

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 18 • Issue 8

FOLLOWING HEROES

Change the world

It's My Fight

When war becomes
personal

Two Lives to Imitate

The grandma and the
saint





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE SECRET

Living a Christian's life in today's complex and intricate world can seem quite difficult. So many things demand our attention on a moment-by-moment basis. Most of them aren't bad, but they take our time and can keep us from growing in our faith.

Yet we all know people who seem to have found a way to balance the conflicts of modern life, and of course, countless Christians before us have been successful in their times as well. So what's the secret? Just as we must eat, breathe, and exercise in order to grow physically, there are three essentials to spiritual growth.

We grow by eating – Reading and studying God's Word and other edifying material is food for our souls and essential to spiritual growth and life. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."¹ "When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight."²

We grow by breathing – Prayer has been called the breath of the soul. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to "pray without ceasing," and Romans 12:12 to "keep on praying."³

We grow by exercising – We exercise by actively following in Jesus' footsteps, doing what we can to help the needy, relieve the burdened, and encourage the downhearted. Most of all, like John the Baptist, we can point others to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"⁴

Spiritual growth isn't easy, but then, growth rarely is! In fact, courage was the quality that demonstrated to the religious leaders of their time that the apostles had been with Jesus: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."⁵

Read on to explore what Christians past and present have to say about living a God-centered life.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. John 6:63 CEB
2. Jeremiah 15:16 NLT
3. NLT
4. John 1:29
5. Acts 4:13 NIV

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FOLLOWING HEROES

BY ANNA PERLINI

I WAS TEN YEARS OLD when I first heard of Albert Schweitzer, and I was really impressed by his dedication—to the point that I started contemplating becoming a doctor like him and following in his footsteps in Africa. Those were the days when in order to know more about something or somebody, you had to look through books, encyclopedias, and most of the time, go to the library. In other words, curiosity didn't find immediate satisfaction, and there was a certain amount of serendipity and mystery involved.

I was a bookworm, and up to that point my heroes were fictional—Robin Hood or Mary Poppins. Since I had a vivid imagination, I also invented my own heroes, till the day came that I started reading about real people who had been missionaries, explorers, freedom fighters, and so on.

1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

Albert was the first in a long series, followed by Martin Luther King, John Kennedy, Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, and many others. I realized that besides the many awful villains I had to read about in the history books at school, this earth has also seen some pretty amazing people!

So at a young age I determined to belong to the category of the world-changers. Every few weeks, I switched my passion to a different country or profession, depending on what hero I was reading about. Now many years later, I'm glad to say that wish came to pass. I was able to follow my heart and spend years on challenging mission fields, and I still dedicate most of my time to the needy and various worthwhile causes.

It hasn't been without a price and without mistakes, but here comes the best part. Talking about mistakes, one of the side effects of this new

age of “immediately accessible information” was that I got to read more about my many past and present heroes and found out that they weren't as perfect and sinless as I'd imagined. All of them had feet of clay, and some of the stuff they believed in, said, or did, could be disappointing initially.

But later, it was precisely their “imperfections” and human frailties that encouraged me when I too happened to fall off my pedestal.

The good these world-changers did far outweighed the bad, and this in itself is proof that you don't need to be perfect to change your part of the world. After all, none of them were, but they changed their world!

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,¹ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■



APPEARANCES AND THE BIG PICTURE

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE A FAILURE? Things haven't turned out the way you thought they should have or the way you wanted? Your expectations have been disappointed, your goals haven't been reached?

Well, let me tell you about a man who felt like a failure.

He was sickly, often depressed to the point of wanting to give up on life completely. Both of his parents had died by the time he was 14. He was expelled from college, which meant that his dreams of higher education and his goal of being a minister were out of the question. He struggled with loneliness and isolation. He battled with fear of death. He died at a young age in poverty after severe illness, with what seemed like few accomplishments to his name.

He was a failure in his own eyes and in the eyes of many others at the time. Yet his story has inspired many missionaries and workers for God, both past and present. His converts went on to witness to others, and his

missionary work influenced many. Generations of Christians have been inspired through his prayer journal.

He died not knowing if he had accomplished anything, except for gaining a handful of converts. His life was only distinguished after his death.

It was his life's struggles on this earth—his so-called failures—in the form of his doubts and depression, his anguish of spirit, that helped many other missionaries and encouraged and strengthened them in their missions.

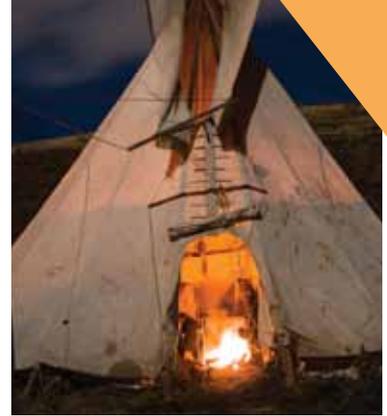
Was it truly failure? Or did God want to use his life as a candle—however small the light and however briefly it would shine before being extinguished—to bring illumination and encouragement to future generations of workers for God?

Did God make a mistake? Is it possible to look like a failure and still be a success in God's eyes?

His name was David Brainerd. Here's a brief overview of his life, which I've compiled and condensed from several books and online sources:

David Brainerd, missionary to the North American Indians. Born April 20, 1718.

By the age of 21, he had received Jesus as his Savior and determined to be a witness. In September of 1739, he enrolled at Yale College. It was a time of transition at Yale. When he first entered the school, he was distressed by the religious indifference he saw around him, but the impact of evangelist George Whitefield and the Great Awakening soon made its mark. Prayer and Bible study groups sprang up overnight—usually to the displeasure of school authorities who were fearful of religious “enthusiasm.” It was in this atmosphere that young



Brainerd made an intemperate remark about one of the tutors, commenting that he had “no more grace than a chair,” judging him to be a hypocrite. The remark was carried back to the school officials, and David was expelled after he refused to make a public apology for what he had said in private.

Brainerd persisted in his efforts to spread the gospel, even though, by almost every standard known to missionary boards, he was considered a risky candidate for missions. He had by his own description a melancholy disposition. He was physically weak, experienced frequent bouts of illness and depression, and had to take frequent furloughs.

In 1742, he obtained a commission as a missionary among the Native Americans. His first year of

missionary activities wasn't particularly successful. He couldn't speak the language of the natives, nor was he prepared for the difficulties of life in the wilderness. He was lonely and deeply sad. He wrote:

“My heart was sunk. ... It seemed to me I should never have any success among the Indians. My soul was weary of my life; I longed for death, beyond measure.

“I live in the most lonely melancholy desert. ... My diet consists mostly of hasty-pudding [ground-up grain mush], boiled corn, and bread baked in ashes. ... My lodging is a little heap of straw laid upon some boards. My work is exceeding hard and difficult.”

His first winter in the wilderness was filled with hardship and sickness. His second year of missionary

service he considered a total loss, and his hopes of evangelizing the Indians faded. He seriously considered giving up his work.

His third year, he moved to a different area and there his meetings began to attract as many as seventy Native Americans at a time, some of them traveling 40 miles to hear the message of salvation. There was a religious awakening, and after a year and a half, the traveling preacher had about 150 converts, some of whom went on to witness to others.

Brainerd's first journey to one ferocious tribe resulted in a miracle that left him revered among the natives as a “prophet of God.” Encamped on the outskirts of the native settlement, Brainerd planned to enter the community the next morning to preach. Unknown to him, his every move





was being watched by warriors who had been sent out to kill him. F. W. Boreham recorded the incident:

When the braves drew closer to Brainerd's tent, they saw the paleface on his knees. And as he prayed, suddenly a rattlesnake slipped to his side, lifted up its ugly head to strike, flicked its forked tongue almost in his face, and then without any apparent reason, glided swiftly away into the brushwood. "The Great Spirit is with the paleface!" the Indians said; and thus they accorded him a prophet's welcome.

That incident in Brainerd's ministry illustrates more than the many divine interventions of God in his life—it also illustrates the importance and intensity of prayer in his life. On page after page in *Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, one reads such sentences as:



"God again enabled me to wrestle for numbers of souls, and had much fervency in the sweet duty of intercession."

"Spent much time in prayer in the woods and seemed raised above the things of this world."

"Spent this day in secret fasting, and prayer, from morning till night."

"It was raining and the roads were muddy; but this desire grew so strong that I kneeled down by the side of the road and told God all about it. While I was praying, I told Him that my hands would work for Him, my tongue speak for Him, if He would only use me as His instrument—when suddenly the darkness of the night lit up, and I knew that God had heard and answered my prayer."

"In the silences I make in the midst of the turmoil of life, I have appointments with God. From these silences, I come forth with spirit refreshed, and with a renewed

sense of power. I hear a voice in the silences, and become increasingly aware that it is the voice of God."

After all the hardships Brainerd had endured, his health was broken. He died at the age of 29 on October 9, 1747. His selfless devotion, zeal, and life of prayer inspired other missionaries, like Henry Martyn, William Carey, Jonathan Edwards, Adoniram Judson, and John Wesley. His influence after his death was greater than any results achieved during his lifetime. His journal became a classic that has inspired many to engage in missionary service. His influence is proof that God can and will use any vessel that is willing to be a tool in His hands, no matter how fragile and frail.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■

BY DINA ELLENS

EDDY AND THE EARRING



SOMETIMES the greatest heroes are actually the unsung little ones who live their lives with quiet courage. By their example, they leave an indelible mark. Eddy is one of those.

Every Saturday morning I volunteer at the children's ward of a cancer center, teaching English to the staff, patients, and parents. I always try to make it fun, using upbeat songs and games, so that it's a time they can look forward to and that helps to get their minds off their pain, even if just for a little while. Eddy always follows along intently, his eyes bright with interest.

Last week, Eddy was wheeled into the room before our lesson as usual. He was so cheerful, singing along enthusiastically and joining in the games, that I didn't pay attention to

a fresh bandage over the stump of his right leg. In fact, I didn't notice until one of the staff mentioned Eddy had just come back from the hospital where he'd had another 10 centimeters amputated. "The doctors hope they got all the cancer this time," she said.

I watched as he rolled himself around, cheerfully interacting with the other children and his mother, and I marveled at his strength of spirit. Eddy is just 12 years old, and his parents are farmers from a nearby village. They dearly love their son and give him a lot of love and emotional support, and as a result, the boy bounced back from a second amputation with courage and a cheerful attitude.

Returning home later, I noticed that one of the silver hoop earrings I'd worn that day was gone. I got a

bit despondent, thinking, *Here I am, trying to do a good thing and cheer up the cancer patients and this is what I get!* I searched my room, then the whole house and the driveway. Still no earring.

Then I felt bad about my grumbling. I could almost hear an audible voice saying, *Today, you lost your favorite earring—but Eddy lost 10 centimeters of his leg!*

According to the Bible, there is nothing lost in God's kingdom. One day, everything will be restored and God will wipe away every tear.¹ In the meantime, I'm sure that Eddy's quiet courage and bravery here on earth will inspire others to count their blessings.

DINA ELLENS LIVES IN WEST JAVA, INDONESIA, WHERE SHE IS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK. ■

1. See Revelation 21:4.

IT'S MY FIGHT

BY MARA HODLER

THE MOVIE *SHENANDOAH* is set during the American Civil War. It's a moving story of a Southern family caught up in the conflict of the day. The patriarch of the family, Charlie Anderson, continually shuts down the urges of his sons who want to join the war. Charlie wants to remain neutral and uninvolved until the war actually touches his family.

Until the war, they had a pretty good life. The family owned a large farm; the six sons were all grown men and they had made the farm profitable. They were comfortable and beginning to marry and start families of their own. The father was a widower, but between seeing his children grow up strong, happy, and wise and seeing the farm prosper, he was content with his life.

One day the youngest son, Boy, goes out raccoon hunting with his friend and stumbles onto a Confederate ambush. They turn on their heels and run to get away from the ambush. When they think they're out of harm's way, the two boys stop at a stream to get a drink of water. At the stream, Boy finds an old rebel cap (the Confederates were rebels) and absentmindedly puts it on. Not a minute later, a Union patrol happens upon the boys and they mistake Boy as a rebel soldier. The Union soldiers take him as a prisoner of war.

His friend escapes and runs back to the farm to tell Charlie what had befallen his son. Now, all of a sudden, the war concerns him very much. He goes from being a

bystander of the war to throwing himself all out into the fray to rescue his son. He tells his sons, "It's our war now." The fight became personal. He was not taking up arms because one government or another urged him to do so, but because if he did not take action, the life of someone he loved was in danger.

Once he made the decision that this was his war, he didn't need anyone to tell him what to do. He didn't need to be motivated; fighting for what he loved was all the motivation he needed.

I can identify with Charlie Anderson and the "it's my war now" stance that he takes in the story. I always knew of Jesus, and I think I loved Him, but it took me a while to really cast my lot in with Him, so to

1. See Ephesians 6:10-18.
2. www.just1thing.com



speak. If life is comfortable for you and you can avoid the hardship that accompanies trying to live a believer's life ... well, who wants hardship, right?

But here's the thing, Satan is out to hinder, thwart, and stop God's plan for mankind, and he's already marked God's children as his enemies. In response, we're called to "arm up" spiritually¹ and make a difference in the fight through our living example.

But all of that means nothing until we make the choice to "make it our war." Once the battle becomes personal, then, like Charlie Anderson, we won't just be casual observers of what's going on around us, but rather we'll be ones who are determined to make a difference.

It starts with understanding why little decisions matter. Like a soldier trains daily, whether he's deployed or not, we need to be active in our spiritual preparation. Our "missions" will probably be everyday things most of the time. Mine are. Things like being a peacemaker, being mindful, taking time to look out for the needs of others, and lots of stuff like that. That's okay. I understand that even those little things have an impact on the overall war effort.

The point is that *I* have made the choice to devote my efforts to the cause of Christ. It's not something that I do because my parents did or didn't, or because my friends do or

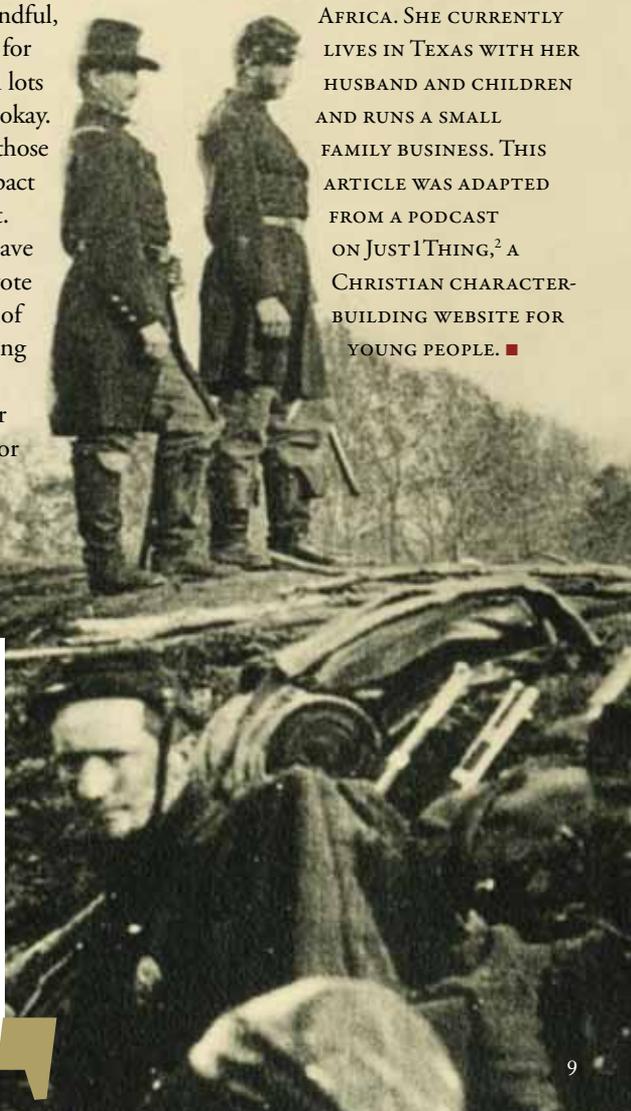
don't do. It's something I do because God's fight has become my fight and I want to ensure as many wins as I can for our side.

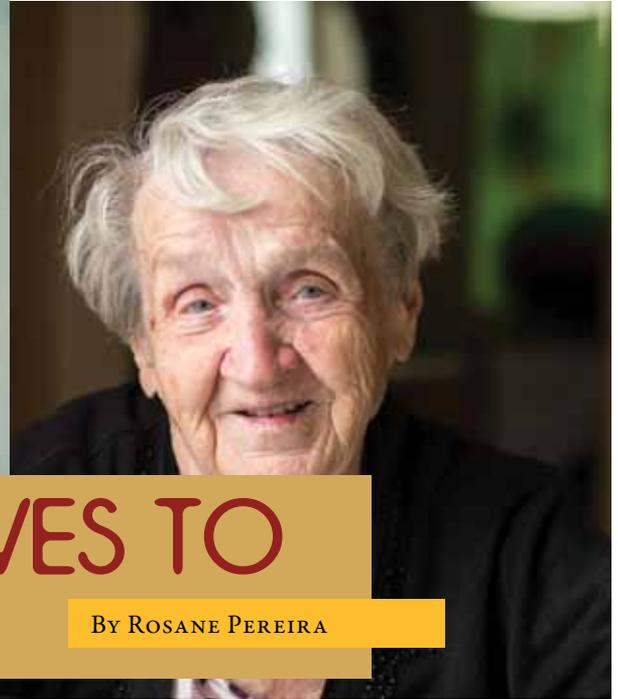
MARA HODLER IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO THE FAR EAST AND EAST

AFRICA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,² A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

When you do nothing you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.—*Maya Angelou (1928–2014)*

My own heroes are the dreamers, those men and women who tried to make the world a better place than when they found it, whether in small ways or great ones. Some succeeded, some failed, most had mixed results ... but it is the effort that's heroic, as I see it. Win or lose, I admire those who fight the good fight.—*George R. R. Martin (b. 1948)*





TWO LIVES TO IMITATE

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

MY GRANDMOTHER SABINA was a saint that I had the privilege to meet personally. She had no birth certificate, but went to school long enough to learn how to read well. She read her Bible daily and never missed a Sunday mass. She was kind and gentle, yet never missed an opportunity to teach us something to build our character, like the time my sister, my cousins, and I stole fruit from the neighbors. She only had to look at us when we got home to know we'd been up to mischief. After we admitted what we'd done, she had us go back and apologize.

She was the only person that I had to ask for a blessing and kiss her hand when saluting, according to the old custom, but I felt the magic when she'd answer: "God bless you, my little daughter!" She was small and frail, but her 8 children and 14 grandchildren all loved her and looked up to her. My father said that she'd lived her entire life for her family and he'd never heard a complaint from her mouth. She was a great woman who influenced many in her own way, myself included.

She reminds me of another great little person, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I recently saw the biographic movie *The Letters of Mother Teresa*. It portrays her humble

beginnings with the poor, and how some of her rich high school students decided to give their lives to Jesus due to her example. It also tells of her sufferings and even of her critics, people that wanted to stop her good work.

Her example of love will live on forever and keep influencing many people for generations to come. Even though she didn't have children like my grandmother, she gave her life to the children of God. Her motto was: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."¹ She saw Jesus in everyone she helped. Helping others was her way to thank Jesus for what He had done for her through His teachings and death on the cross. Her example of love will live on forever and keep influencing many people for many generations to come.

Why aren't there more Mother Teresas? I guess people don't understand the depth of the love of God for humankind as well as she did. I am still learning about it. As the old hymn says: "Wide, wide as the ocean, high as the heaven above; deep, deep as the deepest sea is my Savior's love."²

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. Matthew 25:40 NIV

2. Charles A. Miles, 1914



POINTS TO PONDER

BE KIND!

Treat everyone with politeness, even those who are rude to you—not because they are nice, but because you are.—*Author unknown*



Life is short, but there is always time for courtesy.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)*



Getting money is not all a man's business: to cultivate kindness is a valuable part of the business of life.—*Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)*



To err on the side of kindness is seldom an error.—*Liz Armbruster*



How far that little candle throws his beams!

So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

—*William Shakespeare (1564–1616)*



How beautiful a day can be
When kindness touches it!

—*George Elliston (1883–1946)*



Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.—*Mark Twain (1835–1910)*

If you haven't any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble.—*Bob Hope (1903–2003)*



Always be a little kinder than necessary.—*James M. Barrie (1860–1937)*



I always prefer to believe the best of everybody, it saves so much trouble.—*Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)*



A kind word heals, but a malicious word maims.—*Russian proverb*



Don't be yourself—be someone a little nicer.—*Mignon McLaughlin (1913–1983)*



Don't wait for people to be friendly, show them how.—*Author unknown*



There is no greater loan than a sympathetic ear.—*Frank Tyger (1929–2011)*



When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.—*Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972)*

By swallowing evil words unsaid, no one has ever harmed his stomach.—*Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*



Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.—*Leo Buscaglia (1924–1998)*



You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)*



A person who is nice to you, but rude to the waiter, is not a nice person.—*Dave Barry (b. 1947)*



Beginning today, treat everyone you meet as if they were going to be dead by midnight. Extend to them all the care, kindness, and understanding you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.—*Og Mandino (1923–1996)* ■



OLYMPIC FAITH

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO

THE 2016 SUMMER OLYMPICS held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, had some truly exciting moments. Athletes from 28 sports and 41 disciplines amazed us with their talent, audacity, perseverance, and physical and mental prowess. Yet, in my opinion, there was an aspect of these Olympic competitions that shone even brighter than the medals—the role that faith played in the lives and sports careers of many of the participants.

I'm an enthusiastic fan of the Olympics. For years now, I've watched the Olympics, and I can testify that during these last Games, I've witnessed more expressions of faith by the competitors than ever before. Let's look at some of them.

The Ethiopian athlete Almaz Ayana amazingly beat the record for the 10,000-meter track competition by

14 seconds. So incredible was her feat that suspicions of cheating arose immediately. But the athlete serenely affirmed, "My doping is my training and my doping is Jesus. Nothing otherwise—I am crystal clear."

The story of the swimmer Michael Phelps is iconic. Though he had celebrated unprecedented wins in previous Olympics, he became disillusioned to the point of contemplating suicide. He was in the midst of these dark times when a friend gave him a copy of the widely acclaimed book by Christian author Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Hope was restored and his life was victoriously back on track with a newfound connection with God.

Few anticipated a silver medal for the Colombian light flyweight boxer, Yuberjen Martínez. When his mother was interviewed regarding her son's audacious feat, she explained that years before she'd told God, "I give You this child. Do with him as You will."

Jamaican Omar McLeod won the 110-meter hurdles with a good margin, breaking out in praise as he crossed the finish line, shouting, "Thank You, Jesus!"

1. Psalm 18:32–33 NIV
2. Psalm 84:5 ISV
3. Psalm 62:11
4. Isaiah 40:29–31 NIV
5. Proverbs 21:31 ESV
6. Philippians 3:13–14 CEB
7. 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 NLT
8. Hebrews 12:1–2



Simone Manuel set a new Olympic record in the 100-meter freestyle swimming. She was the first African-American woman to win a gold medal in an individual swimming competition. After the race, she testified: “All I can say is all glory to God.” Another promising American swimmer who won several gold medals is Katie Ledecky. She proclaims that faith “is part of who I am.”

The Fiji rugby team won the first gold medal in the history of their country when they beat all their strong competitors, including England 43 to 7. At the end of the game, the team united in singing a hymn that includes the line, “By the blood of the Lamb and the Word of the Lord, we have overcome.”

Why would faith be important in sports? I think that it has something to do with stamina, balance, well-being, and the optimism it provides. In fact, this is true for any challenge that we take on. The Bible reiterates this; the psalmist sang, “It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer.”¹ “How happy are those whose strength is in you, whose heart is on your path.”² “Power belongs to God.”³

When we recognize our weaknesses and insufficiencies, we’re open to receive our strength from God. “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”⁴ What a promise to claim before a contest! Believers know this secret. We give all the human effort

that we are able, and the rest we leave in God’s hands. “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.”⁵

The apostle Paul often compared the Christian life to a race. It’s what we could call *spiritual athletics*. “Brothers and sisters,” he said, “I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.”⁶

Most likely, the success of the faith-professing athletes—or any of us who lean on God in our enterprises—is due to the fact that we have higher heavenly goals that are not limited to earthly honors. This brings to mind the apostle’s words:

“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”⁷

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”⁸

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF ACTIVATED AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

In our world of big names, curiously, our true heroes tend to be anonymous. In this life of illusion and quasi-illusion, the person of solid virtues who can be admired for something more substantial than his well-knownness often proves to be the unsung hero.
—Daniel Boorstin (1914–2004)

UNSUNG HEROES

BY CHALSEY DOOLEY



GOD ALONE is aware of the vast quantity of heroic deeds taking place each day. If plaques were given for each, there wouldn't be enough space on all the walls in the world! Perhaps this was on my husband Michael's mind when he wrote this song in appreciation of the many unsung heroes.

I saw you when no one noticed,
I watched you from day to day,
Observed your humble spirit,
Admired your simple ways.
I wondered what it had cost you
To so willingly play your part?
Until I could not hold back
The words that filled my heart:

You are the unsung hero
Letting your hopes and dreams
go
That other lives may find what
they're dreaming of.
Giving yourself to the uttermost,

Holding on, no matter what the cost.
In all the world there is no greater
love.

I've wanted so much to tell you,
But words seem so hard to find
To show the admiration
I feel so deep inside.
All of those unseen labors
That nobody seems to see
Are making your crown in heaven
That will shine eternally.

I couldn't do what I do
Without you there to help me
through.
Our lives would know an emptiness
Without your love and faithfulness.

The other night, my son and I were reading a book about John Wesley. We discovered that as a boy, he was once trapped in a burning building. Someone noticed him, climbed up, and got him out. We don't know that

man's name or anything else about him, but without this anonymous rescuer, countless lives wouldn't have had the opportunity to come to know Jesus through Wesley's decades of preaching and active service for God.

Even if we are never heard of and live out our lives as invisible stage hands in a great play, let's do our part well and give others care and respect. We may get our name lit up one day—who knows what the future holds? But mostly, we'll feel the satisfaction of seeing the ripple effect in others' lives.

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WHAT REALLY COUNTS

By KOOS STENGER

I DREAMED that I was invited to a luxurious banquet. Everything around me shone with glory and splendor. Crystal goblets were filled with the best wines and all my favorite dishes were present. Then there was the command, “Eat and be happy.”

So I ate and was happy. By the time the desserts were served, I could hardly take another bite, and then ...

... I heard the alarm clock. 6:00 AM.

I awoke, and with a frustrated sigh, hit the alarm clock and crawled out of bed. My stomach was growling and I moved my weary body to the kitchen. No exquisite dishes, no wines, no desserts. Thankfully, I still had a package of oatmeal.

The food in our dreams tastes good, and often even looks better than real food, but there’s one

obvious problem: it doesn’t give us any strength.

Humans hunger for more than food. The deepest hunger in the human life is the hunger for love. Deep within each heart is an empty spot that needs to be filled, and we are all in a desperate search to fill it. But just like the wonderful food in our dreams doesn’t fill our tummies, many things in this world look good but don’t satisfy.

Our bodies need physical food to keep them going. But our spirits can only be satisfied with the Great Spirit of love who made us. If we confuse things and chase after the wrong ones, we will wake up hungry when the alarm clock of life goes off and we enter eternity. We’ll realize too late that we didn’t actually eat anything that was of true value.

God gives our life purpose. He is the goal, the plan, and the vision. Everything comes from Him and

everything should be centered on Him. Jesus came to earth to tell us that we are not just a random accident in some unknown universe, but that we were made in the image of our heavenly Father with a plan and for a purpose. There is hope, and we are not just a speck of nothingness in an ocean of dark forgetfulness.

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Are you looking for food that will satisfy your soul? Take a moment now to invite Jesus into your heart, so you too can “taste and see that the Lord is good.”¹

Dear Jesus, please come into my life, fill me with Your Spirit and love, and help me stay close to You always. Amen.

1. Psalm 34:8

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

MY PRESENCE

I am always with you, ready and willing to help, direct, comfort, love, heal, and provide for you.

I want you to bring Me into every area of your life. I don't ask this because I want to harness or control you, but because I love you. I want to provide for you and protect you and shower you with love.

When you include Me in whatever it is you're doing, it strengthens our relationship, it draws you closer to My Spirit, and we form stronger bonds of love and communication. The more we communicate, the more you come to Me for companionship, the more you look to Me for answers to your questions and solutions to your problems, the more you bring Me into each area of your life, the greater satisfaction you'll find.

