

Introduction

I'd like to begin by giving you a list of names and then asking a question about them. The names are: Mariano Rivera, Tim Tebow, Deborah Norville, Patricia Heaton, S. Truett Cathy, Pat Boone, Amy Grant, Joel Osteen, Kirk Cameron, Sarah Palin, and Kathy Lee Gifford. Question: What two things do those people have in common? First, they all profess to be Christians. And second, they are all celebrities.

Let me ask you a question with regard to celebrities. Are you star struck? I hope not because you're out of touch with reality if you are. Turn to James 5:13-18 and you'll see what I mean.

Celebrities

This is a well known text about healing prayer. Verses 13 and 14 instruct sick Christians to seek being anointed and prayed for by the elders of their church. Those prayers, according to verse 15, will effectively restore them to physical and spiritual health.

Verse 16 reveals an implication of verse 15. If prayer is that effective, then Christians are wise to pray for each other in all the trials of life, in the context of confession. Praying that way, according to the last line of verse 16, will "**accomplish much.**" Our old adage, "**Prayer changes things**" expresses the gist of that.

James illustrates that principle by citing what Elijah did in 1 Kings 17-18. He prayed that it wouldn't rain and it didn't for 3½ years. He then prayed that it would rain and it did. It was a visible and remarkable demonstration that prayer accomplishes much.

But why did James cite Elijah to illustrate effectual prayer? There were many other Old Testament figures and many other remarkable answers to prayer. So, why did James choose Elijah? It's because he, in addition to Moses, was the most recognized of all Old Testament figures in Jewish thought. Jews regarded him as the prototype of the prophet who would prepare the way for Messiah. And as Moses represented God's

revelation embodied in the Law, Elijah represented it embodied in the prophets. All good Jews, therefore, knew who both men were and thought and conversed about them.

Now, Elijah and Moses have their counterparts in our own cultural context. We call them "**celebrities.**" You know what celebrities are. The technical definition is people who are exceedingly celebrated. That is, they're people who are widely known and frequently referred to and discussed. They're ones about whom the masses think, write, and talk.

Every generation and social context has its celebrities including, and even especially, ours. Give me the names of some celebrities that you know. Here are a few others: Justin Bieber, Donald Trump, Paula Deene, Kim Kardashian, Derek Jeter, Angelina Jolie, and Oprah. All of those individuals are celebrities. They're widely known and frequently referred to and discussed.

Celebrityism

Now, notice a statement James makes in verse 17, "**Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.**" The very fact that he felt compelled to write that implies something about Elijah. Commentator R.V.G. Tasker explains it well: "**So wonderful did the achievements of Elijah seem to succeeding generations that he came to be regarded as semi-divine.**" He's right. First century Jewish Christians revered Elijah. They viewed him as a special kind of humanity – as someone who was different and better than they were.

That in turn affected how they interpreted God answering his prayers. He answered them, they thought, because Elijah was a special kind of humanity. But He wouldn't answer theirs because they weren't.

The Jewish regard for Elijah is analogous to a cultural phenomenon that's obvious to us all. That phenomenon is called "**celebrityism.**" Celebrityism is the adulation of celebrities. It's people placing widely-known individuals "**on pedestals**" as we say it. They think, feel, and act as if they're different or better than non-celebrities are. They consider

them a special kind of humanity and regard and treat them preferentially because they do. They're star struck in other words and that's the term I'm using to describe it – star struck.

Consider this. How many of you are familiar with “**EOS?**” It stands for “**Empty Oprah Syndrome.**” That's the name give to the pervasive sadness millions of her fans have been feeling since the Oprah Show went off the air last year. One woman explains the depth of her sadness this way: “**She (Oprah) is one of us. She's our ultimate girlfriend. She is a shining star of what we can be as humans.**” She and millions of others have given Oprah a higher place in their thinking, feeling, and acting than she should have. They're star struck.

It isn't just the celebrity status of people that makes others star struck. It's why they're celebrities as well. It's the thing or things about them that made them widely known in the first place. They hit home runs, make millions in business, throw touchdown passes, sing well, cook well, act well, host talk shows well, paint well, write well, and on it goes. The masses highly value those things and are star struck as a result with regard to the ones who do them.

Millions of Americans, for instance, highly value football and the ability of a person to throw passes. They're star struck, therefore, about Tom Brady. Other millions, apparently, care deeply about talk shows and the ability of a person to host them. They're star struck, therefore, about Ellen DeGeneres.

I'd sum it up this way. One of the defining characteristics of our cultural context is an unabashed celebrityism. The masses adulate celebrities. They consider them a special kind of humanity and regard and treat them preferentially because they do. They're star struck.

Egalitarianism

But you and I as followers of Jesus shouldn't be. We shouldn't be because we're out of touch with reality when we do.

James identifies what the reality I'm talking about is

Our call is what is called **“egalitarianism.”** Egalitarians are people who believe that all human beings are created equal in terms of value and worth.

Let’s go back to James’ declaration about Elijah in verse 17. He **“was a man with a nature like ours.”** Paul makes that same statement about himself in Acts 14:15. After healing a lame man, the people of Lystra began worshipping him as a god. He quickly declared about Barnabas and him, **“We are also men of the same nature as you.”** Notice the point in both verses – James 5:17 and Acts 14:15. Making it rain or not rain by praying and healing people doesn’t make someone a special kind of humanity. If that doesn’t, then certainly nothing else does either - hitting home runs, throwing touchdown passes, acting brilliantly, cooking exquisitely, painting superbly, or even making millions or billions of dollars.

Egalitarians are people who grasp and believe that. Tom Brady isn’t special because he throws touchdown passes better than anyone. Anthony Hopkins isn’t special because he acts more brilliantly than anyone. Paula Deene isn’t special because she makes food, loaded with butter, that’s out of this world. Each of those has the same nature that everyone else does. What each does doesn’t make him or her a special kind of humanity. He or she isn’t different and better in terms of value and worth than anyone else is. Egalitarians are people who believe that.

But they don’t only believe that; they live it as well. They think, feel, and act as if everyone is equal. They don’t give anyone preferential treatment. They don’t treat anyone different or better than anyone else.

Let me quickly say that there are exceptions to that. They do give preferential treatment when doing so is related to a valid good that needs to be achieved.

They grasp that what James reveals about Elijah in verse 17 is true of every person on earth. He would believe because they believe that way, they live that way. They don't adulate anyone including celebrities. They think, feel, and act as if there's no such thing as a special kind of humanity.

Millions of people are star struck because of them. But it isn't just secularists is it? Christians were star struck 2000 years ago and they still are today in two contexts.

They are so because they excel at doing things that the masses value and enjoy.

Church Celebrities

Let's stop for a moment to think of Christian celebrities. I'm talking about recognized and celebrated followers of God from the first to twenty

first centuries. They include Moses, Elijah, Paul, Peter, Francis of Assisi, George Fox, William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Billy Graham to name a few. The fact is that most Christians revere those people. They consider them not quite human or at least a special kind of humanity – different and better than they are.

That illustrates what our posture is when we view Christian celebrities as a special kind of humanity. It's that our experiences with God can't be like theirs. We think that our nature prevents God from relating to us and working through us like He did and does them. How many of us, for instance, believe we can pray as effectively as Elijah did?

- Elijah and Moses
- Christian celebrities
- Cultural celebrities
- What makes them celebrities
- Star Struck - Celebrityism
- Don't be star struck
- Value love
- Evangelists on tv
- Speakers at conferences
- Sports evangelism
- Teachers
- Buy products

They, therefore, could never pray as effectively as he did.

. And that's why he was so effective in prayer, they thought. They could never pray, different and better than normal human beings are. And that's why he was so effective in prayer, they thought. . They, therefore, could never pray as effectively as he did

So, James emphasizes in the opening line of verse 17 that he wasn't that. On the contrary, he had the same nature (the same humanity) that they did. His prayers weren't effective because he was special. His prayers, therefore, weren't effective because he was special because he wasn't. They were effective because he was righteous and his prayers were earnest. His prayers weren't effective because he was a
Consequently, if they prayed as fervently as he prayed, they'd get the same results that he got.

at a higher place well First century Christians and Jews had so elevated Elijah in their thoughts. You see now, defining celebrity helps us define something else – celebrityism. In his book *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, Kenneth Myers identifies four defining characteristics of the popular culture in which we live. They are distraction, newness, newness, and celebrityism.

Celebrityism is obviously nothing new. As a result of modern technologies and mass communication, however, our popular culture has taken the idolization of famous people to new levels. Americans relate to more celebrities and relate to them more deeply than people ever have.

Celebrity endorsement of products is just one example of what I mean. People do buy what celebrities advertise and branding strategist Eli Portnoy explains why this way: **"The reality is people want a piece of something they can't be. They live vicariously through the products and services that those celebrities are tied to."**

It's true. Many if not most Americans are star struck. They're "in"

to celebrities in a way they aren't in to others.

Character

But you and I as followers of Jesus shouldn't be. God Himself is our model here. Let's examine what our text teaches about Him that we ourselves should emulate.

Verse 7 calls us to praise and thank Him and verses 8-9 explain why we should. Derek Kidner aptly captures the true meaning of these verses in his *Commentary on the Psalms*. He writes that they reveal: **“the immense range of God’s operations, equally wonderful for their vastness and their attention to detail. This is divine care on a scale to evoke wonder and worship.”** He’s right. God’s utter competence enables Him to attend to every need, no matter how small, of everyone and everything in the universe.

Having made that point in verses 8-9, the psalmist goes on to identify two of its implications in verses 10-11. One implication, in verse 10, is that God isn’t enamored with the prowess of human beings. He doesn’t elevate them in His thinking and acting just because they excel at hitting home runs, singing, acting, and so on. Another implication, in verse 11, is that He favors those who fear and wait for Him. He’s inclined toward those who are willing to humble themselves before Him.

Verse 10-11 teach us a life-defining truth. God chooses character over competence every time. Paul offers us a little commentary on verses 10-11 in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. He describes the Corinthians this way in verse 26, **“there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.”** But God called them anyway and Paul defines He doing so this way in verse 27, **“God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”** There’s no doubt about it. God values and enjoys character far more than He does competence. He isn’t star struck.

And you and I, as followers of Jesus shouldn’t be either. I’ve said before that we should participate in popular culture’s blessings but reject its profanities. Celebrityism is one of its profanities and so, we should reject it. Don’t be star struck in other words. That means three things as a practical matter.

abilities that a person has on a horse To delight or take pleasure in something means that we value and enjoy it. Verse 10 reveals what God delights or takes pleasure in, and I'm going to discuss what that is later.

But let's consider for our purposes today what the people in our current culture delight or take pleasure in. It's

Buy products

Emulate them

Put on a pedestal

Televangelists

Assume the authority of their pronouncements

Witness for them

Invite them to speak

Think and feel

Act

Value:

Do something – value it – give him attention = celebrity

Celebrity – regard and treat him better than normal people

“The reality is people want a piece of something they can’t be,” says Eli Portnoy, a branding strategist. “They live vicariously through the products and services that those celebrities are tied to. Years from now, our descendants may look at us and say, ‘God, these were the most gullible people who ever lived.’ ”

Value Character

First, value character not celebrity.

There are several possible explanations for that, one of which Ernest Becker identifies in his book *Denial of Death*. Beck argues that human beings are suffering from angst, that is, the fear of dying. They fear dying and don't want to face their finitude and mortality. To escape their angst, therefore, they identify with persons who convey the impression of immortality. They seek these persons out and identify completely with them. By losing themselves in their hero or heroine, they gain a sense of power and significance that they wouldn't otherwise have. In short, they transfer their own selfhood to those who seem to be beyond their own limitations and shortcomings.

that celebrity sells. The fact is that if consumers believe that stars actually use a product, sales can skyrocket. That celebrity sells teaches us something about many if not most people, including

Celebrities