

We live in a celebrity culture where people become famous for doing nothing very worthwhile. Did you know that “Bieber Fever” was actually a real condition? Named for pop idol Justin Bieber, it was highly contagious around adolescent girls and involved an obsession with the singer.

One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 84. In verse 10, the psalmist writes, “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.” A popular praise song chorus picks up on the words immediately preceding this: “Better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere.”

True fame is not about having your picture on a magazine or your exploits recounted on TMZ, but about being in the presence of the living God, serving him with our lives, often quietly. We know this in our deepest being. When we talk about the heroes of our lives, the people we often mention are those folks who live these words from Psalm 84, who seek to live in God’s tent and would rather be a doorkeeper for God than People’s Sexiest Man of the Year.

I ran across a poem that captures those feelings. It is “Famous” by Naomi Shihab Nye.

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,
which knew it would inherit the earth
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The boat is famous to the earth,
more famous than the dress shoe,
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous.
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it could do.

From *Words Under Words: Selected Poems* (Portland, Oregon: Far Corner Books, 1995)

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of the wicked. My prayer is that at my funeral, the minister can read Psalm 84 and say, “Amen. Well done, good and faithful servant.”