

Stop the Sideshows

This magazine has had its share of Christian celebrities on its covers: Pastors of megachurches, award-winning musicians, best-selling authors, you name it. We all love famous people—perhaps because we envy their success, or maybe because we are just curious whether they have flaws.

In the end, these flawed celebrities often disappoint us. Ten of the ministry leaders we featured on the covers of *Charisma* in the 1980s eventually endured embarrassing scandals. And two of the six megachurches we featured 16 years ago in a series called “Outstanding Churches of America” disbanded because of moral failures.

As much as we hate to admit it, bigger is not necessarily better, and the applause of men rarely has anything to do with God’s favor. What seems to glitter with success today may not stand the heat of God’s refining fire tomorrow. What grabs the spotlight usually turns out to be a distracting sideshow.

I wish I could say we’ve learned that the so-called big names are not necessarily the people we need to follow. But judging from reports I’ve received lately, there is a new epidemic of spiritual pride infecting the church today. For example:

* A pastor from Florida told me that he recently hosted a conference speaker who demanded limousine service to his hotel. Then the evangelist said he expected a fruit basket in his room. “And not the cheap kind. I expect a handmade basket,” he told his host.

* It seems there is a mad rush to pin fancy labels on church leaders today. Suddenly it is stylish to use impressive titles such as “Ruling Bishop,” “Apostolic Prophet” or “Exalted Prophetess.” (What’s next? “Grand Master”? “His Excellency”?)

* Some bigheaded charismatic speakers insist on waiting until worship is over to make their grand entrance into the church service. I guess they want to make it clear that they are on a higher spiritual level than the folks in the pews.

Be assured that Charisma’s editors are just as sick of this nonsense as you are. That’s why we’ve been focusing more and more of our coverage on unsung heroes—the “average” folks who are happy to serve Jesus whether or not anybody applauds their sacrifices or writes about them in a magazine.

Whether these people are witnessing to strippers, sharing Jesus with punk rockers, starting orphanages in Haiti or risking their lives to win Muslims in Afghanistan, they are the real reason God’s kingdom is advancing today.

In this special “Holy Spirit Around the World” issue you will read about such heroes: An Ethiopian youth pastor whose student teams led more than 8,500 people to Christ in three years; a brave Vietnamese man who led 20 people to faith while he was in prison; and an unknown Atlanta preacher who told God he was willing to tackle the ugly problem of sexual abuse in Peru.

I hope their stories will encourage you to serve God with pure motives. When it’s all said and done and the final curtain falls on eternity, all the wood, hay and stubble of our

charismatic sideshows will go up in smoke. Our limousines, fruit baskets and fancy titles will smolder in the ashes.

Only what was done for Jesus from a heart of love and humility will shine like gold. Then the true heroes of faith will receive the applause of heaven.