

It's Not About Us

Jonathan, a 26-year-old friend of mine, recently moved to Jerusalem to attend a ministry school where he will learn how to evangelize Muslims. He has been in the turbulent city for only a few weeks, yet he has already been threatened, spit on and cursed at. "A group of guys even pulled knives on me, and I have to tell you that stirred up some fear," Jonathan admitted in an e-mail.

I am so proud of this guy. His dream is to venture to North Africa someday as a missionary. Back in May, when I was with Jonathan at a prayer retreat in Oklahoma, he wept as he shared his burden to win Muslims to Christ. When six other men and I laid hands on him and prayed that day, we knew he would be putting his life at risk to obey God's call. Now he is on the front lines of ministry.

What Jonathan has done is humbling. He bent down low to serve the Lord. To him, ministry equals sacrifice and self-denial. He could have chosen a less dangerous career path, but he couldn't deny the sense of urgency he felt whenever he heard about the millions of people who are trapped in Islamic deception.

He had to go. And going required Jesus-style humility.

I wish there were more Jonathans in today's church. Often when I meet people who are considering "going into ministry," I probe to find out what they think ministry really is. Too often I discover they are expecting glamour or fame.

In some sectors of the church today we even offer seminars on how to become a “successful” minister. The steps include (1) printing business cards; (2) launching a Web site to “sell product”; (3) hiring an agent who knows how to secure speaking engagements at big churches; (4) learning how to negotiate with pastors for big offerings; and (5) buying a new wardrobe.

I don’t have any problem with a man or woman of God who sells tapes, gives out business cards or wears a nice suit. But sometimes I just want to jump on a table and yell a reminder to everybody: “It’s not about you!”

Somehow we have redefined the word ministry to mean getting instead of giving. In our glitzy world, celebrity pastors teach their disciples that ministry is about first- class seats, limousine service, pampered treatment and a five-figure honorarium.

With this new definition, we judge a man’s anointing by the size of his entourage—which includes one person to carry his briefcase, another to deflect his cell phone calls, another to charter private airplanes and yet another to carry his bottled water.

And don’t forget the bodyguards!

When I asked someone recently why evangelists in the United States need bodyguards, I was told it is “to protect the man of God from the crowds.” Well, we certainly wouldn’t want the man of God to have to bother with those little people, would we?

Speaking of bodyguards, my friend Jonathan in Israel doesn’t

have one.

Neither do the selfless people we profiled in this issue of Charisma—real Christians who are feeding the poor, loving fatherless children and caring for prisoners. These unsung heroes will probably never have an entourage, nor do they want one. They don't want anybody to keep them from the little people.

These folks, like my friend Jonathan, prefer to stay low. Maybe we should let them totally redefine ministry in the 21st century.