

Mourning For Michael

✖ When Michael Jackson died last week, I have to admit that the news not only jarred me, but deeply saddened me as well. I grew up during the height of his staggering career and, as both a passionate music fan and an aspiring musician, was greatly influenced by him.

Jackson's groundbreaking album *Thriller* released when I was 11 years old and over the next two years produced hit after hit after hit. Songs like "Billie Jean," "Beat It," "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," "Human Nature" and the title track were routinely played on my sister's record player.

Those same songs (and many more) have played in my head like a mental jukebox since the day he passed. He impacted the world with music like few others before him or since. Elvis, The Beatles, Sinatra and U2 join him in that rarefied air only occupied by the truest of icons.

There are three distinctive factors that have contributed to my melancholy.

1. Jackson squandered his gift: There's no question Jackson had a God-given talent that defied the natural. From the time he was a young pre-teen performer, he was touching the masses with his voice, his dance moves, his boyish charm and his infectious smile.

But most historians who have written about Jackson's storied past agree that he was a damaged soul due in great part to his tumultuous upbringing and early exposure to a lifestyle that no child or teen should have to experience. While he seemingly remained unaffected early in his career, the lack of a true

childhood later caught up with him as his insecurities and identity issues led him down a bizarre path that included countless plastic surgeries, inappropriate relationships with minors and an apparent dependency on prescription drugs.

Jackson touched the world, but was it in a way that his creator (and the giver of those talents and abilities) intended? Something tells me the answer to that question is a sobering *no*.

2. Jackson's fans misdirected their worship: The reaction of Jackson's fans to his death reminds me of something that happened in 1997. On Aug. 31, Princess Diana Spencer was tragically killed in a car accident. Five days later, the world lost Mother Teresa. I remember watching the media coverage from a hotel room in Fort Smith, Ark., and in particular the stunning imbalanced approach America's media was taking to the two deaths.

The coverage was five-to-one in favor of Lady Di. Sure, she did some great things for the sake of various humanitarian causes, but she by no means sacrificed her entire life for the cause of Christ by ministering to the poorest of the poor and the hopelessly diseased. Her life was something to be truly celebrated, yet she was sadly outshone by the sexy allure of outdated royalty.

Likewise, Jackson shared a "deathdate" with some inconspicuous heroes. Sheila Ann Taylor also passed away on June 25. The White Plains, Md., resident was just 48 years old. Taylor was a loving mother and wife. Nothing special in the world's eyes, but she meant a lot to the people closest to her.

In Hinesburg, Vt., Wendy Jo Pierson lost her 18-month battle with brain cancer. Before the disease, she was a vibrant

fitness guru who loved to help others develop a healthy lifestyle.

Neither of these women may have reached the status of Mother Teresa's notoriety, but they certainly made an impact on those around them. Yet in the world's eyes, they were insignificant and unworthy of our praise.

3. Jackson's story (and celebrity worship in general) has overshadowed the important issues of our day: It's a big deal when an icon who transcended racial, international, political and artistic lines dies. I get why the media and us regular folk are clamouring about the intriguing details surrounding the King of Pop's last days on earth.

But like my good friend Ash Greyson wrote on his Facebook profile recently, "It's terrible that we have lost so many great people this week. It is also terrible that each day, in the U.S. alone, nearly 4,000 pre-born babies are killed ... "

This was one death. And as tragic as it may be, I haven't seen throngs of mourners gather to pay respects to the 50-plus million babies that have been aborted since 1973 or the 15-plus million children who die annually in Africa, Asia and Latin America due to starvation and poverty or the 17-plus million people who have succumbed to various forms of cancer this decade alone.

In other words, the modernized societies of our world are terribly skewed towards idol worship in such a way that the things that really matter-the things that God cares about such as justice, righteousness and biblical truth-aren't given much thought at all by the vast majority. This mindset has also overrun many churches and is the pervasive way of thinking for many who call themselves Christians.

The reaction to Jackson's death is just one reminder of the fact that now is the time for true followers of Christ to start chasing after God's heart and doing His work instead of being distracted by the white noise in our lives.

And while I continue to feel a certain measure of sorrow for Michael Jackson and those he left behind, I feel a deeper sorrow for those who place their hope in people and the material things of this world. God help us all to never get to the point where we care more about the unfortunate fate of one while ignoring the tragic sufferings of many.

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