

Calling Christian celebrities

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

August 16, 2013

I was reading Morgan Guyton's [blog post](#) asking if Christians can transcend celebrity culture. I resonated with that weird feeling of being not-quite-famous. I'm usually at a conference center, where people are looking at my colored leader's nametag, trying to figure out who I am, while looking over my shoulder, to see if there's someone more important behind me. Sometimes people figure out who I am and say, "Tribal Church! You're Tribal Church." Then 5 seconds later, "You're so much shorter in real life."

And I wonder how I could be shorter than a one-inch avatar.

It's hard to be around celebrities sometimes. I spend a lot of time at conferences. Most (as in 95%) of Christian celebrities are beautiful people. But it can be annoying to see how that person who is enjoying his fifteen minutes of fame blatantly runs over me with his roller bag and doesn't offer an apology. Or when I bump into that writer who seemed so kind when she wanted me to review her book. But now that her book is doing better than mine (she knows, because she's constantly comparing rankings on Amazon), somehow she can't figure out how to give me the time of day.

I just shake my head, because headlines are ephemeral, and you have to still be a person after they fade.

Then there's the fact that I want to write. I feel called by God to it. But writing comes with self-promotion. Which is hard because writing a book takes hours and hours of being in a room *alone*. Think about that. Writers like solitude. That sometimes means we're socially awkward. It also means that most of us don't like promoting our work. I mean, sure, we'd love for our book to take off. We just don't like having to push start the junker to get the engine puttering.

Traditional publishing is going through all sorts of transitions, and most of them include cutting their marketing departments way back and expecting their writers to "build their platform," in whatever means we can. Some of my colleagues are

amazing at it. They have glimmering personalities, and crowds flock to their charisma like wet campers to a bonfire.

In Progressive Protestant circles, [David Heim makes the case that we don't really have celebrities](#). We're uncomfortable with them. We assume that if they have glitz then they must be shallow. And if they have an audience then they must be dumbing things down.

But (with apologies to Morgan), here's the thing. We need a figurehead, a personality, because that's how our world works. When big-time reporter Sally wants to know about what Christians think about homelessness, poverty, SNAP, the environment, or church, Sally needs to call someone. Sally needs a name. She's probably going to call the first name that comes to mind—the Christian celebrity. If Progressive Protestants want to ever be heard in the media (and I know we do, we complain about how we're ignored all the time), then it seems have to get over our aversion to celebrities.

(I need to note that these reflections also came after a conversation with [Bruce Reyes-Chow](#), [Shannan Vance-Ocampo](#), [Jes Kast-Keat](#), [J.C. Austin](#), [Ed Blum](#), and [Kristin Dalton](#)—all beautiful celebrities in their own right.)