

Walk a mile in the preacher's \$5k sneakers

Does a desire for nice things have anything to do with the gospel?

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [May 8, 2019](#) issue



Photo by [Paul Volkmer](#)

Funny stories emerge from our church sacristy. One of my favorites occurred before a worship service 15 years ago. Brad and Nate, our eighth-grade acolytes for the day, were trying to figure out how to fit their adolescent bodies into some undersized white robes they had grabbed from the rack.

As I helped them with the Velcro closures on the shoulder flaps, I glanced down at their sneakers. I asked Nate (who later grew to be 7'2"), "What size *are* those shoes?" "Size 16," he said. Taken aback, I looked at Brad, the other 14-year-old

(who went on to play college football). “What size are *your* shoes?” “16,” he replied with a smile.

More than a little dumbfounded, I looked up at these two and said, “Where on earth do you guys buy these things?!” They smiled at each other and said in near perfect unison, “2bigfeet.com.”

I grew up in a different world. My eighth-grade feet were considerably smaller and they never went to church in sneakers. Our Saturday night ritual (aka requirement) was to polish what my mother called our “church shoes.” With our box of Kiwi polish cans, daubers and brushes, we’d go to work. I don’t mind sneakers in church at all these days, though I have yet to adopt them for my own worship apparel. That decision may preclude me from ever becoming a celebrity preacher.

An Instagram user named Tyler Jones recently created an Instagram account as something of a joke: @preachersnsneakers. While sitting on his couch one Sunday watching a YouTube clip, he hit upon the idea of posting photos of popular preachers who like to wear pricey sneakers. Next to the photo of each trendy preacher is a screenshot of the price tag for the shoes. For example, John Gray, pastor of Relentless Church in Greenville, South Carolina, is seen dressed in Nike Air Yeezy 2 Red October high-tops—\$5,611 a pair.

Carl Lentz of New York’s Hillsong Church (who baptized Justin Bieber), Rich Wilkerson Jr. (who officiated at Kanye West and Kim Kardashian’s wedding), and a host of other lavishly shod preachers featured on the site all lend new meaning to the biblical word: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

@preachersnsneakers may have begun as a comedic idea, but the site prompts all kinds of questions pertinent to any Christian servant. When is opulence too opulent? Does an inordinate desire for nice things have anything to do with the Christian gospel? How often should I replace my smartphone? Does the purchase of locally sourced organic food, often priced higher than average supermarket fare, cross into the realm of excess? When is a luxury a sin? Doesn’t solidarity with “the least of these” have some place in every ministry? Since we’re all adept at justifying personal behavior, these questions can be difficult to answer.

High-top-clad John Gray recently offered a telling word while justifying to critics why he purchased a \$200,000 Lamborghini for his wife: “She has toiled with a man who is still trying to find himself.” For the sake locating his identity, I might suggest to

Gray the idea of removing his shoes, getting down on the floor, and washing some other feet every so often. But before being so bold as to issue such a recommendation, I'd better do some of that myself.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "How beautiful are the feet?"