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The "Coal Miner's Daughter"



Loretta Lynn
1932-2022



"One need not have been a country music fan (as I am) to find this woman's life important."

That's how Russell Moore, the editor-in-chief at Christianity Today, began his tribute on that website after Loretta Lynn, the country music singer-songwriter who was the most awarded female country recording artist ever, died October 4 at the age of 90.

"Her story is especially significant at a time when, five years into the mainstreamed #MeToo movement, we still face serious questions about the treatment of women in both the church and the world," Moore added.

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He went on to tell his favorite story about the self-described "Honky Tonk Girl" and her meeting with Richard Nixon.

Lynn had been invited to perform at the White House at the height of the Vietnam War, and she took advantage of an audience with first lady Pat Nixon to raise the matter of someone she thought was unjustly imprisoned.

"Pat," she said, I've been wanting to write a letter to tell Richard to let [the imprisoned man] go."

It's not appropriate protocol, of course, to refer to the president of the United States by his first name while in the White House. But when later asked by a television announcer why she had referred to the president as "Richard," she said, "They called Jesus 'Jesus,' didn't they?"

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Moore commented, "With one sentence, she gently poked at an institution that needed more authenticity. And she did it with a mischievous wink, letting her listeners know that she was not nearly as unsophisticated as she let on and that she knew exactly what she was doing."

He also noted that just about every report about Lynn's career "focused on her role as a kind of profeminist."

Indeed, in its report of her death, the Associated Press said that as a songwriter, Lynn "crafted a persona of a defiantly tough woman, a contrast to the stereotypical image of most female country singers. The Country Music Hall of Famer wrote fearlessly about sex and love, cheating husbands, divorce and birth control and sometimes got in trouble with radio programmers for material from which even rock performers once shied away."

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"It was what I wanted to hear and what I knew other women wanted to hear, too," Lynn told the AP in 2016. "I didn't write for the men; I wrote for us women. And the men loved it, too."

For example, said Moore, Lynn's song "Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (with Lovin' on Your Mind)," co-written with Peggy Sue Wright, took on the abusive behavior of men caught in alcoholism and adultery, both of which Lynn had tragically seen up close."

Her song "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" countered the common country music image of a heartbroken woman watching her man take up with another woman. In another song, Lynn promised "Fist City" to anyone who threatened her or her family.

Other songs talked about the burden of a woman raising children without adequate support or help from the father.

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"Her class critique cleverly took on both the elite feminist establishment and those who embraced the status-quo idea of domesticity," Moore said. "Neither one could understand what it means to be in Topeka, Kansas, hoping 'it ain't twins again.'"

Moore referred to a book Lynn had written describing her life on the road with fellow country legend Patsy Cline. In that book, she told about bluegrass icon Bill Monroe allegedly pinching her backside while backstage at a show. "Lynn took the reader through her thought process," Moore said. "'Was it because I hugged him?' she asked. Did he misinterpret her actions as flirting? 'It seemed like it had to be my fault,' she wrote. 'Otherwise, how could a respectable man like Bill Monroe do such a thing?'"

But she went on to tell her readers that at the time, she was too naive to see that he was to blame, not her, and declared that she now knew better. "Bill was a dirty ole man, plain and simple," she wrote. "Being talented didn't make him trustworthy or a gentleman. I don't like it, but I know now. You can't trust somebody just 'cause you wish you could."

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Moore then reflected on how things like that sometimes play out in the church, where "many default to protecting the institution."

"Sometimes the woman-blaming happens when people suggest the conversation itself is a 'secular #MeToo movement' and a 'liberal Trojan horse' attempting to supplant the sufficiency of Scripture," Moore said.

"But -- most disturbing at all -- people within the church will often blame the women who endure the harassment or abuse rather than the people who did the harassing and abusing. Women might be expected to reflect on what they might have done to 'lead on' the men who abused them. More women than I can count have had their lives wrecked -- through defamation and worse -- simply for coming forward.

"Underneath all this is the same old set of lies -- that men cannot control their passions and that women must be responsible for not setting off those passions (or must 'just endure' what happens when men don't restrain themselves)," Moore said, "Loretta Lynn could see through that, and so should we."

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Many tributes to Lynn refer to her as a "Coal miner's daughter," which accurately describes her origins, and which she used as the title of one of her songs and her 1976 autobiography. It was also used as the title of an Oscar-winning biopic about her.

The Wired Word team member Bill Tammeus quipped, "I've often wondered why she wanted to define herself by her father's occupation instead of by hers. On the other hand, that worked pretty well for Jesus."

In 2010, Sony Music released a new compilation album, *Coal Miner's Daughter: A Tribute to Loretta Lynn*. It featured stars including Reba McEntire, Faith Hill, Paramore and Carrie Underwood performing Lynn's classic hits spanning 50 years. The album produced a Top 10 hit music video on Great American Country of the single "Coal Miner's Daughter," featuring Lynn, Miranda Lambert and Sheryl Crow. The track cracked the Billboard singles chart, making Lynn the only female country artist to chart in six decades. **END**



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Warming Up:

Loretta Lynn struggled with many aspects of the culture of her day, seeking to bring light to things that were either uncomfortable to talk about, or completely ignored.

What things in culture are difficult or uncomfortable to talk about today? What issues are largely ignored?

How do you feel women are treated today compared to when Loretta Lynn was just beginning? What issues of the mistreatment of women remain today?

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Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5

It may be important for us to remember that Bathsheeba may not have been an entirely willing participant in what happened. In these days of Israel, if the king commanded, the commands were followed without question.

Questions:

What situations today might arise from someone in power taking advantage of someone with less power (sexual or otherwise)?

The cliché says that “power corrupts”. How does power corrupt even the King of Israel here?

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Read Exodus 15:19-21, 1 Samuel 2:1-10, and Luke 1:46-55

Each of these are examples of strong female “singers” like Loretta Lynn who have strong songs about their situations and the promises of God.

Questions:

What do these songs have in common?

What is different about the songs?

How does the fact that they are being sung by women (especially in the situations they each find themselves in) make a difference in hearing the songs?

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Read Ephesians 5:1-21

Paul addresses the Ephesians around the notions of living in a world that has “hidden darkness” and “secret things it is shameful to mention.”

Question:

How are we as Christians to “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”?

How and when is Christianity supposed to question and even live counter to the culture of our day?

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Read 1 John 1:5-10

John explains to his audience the role that confession and forgiveness plays in the life of a Christian.

Question:

What happens when we fail to confess our sins and “walk in the darkness”?

Think of Loretta Lynn’s songs. How often was she calling out sins that needed to be brought into the open and confessed?

Why is simple confession of wrong not enough? Why will even punishment of confessed sins still not be enough? What do all sins eventually need to be fully worked out?

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Wrapping It Up

Loretta Lynn was very public about her Christian faith. How do you think her faith played into the songs that she wrote?

Western Christianity has been accused of losing or ignoring the Biblical concept of “communal sin” (sin that pervades our culture, is held by all of us). What are the communal sins that we may confess today on behalf of ourselves and our culture?