

# Looking for Heroes

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Where have all the heroes gone in our world today? A hero is someone who puts others and the welfare of the surrounding community above their own self interests. They see higher purposes when most people have their heads down contemplating current predicaments and insurmountable worries. Today, everyone is so busy promoting themselves, branding and promoting their own name and value, trying to influence others, that they have a hard time thinking about the well-being of others. Tragically, self-sacrifice is becoming a foreign concept. Nathan



Hale, a patriot of the American Revolution, said before being executed by the British army, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Socrates, at the dawn of modern life in ancient Greece, before he was hastily tried and executed by elders of his city, said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." If our world is going to survive, self-sacrifice, not self-promotion, needs to be our renewed guiding light. And no one modeled this abundant life better than Jesus of Nazareth who willingly sacrificed his life on a cross to free us from the tyranny of sin. Self-sacrifice leads to new life every time. And that is why Easter is the most important of all celebrations.

As many of you know, I have had the privilege of leading men's Bible study groups for many years in the Chicago area in addition to my cross-cultural work with Frontier Fellowship. During this time, lots has happened in the lives of these men. In one study, a member named Bill recently reminded our group that it had been three years since he received a kidney transplant from another member of our group, whose name is Jim. Bill wanted to give thanks for the last three years of his joy-filled life, which was made possible by the sacrifice of Jim who had given one of his healthy kidneys to him. Jim is humble and always self-effacing and has become a hero and inspiration to our group for his sacrificial love for his friend. Bill said his faith has grown tremendously these last three years. Before, he was on the brink of dying. But the group's prayers and Jim's gift gave him new life. The retelling of this story renewed our calling to offer sacrificial love to others and brought the meaning of Easter home to everyone in the Bible study.

What is most disturbing about the current deluge of self-promotion in our world today is an increasing disregard of God is often fueling this new way of life. Every way we turn these days, we find a growing enthrallment of being human apart from God - not necessarily a humble, reverent child of God, just human. In this new context, people are fast forgetting that promoting

oneself is antithetical to loving and serving God; it runs contrary to everything Jesus ever taught or modeled. True followers of Jesus want to point everyone to God, where all the credit is due, not to themselves. Being overly human centered, unfortunately, is having severe consequences. In today's world, a general disregard for God is slowly calcifying into a growing agnosticism which is often finding a home in atheism and even leading to nihilism and a complete rejection of any moral order or overall purpose in life. Suddenly, we are faced with the following dilemma: if there is no moral order in the universe or a Creator God knowing and judging our actions and thoughts, lying, stealing, or being unfaithful become common place rather than transgressions or sins to be confessed. If we are not careful, we continue thinking, why not lie all the time if we can get away with it. Why not seek revenge against our enemies since there is no God to judge fairly for us. Or why not amass as much wealth as possible for the security we seek, or take advantage of weaker people and even abuse them if no one is able to stop us? In this new world we now find ourselves, the true meaning of Easter, disciplining ourselves to do the right thing, following the Lord's example of self-sacrifice, has never been more important for us to consider.

When we turn over control of our lives to the love and protection of our Lord, everything looks and feels different. We can suddenly breathe again and relax. A great tension leaves our bodies and souls. An overwhelming peace washes over us. We no longer feel driven to promote ourselves. And when we take up our own cross and sacrifice our old, self-centered lives, becoming a new creation in the grace and mercy of our God, our lives suddenly become abundant and full of meaning. Everyone we meet and everything we do has new meaning; we are buoyed by purpose and fullness. As the Apostle Paul said to the Athenians, "For 'In him we live and move and have our being.'"(Acts 17:28a). We suddenly realize how inherently connected we are to others, especially to those who have also daily taken up their crosses. Nothing is random anymore. Where there was once emptiness, boredom, meaninglessness, there is suddenly purpose, fullness, and love to fill our lives. We no longer need to attack our enemies; we can even try to love them.



Few people have better articulated this transition from a self-centered life to a God-centered life than King David when he wrote these famous words, "The Lord is my shepherd: I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever."(Psalm 23)

If we are not connected to God, we will have a difficult time feeling connected to ourselves and others. Our abilities to become empathic and compassionate become severely diminished. Poor, neglected, or marginalized people become a bother to us rather than a calling to come alongside and help. In our disconnectedness, we often feel alone and frightened. Without God at the center of our lives, we can become disconnected even from life itself, which is a dangerous place for us to be. We were made to serve and love God in this life and for an eternity – a world without end. That is how we were created and designed to function and be. If we deny that central part of ourselves, we will always feel terrible loneliness with unfulfilled holes in our hearts.

It is not too late for us to begin again following true heroes in our lives. They are out there; we just need to find and support them. However, we need to become more discerning in knowing the difference between a person who is self-sacrificing versus self-promoting. And we ourselves can become heroes, too, for others – for our friends, neighbors, spouses, children, or grandchildren. However, to do so, in any meaningful and lasting way, we need to invite Jesus, the ultimate hero in human history, into our hearts to help us. And we need daily to remember these following words from Scripture: “The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin a fresh each morning.” (Lamentations 3:22,23)



Sharon, our children, and I hope you and your families have a blessed and Happy Easter!