

Salacious Stories Sell, but Martyrdom Hardly Motivates

While looking at the Charisma News website last week, I noticed two stories. One had been shared almost 11,000 times, the other barely 100. Is it any surprise that the first story was about a scandal in a gospel celebrity's family and the second story about a courageous martyr in Africa?

The first article was posted on May 7 and was titled "Mary Mary's Tina Campbell Reveals Husband's Infidelity," detailing the struggles Tina went through after learning of her husband's unfaithfulness. "Once I became aware [of the affair]," she said, "I initially wanted to kill my husband."

Thankfully, they are seeking to preserve their marriage, but I'm sure that wasn't the main reason the article was shared. Rather, it was because of the nature of the story, featuring a well-known gospel singer, adultery and extreme jealous anger. (The reporting itself was meant to be informative and constructive.)

The second article was posted on May 31 and was titled "Christian Martyr Faye Pama Musa Is Mourned, Knew His Life Was in Danger," telling the story of the courage of the Rev. Faye Pama Musa, who continued to preach and minister in the midst of Muslim threats, even though he knew his life was in danger. He was ultimately "gunned down by Islamic terrorists."

Now, I'm aware that Nigeria is far away and that most of us never heard of this faithful servant of the Lord. And I do understand that certain stories are more attention getting. After all, my February article, "Sex Symbols Who Speak in Tongues?" which did not mention names and which was primarily a critique of our contemporary American gospel, was shared more than 61,000 times just on the Charisma News page alone.

(I don't doubt that the editor's addition of the picture of Megan Fox's face at the beginning of the article drew initial attention to it as well.)

But what troubles me is that all too often, we are drawn to the sensational stories—and when I say “we,” I’m including myself—rather than to the stories with substance. In fact, we are sometimes more drawn to bad news than to good news, to the point that we’ll do more talking about a split between leaders than to the reconciliation between those leaders. (A Google search today for “Benny Hinn divorce” yielded four times as many hits as “Benny Hinn remarriage.”)

As I visit different Christian websites, I’ll see important articles about things like abortion, sex trafficking, martyrdom and persecution, and they often get very little attention, especially when compared to the “juicier” stories. Doesn’t this reflect a deeper problem in the church?

Recently, I received a catalog from a major Christian publisher, and as I started flipping through the pages, I was shocked to see page after page of romance novels. (The new fad seems to be Amish romance novels.) Then there were a bunch of books with fairly lightweight themes (kind of “Christian self-help” books), along with a handful of more serious, challenging volumes, all of which together painted a pretty good picture of much of the church of America.

Now, I don't doubt that some of the novels teach good moral lessons and that some of the “lightweight” books contain some useful content as well, but all this seems to be a far cry from Jesus' call to deny ourselves and take up the cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23), to Paul's call to endure hardship for the Lord as good soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3), to Peter's call to stand strong in the midst of persecution and suffering (1 Pet. 4:12-19), to the Lord's call in Revelation to be faithful to death in order to receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

This is not just abstract to me, as I have had the privilege of ministering in India every year for the last 20 years and have literally washed the feet of a martyr's widow, a woman whose husband we laid hands on for ministry only a few years earlier. (For the moving, live broadcast from India after the service, [click here](#).)

Last year, we buried one of our own ministry school grads from America, martyred by Muslim terrorists as he labored with his family in the Middle East. Both his young widow, his brother (also a ministry school grad and missionary), and his parents told me that they have no regrets about any of the decisions they made, despite their son's tragic death.

Yet this is the daily reality for our brothers and sisters around the world, suffering severe persecution in countries like North Korea and Nigeria and horrific bloodshed in Egypt, Syria and many other lands.

Perhaps it's time for those of us in the West to ask God to awaken us to eternal truths, to help us to understand we really are in a war (often with grave violence against us), and to take us deeper as believers, not titillated by the latest hot news but rather moved to be men and women of God, regardless of cost or consequence, whether by life or by death.

Do we really have a choice?

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