to 2004—was found dead in a hot tub in his Los Angeles home last weekend. So far investigators haven’t determined the cause of his death. He was 54.

Perry was a really funny guy, and it seemed he was born to play the role of Chandler—the insecure, quick-witted data analyst who becomes friends with Ross, Monica, Rachel, Phoebe and his goofy roommate, Joey Tribbiani. Chandler had a fear of commitment, lots of insecurities and a secret addiction to cigarettes, but by the end of Season 7 he marries Monica and they eventually adopt twins.

“Friends” was one of the most successful TV shows of all time, and Perry was worth an estimated \$120 million at the time of his death. But his popularity and wealth didn’t translate into happiness. He battled depression and a serious addiction to opioids and alcohol—and he reportedly spent at least \$7 million trying to overcome his substance abuse.

In an interview with The Los Angeles Times last April, Perry was honest about the emptiness of his life.

“Nobody wanted to be famous more than me,” Perry said. “I was convinced it was the answer. I was 25, it was the second year of “Friends,” and eight months into it, I realized the American dream is not making me happy, not filling the holes in my life. I couldn’t get enough attention. ... Fame does not do what you think it’s going to do. It was all a trick.”

After his parents divorced when he was a baby, Perry got his start in show business as a child actor. “Friends” gave him his big break, turning him and every other member of the cast

into stars. But in his 2022 memoir, “Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing,” Perry admitted that he had been addicted to alcohol since his first drink at age 14. His addiction battle got worse, and it almost killed him in 2018 when he suffered a ruptured colon.

Just like the character he played, Chandler Bing—who hid his cigarettes from his wife and lied when she asked if he’d been smoking—Perry did a pretty good job hiding his drinking problem. The actor said in a BBC Radio interview that he couldn’t remember three years of filming the hit show because he was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. But he continued to smile and crack jokes, and he won numerous Emmy nominations in spite of his struggle.

When I heard about Perry’s death, I was reminded of Proverbs 14:13: “Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief.” Just because someone is smiling doesn’t mean they aren’t facing the worst battle of their lives. Just because someone is a jokester doesn’t mean they haven’t contemplated suicide recently. Just because someone is as funny as Chandler Bing doesn’t mean they don’t need a shoulder to cry on and a big dose of encouragement.

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A record number of people today are on the verge of a serious mental health breakdown. We need to be more vigilant to check on each other, ask questions, use discernment and stage interventions when a friend is struggling.

We also need to be ready to share the hope of Jesus with people who are drowning in their own addictions, or searching for the real meaning of life. You may have a friend like Matthew Perry—someone who seems to have it all together but who is actually falling apart inside. Don’t focus on the

outward appearance. Look at the heart, and pray that you will have the right words to say.

There are some hopeful signs that Perry may have actually surrendered his life to the Lord before his death. In his memoir he recounted a moment of spiritual surrender: "I started to cry. I mean I really started to cry—that shoulder shaking kind of uncontrollable weeping. I wasn't crying because I was sad. I was crying because for the first time in my life, I felt OK. I felt safe, taken care of, decades of struggling with God and wrestling with life and sadness—all was being washed away. Like a river of pain, gone into oblivion."

Perry continued by saying that he was certain he had been in the presence of God and that "everything was different" because of that encounter.

"Eventually the weeping subsided," Perry wrote. "I stayed sober for two years based solely on that moment. God had shown me a sliver of what life could be. He'd saved that day, and for all days, no matter what. He had turned me into a seeker, not only of sobriety and truth, but also of Him."

After Perry's memoir was published, he told atheist Bill Maher that he believed in God. And he added: "I have a very close relationship with Him that's helped me a lot."

Those are some serious words from a comedian. I hope Perry found salvation after so many years of struggle. And I hope the tragedy that ended his life will help us be more sensitive to the people around us who are quietly drowning in their secret pain.

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