

The Superstar Syndrome

Christ didn't care about the "stuff" that made Him look good in the eyes of the people.

You don't have to look too closely today at media ministries to realize that many of them have become far too accommodating to the culture. Whatever happened to being salt and light, telling the truth and being "in the world, but not of it"?

Many superstar pastors and evangelists have lost the distinctive God has called them to, and they've started imitating successful secular business leaders or celebrities. But the very thing that made Mother Teresa and her ministry to lepers in India different is what made her a legend. She turned her back on the trappings of the world.

Mother Teresa didn't value possessions or fame the way corporate executives or Hollywood does. Instead, she cared about people.

I've written before that far too many church and ministry leaders are insecure, and surrounding themselves with the "prizes" of their success helps shore up their fragile egos. But Christ didn't care about "stuff" that made Him look good in the eyes of the people. In fact, some of His harshest words were for those who had sold their souls for the sake of appearance.

So what is the measuring stick for success in the teachings of Jesus?

Love. That's it.

““Love the Lord your God with all your heart. ... Love your neighbor as yourself”” (Matt. 22:37-39, NKJV). In fact, Jesus said all the laws of the prophets hang on this simple but difficult principle. Note, He didn't mention anything about having more servants, staff, disciples, houses or golden chariots. He didn't even mention freedom from Roman oppressors—which is what every Jew wanted more than anything. He talked about only love.

I'm not against wealth or material success. I wouldn't mind having a beach house before I die, and I admire leaders who know how to create financially successful companies or innovate in the marketplace. But when it comes to ministry, if they want to be distinctive, why are they pursuing a model created by the world?

For years, ministry leaders have used a “business” model in managing their churches. It's a legitimate attempt to get religious organizations working at a more efficient level and trying to make them more productive. But ultimately that won't work. Writer and consultant Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, says a business is driven by profit, but a nonprofit is driven by mission. The two can't be confused.

Jesus could have done a lot of things in His lifetime—built a temple or synagogue, started a new religious sect, written a best-selling scroll, preached to thousands or gotten involved in politics. But He chose something radically different. Jesus picked 12 men and then invested His life in them. He loved, taught and cared about them. And that handful of people changed the world.

If you are a pastor or ministry leader, get the attention of the world by being distinctive. And be distinctive by pursuing

love—not by driving a luxury car, living in a mansion, expanding your building program or hiring a staff of personal servants (sorry assistants) to have at your disposal.

Expanding, fundraising, growing a church and having a great staff can be important, and the best ministries use these strategies well. But it's critical that you understand that those things are not the benchmarks of success in the kingdom of God.

As Christians, we can all be distinctive by telling the truth, loving people and pointing others to the kingdom of God, not to the kingdom of success.

Phil Cooke, Ph.D. is a media consultant to ministries and churches worldwide, and author of the book *Successful Christian Television* (Xulon Press). Find out more at [www.philcooke.com](#). To read past columns in *Charisma* by Phil Cooke, log on at [www.charisma.com](#)