

Seeing through Stevie Wonder's eyes



CHRIS HIGHLAND
HIGHLAND VIEWS

Superstar musician Stevie Wonder was interviewed on NPR on Aug. 30 and said some remarkable things.

"I think that my thing is basically, God — when I think about it, I say, 'God, how can I make you even more happy?' Because, you know, obviously I'm appreciative of the fans and success and all that. But to please God is my greatest joy."

I would imagine most Christians would be fine with that. But "Mr. Wonder" goes on:

"And for those who might be Muslim, to please the God that you serve, Allah, or whatever your religion is. Like I said before, it's not about the religion, it's about the relationship."

He's not finished.

"And so my thing right now is I'm thinking: How can we deal with this situation where people are prostituting the most high with their negativity, with their evil? That hurts my heart so deeply. And that's everywhere. And so, to me, the one thing you've heard through and through every religion is: Hey, just love...."

"That's the most important thing: Just love. That's what's gonna see us through. So when I hear these little children singing my songs or singing songs, hearing those voices and I think of those little kids in Manchester, just going to see a concert and then someone uses that as a source of their anger — it's unacceptable."

"I don't care who you are or where you're from, it doesn't matter. And for me, not seeing anybody, it means that I'm looking at their souls."

This amazing artist — who's sold something like 100 million records with 25 Grammy awards — deserves to use his piano pulpit for a truth-telling sermon. The young people who were killed in the concert in Manchester were only there to find joy in singing. Stevie has the "eyes to see" the shadow side of any faith that would harm innocents.

But how is this "prostituting the most high with their negativity"? Though he says the "one thing" we've heard from every religion is "just love," he also understands there are angry people, even angry people with faith — an angry faith — who choose to harm others by using their God to force their negative feelings on others.

Judging and hurting others to prove that your "God of Love" is best and your faith is the only way is a form of prostitution.

In the Bible we find an embarrassing story — one of those unmentionable passages no one dares to preach — when God tells the prophet Hosea to "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children" (Hosea 1).

Why would God demand such an outrageous thing? A lesson, of course. "The land prostitutes itself by forsaking the Lord." Hosea's "wife" (purchased for some silver, a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine) is forced to have three children, each given a name to show God's displeasure.

There are other "spiritual instructions" in the Book of Hosea, but it seems to be an ancient affirmation of Stevie Wonder's observation: There are angry people who, in the name of an angry God, take out their anger on others.

What did this unnamed woman think about being used as a "divine lesson"? A poor woman is bought and sold because a man is told to make a lesson out of her since his God feels cheated on by His adulterous people.

I think we can guess why this story isn't taught in Sunday School. Bible experts will tell us the "message" is more important than the details, yet a human being, the woman, is one detail we can't ignore.

Why spend so much time on this terrible story? Because, as Stevie says,

using another to display your own negativity and anger is "unacceptable." As he says, "I don't care who you are or where you're from, it doesn't matter. And for me, not seeing anybody, it means that I'm looking at their souls."

A secular person might not speak of looking at "souls," but we can all choose to "see" — to consider real human persons.

Years ago I remember how much I enjoyed the album "Songs in the Key of Life." One song was quite beautiful, almost haunting: "Love's in Need of Love Today."

"Love's in need of love today / Don't delay, send yours in right away / Hate's goin' round, breaking many hearts / Stop it please, before it's gone too far."

"The force of evil plans to make you its possession / And it will if we let it destroy everybody. / We all must take, precautionary measures. / If love and peace you treasure, then you'll hear me when I say: / Love's in need of love today."

If only more of our world could see like Stevie, and sing along.

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer, free-thinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at chighland.com.