



**BECOMING  
A DISCIPLE  
WHO MAKES  
A DIFFERENCE**

Author of  
***Organic Church***

Foreword by Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways*

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## Between a Rock and a Hard Place

### *The Need for True Heroes*

It was another warm, sunny weekend with large crowds at Venice Beach. Venice is world renowned for drawing large crowds of crazy people. This day was no exception. The surf was big and the crowds bigger. On a day like this I expected to make rescues, but I never expected what was about to happen.



Supervisory tower of Venice North with the breakwater in the background.

This rescue should not have taken place. I deserved no glory. I did not do everything the way I should have. My boss wasn't sure whether to write a commendation or write me up for being foolish and breaking the rules. It wasn't even my area, and in fact I didn't do much. I just showed up and was trying to do what was needed in a harrowing circumstance.

The Venice section of beaches is divided into two areas: Venice North and Venice South, each with a supervisory tower as well as other towers. I was working at a tower next to the supervisory tower in the Venice North area. The supervisory station is at a beach point at the end of which is a man-made breakwater—a row of large rocks running parallel to shore providing some break from the surf. More than one lifeguard always mans the supervisory towers, they have a rescue vehicle assigned to them, and they always have a higher ranking and more experienced personnel than the other towers. At the time, I was a third-year guard who didn't have much seniority.

Our lieutenant, Don "Rosie" Rosenthal, who supervised the whole area of Venice, didn't have a tower. He cruised the beach in a truck and stayed at headquarters when not on patrol. I chose to work the Venice area because of Rosie's reputation as a good lieutenant. He was also an old friend of my dad and uncle. They lifeguarded and competed with each other when they were younger. Rosie's son and I were in the same rookie lifeguard class, much like our fathers.

On this particular day there was another guard in the tower with me because it was a busy summer weekend. He was older and more experienced than I, but this was my assigned tower, so he gave me a lot of respect, probably more than I deserved. That day we both noticed two things: a boat was getting dangerously close to the rocks in front of the Venice North station and was rocking up and down on some pretty big waves, and the lifeguards in the main tower were not doing anything about it. We assumed this because a lifeguard never goes anywhere without his or her floatation device, which is known as a rescue can. When a guard is in the tower, the bright red plastic can hangs from the roof at the front of the tower to let the other guards know that he or she is inside (see the picture on p. 17). In this case, the can was still hanging from the tower, and the rescue truck remained parked alongside the tower. We could not see that the guards in the tower were moving, even though they were right in front of the impending shipwreck.

The impending crisis was causing a crisis in our tower. We weren't sure what to do. It is one thing to respond to an urgent situation that is occurring in front of a tower next to you; it is quite another to do so when that tower belongs to the boss. Besides, how could anyone miss such an obvious emergency?

Suddenly the boat surrendered to the power of the ocean and crashed up against the rocks. The boat's mast was flying up and down on the rocks like



The Venice North tower.

The rescue can hanging in Venice North tower, with the breakwater off in the distance.

a fly swatter desperately trying to kill a fly. Yet neither my supervisor nor his comrades responded. That's enough, I decided; I no longer cared about the reputation of my boss. I ran down the beach at full speed, leaving my area under the watchful care of the other guard.

White water was spewing high above the jetty, and the mist, carried by the wind, fell all around like raindrops. The boat was lodged in the rocks and still bowing continuously



to the lordship of the sea and the unforgiving judgment of the rock jetty. I ran out to the point and started to climb up over the rocks, timing my entrance between the waves. When I got close to the boat, I saw three middle-aged men full of panic, gripping the rails of the boat with knuckles as white as their huge eyeballs.

Climbing over the wet rocks, I got down to the boat and took hold of the rail high on the tip of the bow. I reached out to the closest passenger, who quickly took my hand and climbed off the boat, over me and onto the rocks. As I was reaching the next boater, I yelled to them, asking how many were on board. Then I told them all to climb back over the rocks to the other side as quickly as possible before the next wave came.

Soon I discovered the location of the other lifeguards. Three or four were stroking as hard as they could through the surf to get to the boat. I also noticed that the Santa Monica rescue boat, called Baywatch, was arriving. In their hurry to reach the boaters, the lifeguards had left the rescue can on its hook in front of the tower. They had chosen to swim all the way around the breakwater from the south side because it was too risky to climb up on the rocks with such high waves hitting them. I was soon to realize the wisdom of their decision and the recklessness of my own.

While assisting the third and final victim off the boat, the lull in the swells ended and a wave picked up the ship. With one hand I was holding on to the man who was halfway off the boat; with the other hand I was holding the bow rail. So when the surge of water lifted the ship over the rocks, I was lifted off my feet. My life hung literally between a rock and a hard place. My supervisor, swimming hard for the boat, said to me later that he was certain I would be crushed under the weight of the boat. But for the grace of God, I am sure I would have. Instead, the surge lifted me off the rocks, and I hung in the air a few seconds, holding both boat and boater. The surge subsided, and I was gently let down to the rock I had been on.

With speed and efficiency I managed to get the man off the boat just as another lifeguard handed me the hook from the rescue boat. I tried to attach it to the same rail I had been clinging to but was in too much of a hurry to do it right. My ride in the sky over the rocks shook me up. Fortunately, the other lifeguard helped me attach it. Immediately the boat was towed off the rocks, through a few waves and out to safer water.

Just as I was climbing back off the rocks and the other lifeguard was trying to swim back out, I noticed the largest wave yet building fast to crash on the rocks. I hesitated, watching my fellow lifeguard to make sure he made it out. He did, but my hesitation was a mistake. When the wave struck I was blown completely off the rocks. I remember flying through the air with white water

all around me and landing on my back on rocks about six feet below. The amazing thing is that I came down gently without a broken bone or even a bruise. I did have a slight abrasion on my left shoulder, just enough to have some blood trickle down for dramatic effect as I rose up out of the wet rocks fully intact. When I stood up, I noticed that Rosie's truck was there and he was watching, along with dozens of bystanders and three shaken boaters. They broke into spontaneous applause as I emerged from the water.



The rocks where I was thrown into the air while rescuing the shipwreck in big surf.

Later that week I received calls in my tower from other lifeguards to congratulate me on such a dramatic rescue. I had many chances to tell them that it was God who set everything in motion and protected me in this dangerous endeavor. A letter of commendation was placed in my file. As a result of that one rescue, I was known as a gutsy lifeguard.



The same rocks in big surf.

Rarely in my life have I felt God's grace exhibited more blatantly. I was set up. From the beginning, every piece was put in place for me to come and make a difference. God did the rest. In all the rescues we have to make, he

orchestrates the situation and choreographs our moves. We are privileged to play a part, but he is the one who does all the heavy lifting.

Glories await those who are willing to follow God into the dangerous places to rescue the lost and shipwrecked. Granted, none of us deserves the glory, but God delights in sharing his glory with us. It is his nature, his way. But we will never know the glory if we play it safe. If we count our own lives too valuable, we will never know the great things God has in store for us.

### **Being Proactive and Preventive**

The Los Angeles County Ocean Lifeguards used to be its own department. A few years ago the department became a division of the LA County Fire Department. In many ways this has been an appropriate marriage. There are some important distinctions, however, in the way a lifeguard operates and the way a firefighter operates that could cause tension.

Both the lifeguard and the firefighter save lives and respond to emergencies with dedication, heroism, and quick action. Both are servants to the community. Both are well trained for emergencies. Both deal with life-or-death situations and, at times, can put their own lives on the line (though the firefighter is more often in greater danger than the lifeguard). Both need to be in good physical shape.

One of the biggest differences in the way a firefighter functions and the way a lifeguard functions is in how each responds to emergencies. A firefighter's response, by necessity, is a reactionary response to a problem. Firefighters wait in the firehouse until a problem is already in process and they respond. In fact we have a colloquialism that refers to this. When someone is functioning in a reactionary way to a chaotic set of problems, we say they are running around "putting out fires."

Lifeguards, however, are more proactive and preventive than firefighters. A lifeguard is trained to spot problems before they happen and work to prevent situations that could cause serious injury or loss of life. The best lifeguards are not the ones who make the most rescues, but the ones who prevent the need for rescues.

A lifeguard is assigned to more than a tower; he or she is to cover the entire beach in front of the tower and extending as far as the next tower on either side. That way there is constant overlap of coverage.

Lifeguards are trained to read the ocean, identify dangerous currents, and relocate patrons before they become victims. Some of the daily activities a lifeguard does that are proactive and preventive include picking up broken

glass in the sand; assigning safe places and times for surfing, so that surfers do not strike swimmers with their surfboards; waving people away from rip currents or riptides; keeping unsafe floatation devices out of the water; keeping people off rock jetties; waving boats away from shore before they get too close; not allowing fires or charcoal barbecues on the beach. The list goes on; even keeping dogs off the beach is a form of preventive lifeguarding. Lifeguards do a whole lot more than soak up the sun and flirt with sunbathers on the beach.

Unlike lifeguards, though, firefighters can react only to existing problems. Like Smokey the Bear says, “Only *you* can prevent forest fires.” Firefighters cannot. They react to whatever emergency occurs and strive to put out the fires.

In the spiritual climate of today’s world, we need both types of response. There is little doubt that the world is already in crisis, and hell is already consuming lives all around us. Followers of Christ must take the initiative and go about bringing change before the crisis gets out of control. We are called to watch for the signs and do whatever we can to bring hope, peace, and health to the society in which we live—being salt to the world.

Each church should cooperate with other churches in a community to “watch the water” and take preventive measures to make sure that danger and darkness are kept to a minimum. If Christians started to take responsibility for our communities and cities, began being more proactive in prayer, and established a real presence of grace and truth, we could have a huge impact.

### **Between a Rock and a Soft Place: Paul’s Letter to Timothy**

In this book we will be learning from a letter written almost two thousand years ago by a man in a dark, damp hole carved out of stone with bars over the hole. From this place in Rome, Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, his son in the faith.

This is one of my favorite books in the Bible because it is written by a man who, while he is awaiting his own execution, not only changed the world in his day, but changed all of human history. It is one of the more personal of Paul’s letters, and it gives us a glimpse into the psyche of a real hero, a man who is willing to die for what he believes.

My oldest daughter, Heather, and I visited the Mamertine Prison a few years ago, where it is commonly believed that Paul wrote 2 Timothy. Hidden among some of the most famous ruins in the world, it was the first thing in Rome I

wanted to see. In preparation, we decided to read 2 Timothy every day while on the trip, which made the experience and the Scriptures come alive for us.

We descended into the Mamertine Prison, also called Paul's prison.<sup>1</sup> At one point, my head could touch the ceiling. I am just a little taller than six foot one. It is in places like these that real heroes are found.



Inside the Mamertine prison.



Paul's view from prison, looking up through the only entrance and exit at the time.

Ironically, we visited the Vatican later that same day. Wow, what a difference a few hundred years can make for Christian leaders! Great riches of history adorn this palace, this religious city. The ceilings were way too high to touch. You wouldn't be allowed to touch them anyway—as one is even an original Michelangelo masterpiece.

Both sites are impressive. My art background drew me to the Vatican, but my heart never left the cave. Being there and trying to imagine Paul in this place at the end of such a heroic life changed me forever.

Heather and I looked at each other in the dim light with the smell of mildew and realized that this is the very rock where God inspired one of my favorite books of the Bible. It was in this tiny place that Paul agonized over his few remaining days and the lasting impact of his life. He was in this place just a few moments before his head was separated from his body, and his soul was transferred into the light of God's eternal presence.

Some of the books of the Bible were written from palaces like the Vatican, but not as many as were written from dungeons and on the run in the wilderness with a posse breathing down the author's neck.

I couldn't help but ask myself, *Neil, which place would you prefer as a Christian leader?* I am afraid too many of us would choose the elegance of

privilege before the cold, hard, and unforgiving stone of Mamertine. But as I think of real heroes throughout history, most have lived their days in dark, marginalized places. In our society, however, we tend to exalt those who make the most money and are the most famous, whether actors, musicians, or athletes, regardless of their character. Real heroes do not emerge from places of comfort, elegance, and privilege, but from pain, hardship, and trouble. It is under the pressure of great diversity, conviction, and challenge that heroes are forged.

We are called to make a difference in this world. More to the point, we are called to make this world different. May we all choose the dark cave of obscurity over the posh privilege of the Vatican.

### **The Power and the Calling**

This book will give you what you need to take the initiative and begin to make a difference in the lives of people around you. Some of the concepts here are developed from ideas I have shared in previous works. I have felt the need to recast the message so that more people will understand and real change will take place. The second section of the book is a refashioning of some chapters from *Cultivating a Life for God*.<sup>2</sup> The material has been revised dramatically and many chapters are completely new, making it a worthwhile read even for those who have read my previous works. This latter section presents a discipleship model and explains some very practical ways to be a disciple maker who reproduces healthy disciple makers. But this is not just a how-to book of discipleship methodology. I have found that implementation of the model without a grasp of the underlying principles often leads to frustration and failure. Granted, most of us like to receive practical how-to methods that can be immediately and effectively applied. The truth is, without the framework of the principles and values described in this book, the methodology lacks a healthy environment in which to thrive.

Hear me when I say it is not the methodology that transforms lives, it is only the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ applied to a needy soul by the Holy Spirit. The methodology is only helpful in that it brings the desperate sinner into prolonged contact with God and his Word in the context of a community of others who are also pursuing the Lord.

The power to change lives is within each of us, and the call to do so is on us all. Take the initiative and join Jesus as he searches and saves those who are lost and drowning.



PART **1**

# LAST WORDS FROM A DYING HERO

*Paul's Second Letter  
to Timothy*



# 1



## Revealing a Secret Identity

### *What Is a Real Hero in God's Kingdom?*

On the morning of January 2, 2007, Wesley Autrey did not wake up thinking of himself as a hero. He doesn't wear spandex under his clothes and have a red *S* on his chest. The people he spoke to that morning did not think him an extraordinary man. Perhaps the only ones who did think he was larger than life were his two daughters, four-year-old Syshe and six-year-old Shuqui—most little girls think their dad is a hero. Soon, however, much of the Western world would know that Wesley Autrey had done something heroic.

Just before 1 p.m. that day, this fifty-year-old construction worker and his daughters were waiting for the downtown local subway at 137th Street and Broadway when Cameron Hollopeter fell into a convulsion and collapsed on the tracks just as an incoming train appeared.



Wesley Autrey with Syshe and Shuqui.

Wesley was not thinking about heroic things at that moment. Instead he remembers thinking, *Someone should help that guy*. His next thought was, *I should help that guy*.

Without a whole lot more thinking, he took action. With the increasing roar and the light of the oncoming train swallowing up the whole scene, and as his two little girls watched in horror, Wesley jumped between the tracks, lay down on top of Cameron, and held him down while the train ran over the two of them.

Five cars rolled overhead before the train came to a stop. Hearing shrieks from the train and cries from onlookers, Wesley called out, "We're okay down here, but I've got two daughters up there. Let them know their father is okay."

That was one heroic leap. And Wesley did it, not for a great man or a friend, but for a complete stranger, just one of millions of commuters in New York City whom he passes each day without a second thought.

There are about twenty-two inches of space in the gutter under the train. The two men took up twenty-one. Wesley's cap was smudged with grease from the undercarriage of the train. When Cameron awakened with a stranger lying on top of him in very tight quarters, he started to fight. Wesley tried to hold him down and explained in as calm a tone as possible where they were and why he was lying on top of him just inches from the high-powered electrical current.

Superman would have jumped in front of the train and held it to a stop. The Flash would have had time to run down, pick up the victim, and take him to the safety of a hospital before the train even arrived. Spider-Man would have spun a web to catch the train and bring it to a stop. While all those rescues would have been dramatic and awesome, what Wesley did is far more heroic. It is impressive to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but the leap Wesley made that afternoon is even more amazing. He demonstrated that it's not special powers that make a real hero; it's courage and the willingness to be self-sacrificing to help a desperate person.

Could it be that the very average and everyday nature of who you are makes you a more impressive hero? When ordinary people rise to do extraordinary things, we find a true hero, one whom we can understand and follow. When someone like Wesley Autrey takes a risk for someone else, we are inspired to do the same.

That's why I have always liked Daredevil as a hero (the comics more than the movie). He bleeds and can die like everyone else and he is also blind. Granted, he has some special powers that enable him to see with sonar, but if he falls from the top of a building, he will die. In fact it is his weakness that

becomes his strength. There is something spiritual and powerful about that. You have weaknesses as well. For most people, their weaknesses keep them from doing special things. But in God's kingdom, you have a chance to turn your weakness into strength.

As a child, I read comic books and dreamed of having super powers. Now that I have grown up, I have realized that real heroes do not wear tights, capes, or masks to hide their true identity. Like Wesley, their inner hero may be hidden, but not behind masks. The true heroic nature of a man or woman is lying in wait for a moment when it can reveal itself, a moment of crisis when the hero can come out to show the world who he or she really is.

### **Dr. Liviu Librescu**

The late Dr. Liviu Librescu, former head of the Engineering Science and Mechanics department at Virginia Tech University, is such a hero. There were moments in his life when his heroic nature was unmasked. While living in Romania he survived internment as a Jew under the Nazi holocaust. He survived the cruelty of Communism and the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania in the seventies. But perhaps his most heroic moment came on what started as a quiet morning at Virginia Tech University, where he was teaching his engineering class.

Students and faculty heard gunshots, as Seung-Hui Cho started entering classrooms and shooting. Dr. Librescu had all of his students climb out of the windows as he went to the door to slow the killer with his own body. He sacrificed his own life to save his students. One of his students was wounded, but Dr. Librescu was the only one from his class to be killed. He was a true hero who finished his life with his most heroic moment.

Heroes may be found in a moment, but they are not made in a moment; it takes years. If we simply wait for a big crisis and hope we will respond right in that crucible, we are hanging a heavy weight on a very thin wire. Heroes are not made by dangerous circumstances,



Dr. Liviu Librescu.

but they are recognized in them. Heroes are made in the simple decisions made each day in ordinary life. Those decisions may not seem heroic at the time because the stakes do not appear to be high, and few take notice, but in reality they are heroic, for they make up the strength of the man or woman who will step into the dangerous crisis in the future. You cannot be selfish in all the little choices of life and expect to be self-sacrificing in the moment when it counts.

## **A Superhero**

As a kid, I used to talk with my friends about who our favorite superheroes were. My heroes have changed now that I am an adult. One of my all-time favorites in human history is the apostle Paul. In this chapter we will examine seven characteristics of Paul, found in the first chapter of 2 Timothy, that demonstrate the qualities of a kingdom hero. The first chapter of this epistle summarizes all that Paul speaks to throughout the body of his letter.

### ***Internal Conviction***

*A hero has internal conviction that is not swayed by external pressures (2 Tim. 1:8–14).*

Paul faced much external pressure to end his spiritual influence. But he was convinced of who he was and what he was about, so he continued his ministry. So many live their lives wondering *why?* Not Paul. He knew what he was here for, and he never let the pressure of others sway him. He said, “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Strength comes from an internal confidence in who you are and why you are here. Add to that faith in an omnipotent and loving God who cares for you, and you have a remarkable person. This is what characterized Paul.

### ***Self-Sacrificing***

*A hero will sacrifice himself for the sake of others (2 Tim. 1:8).*

The opening lines under the heading “Hero” in Wikipedia read: “From the Greek ἦρωϛ, in mythology and folklore, a *hero* (male) or *heroine* (female) usually fulfills the definitions of what is considered good and noble in the originating culture. Typically the willingness to sacrifice the self for the greater good is seen as the most important defining characteristic of a hero.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul constantly laid his life on the line so that others could live. This quality, more than any other, is what separates the heroes from the zeroes. To give your life *for a friend* is indeed noble and heroic. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

To lay your life down *for a stranger* is even more heroic. Paul was constantly giving his reputation, his body, and even his life away to bring the Good News to people whom he did not even know. He writes to Timothy: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, . . . according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal. . . . For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory” (2:8–10).

Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” To give your life *for those who hate you* is beyond belief. Jesus did so without hesitation. Paul connects on a personal level with this particular love, because he was one who persecuted and attacked Jesus. He carries a love like this for others. If it were possible, he would even be willing to give his own soul to bring salvation to the people who hated him the most (see Rom. 9:1–5).

Paul says near the end of this epistle, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (2 Tim. 4:6). He made the ultimate sacrifice for others. He is a hero to the utmost.

### **A Clear Conscience**

*A hero has a clear conscience because he or she does what is right (2 Tim. 1:3).*

We all would agree that Wesley was a true hero when he saved Cameron. Part of his story is the gifts and accolades he received from many famous celebrities when they heard what he had done. But Wesley did not do this brave thing for accolades. True heroes do not risk their life for attention or a decent paycheck. Usually they don’t seem to comprehend the immensity of their actions. “I don’t feel like I did something spectacular; I just saw someone who needed help,” Wesley said. “I did what I thought was right.”

That is a part of what a true hero is all about. The hero does not think of him- or herself as someone who did anything unusual. The hero wants to be able to sleep well at night because he or she has done the right thing throughout the day. Most days a hero sleeps well because he or she did little things and made right decisions that may go unnoticed and do not have huge implications. But because the hero lives in this manner, there are a few other

days, like January 2, 2007, when that thought process results in a dramatic, death-defying leap of heroism.

Paul writes to Timothy, “I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day” (2 Tim. 1:3). Heroes in God’s kingdom live each day in such a way that they are not ashamed of their actions. They follow the example set before them by others they admire, and they bear responsibility for those who follow them. My friend and co-worker Dezi Baker often talks of “Sleeping the sleep of innocence upon the bed of no regrets.” To live each day without regrets because you choose to live by your own convictions is a great gift and its reward is often a night of sound sleep. As a result, one day you may be in a moment of crisis and find that you too are a hero.

Perhaps one of the most moving examples in our lifetime of someone who lived and died by her convictions is Rachel Scott, who died in the Columbine tragedy in 1999. She exhibited her faith to the killers in the days leading up to the rampage. When they committed their murderous spree, they targeted people of color, athletes, and Christians. One of the boys shot Rachel in the legs and torso. As she lay on the ground, he came to her, grabbed her by the hair, and asked, “Do you still believe in your God?”

She said to his face, “You know I do.”

“Then go be with him” was the response before Eric Harris fatally shot Rachel.

A true modern-day martyr for her faith, Rachel Scott is a strong example to her generation of a person who lived and died for her convictions. We can learn much from this little girl. She is a hero.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Taking Initiative***

*A hero takes initiative rather than waiting for others to fill the gap (2 Tim. 1:6–7).*

Paul sets an example for Timothy and then challenges him to rise to the same standard as a leader. He writes: “I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (vv. 6–7).

So many leaders, especially men, wait on others to take the initiative in life. One could argue we have been suffering from passivity ever since the fall when Adam followed his wife into sin rather than taking the initiative to lead into righteousness. I believe that this is so important that in training my own son to be a real man, *initiative* was one of the five principles I taught him.<sup>3</sup> Women, of course, can take initiative, lead, and become heroes as well.

I am not suggesting otherwise. I am merely stating that too often men do not take the lead, especially as it relates to raising their children. I believe this is perhaps the greatest threat to our society today. I long for a time when the kingdom of God is so real to our people that the hearts of the fathers are turned back once more to their children (Mal. 4:6).

Paul was a real man and a spiritual father to Timothy. He went to Timothy and initiated a whole new level of spiritual leadership with him, and then challenged him not to be passive or timid or to go on retreat. Instead, he reminded him to demonstrate the power, love, and discipline of a true hero.

Paul goes on to raise this challenge higher with Timothy when he writes, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (4:1–2). He finishes this thought with, "Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist [telling others the Good News of Jesus], fulfill your ministry" (v. 5). We must all fulfill the call of God on our lives by taking initiative when it is convenient and when it is not.

### ***Transformed Within by the Voice of God***

*A hero of God's kingdom is transformed within by the present voice of God (2 Tim. 1:13–14).*

While it is true that we are all, for the most part, ordinary people who can be extraordinary heroes, we do have something special in us if we are Christians. Paul writes to Timothy, "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you" (v. 14). I guess we actually do have some super powers, but they are not inherent in us as much as imported into our lives by the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us. That means that he lives within us and has a positive influence on our internal lives.

It is hard to imagine what the "treasure" is if not the presence of the Holy Spirit, but as Paul says, it is his presence that we use to guard the actual treasure. "Wow, you mean there is more than the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?" Yes! There is the fruit of his presence in our inner life: love, salvation, power, hope, strength to endure, and an intimacy with God in all things at all times. We can hear from God about anything in life and have the freedom and power from within to fulfill anything he asks of us.

In the heading I use the phrase "voice of God" intentionally. There are, of course, many other terms I could use that may actually have a wider appeal in the kingdom of God. I could have easily said "word of God." This would have

the broadest acceptance, but it would probably limit our thinking to just the written Scriptures and not include the very present Holy Spirit within.

I could have used the term “message of God,” but this could easily imply that simply knowing and passing on some relayed facts is enough. The word and the message are powerful and true, no doubt, but they are so because they come from the mind and mouth of God. I choose the phrase “voice of God” because it connotes something active, intimate, and ongoing. It also encompasses the other terms.

Paul does go on throughout the letter to highlight the transformative presence of God’s Word in our lives and how we are to live according to it (2:15; 3:16–17; 4:2). Some would argue that the “treasure” mentioned in verse 14 is the Word of God written on our hearts, which is very plausible. But we must understand that having the Holy Spirit dwelling within us is indeed more than simply being able to know the Bible and obey it. There is an intimacy factor that is infinite and powerful for the transformation of our lives.

Knowing Bible verses is valuable, but it is the voice in the words that holds the power. This is so important that Jesus says that hearing his voice is a test of whether or not we are even his followers. He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them [intimacy], and they follow Me [lordship]” (John 10:27). Hearing the voice of God is essential, not just a bonus for the Christian life. And this is not just for important Christian leaders who will then pass information on to the rest of us. It is essential for any and all who follow Christ.

### ***A Link in the Chain of Heroes***

*A hero is usually a link in the great chain of heroes (2 Tim. 1:3–7, 13).*

Often in the early verses of a letter, Paul brings up the main reason he is writing the letter, and 2 Timothy is no exception. From the start, he is writing this letter to challenge Timothy to keep the faith and pass it on to succeeding generations. He even begins by addressing Timothy as his “beloved son.” Paul responds to Timothy as Timothy’s spiritual father. He is passing on a legacy from one generation to another. As the letter unfolds, Paul will elaborate with more depth on the idea of passing on the work to the next generation (2:1–2; 3:10–14), and we will look at this idea in depth in later chapters.

Paul begins this epistle to his apprentice by saying they both are responsible to the ones who came before and invested in them. Paul serves with a clear conscience, keeping in mind his own forefathers (1:3). He reminds Timothy of the sincere faith that was first in his grandmother Lois, then his mother, Eunice, and is now in Timothy (v. 5). He also ties both lineages together

when he tells Timothy to “retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me” (v. 13).

Heroes are not accidental; they are raised that way. There is a long chain of heroes who pass through history, and each of us is merely another link. We must pass on the stuff that makes a hero to our children and our disciples. If we don’t, we have not only been irresponsible, but have failed all who have come before us and certainly all those who will come after.

Paul goes so far as to mention others who have dropped the baton. Demas, who is mentioned positively in other epistles (Col. 4:14 and Philem. 24), has loved the world more than Christ and deserted Paul and all he stands for (2 Tim. 4:10).<sup>4</sup>

While we carry the responsibility of passing on the faith to the next generation, we cannot make decisions for them. Every parent must learn this. We must let go and allow others to rise up on their own, and some will disappoint us. This only adds to the passion Paul must have felt when he wrote these words to Timothy.

After all his influence in Asia, many turned away from Paul (1:15). This may not mean that they turned away from Jesus, but merely lost trust in Paul who is publicly condemned as a criminal of the worst sort.

Being a hero can be a lonely life. Perhaps I should have included that as one of the seven characteristics in this chapter. The words “Only Luke is with me” (4:11) haunt me as a disciple maker. I have seen my own disciples turn on me, abuse me, and go back into the world to pursue the lure of sin, and it hurts.

At a recent conference for the leaders in our movement, Church Multiplication Associates, I began in an unusual way. I used a reference from the movie *The Matrix*. In this movie a red pill and a blue pill are offered to those who are sought out in order to be set free from the bondage of the Matrix.

In the movie Morpheus explains to Neo: “You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

We often show this clip in our training events and have adopted the language of “the red pill” in our movement.<sup>5</sup> When someone comes to understand the kingdom of God in a real, organic, and dynamic way, we refer to that as “taking the red pill.” Often such a transformative awakening leads to a change in lifestyle.

The opening message (the only one I presented) at our conference was titled: “Why, Oh Why, Didn’t I Take the Blue Pill? The Dark Side of Organic Church.” The bottom line is that approaching the Christian life relationally

is the best choice. It is the most rewarding choice but also a painful choice. When you lead people into the kingdom, invest all you have in them, and cheer for their success like your own children, it hurts deeply when they fall away. In a typical church setting, when someone falls away, you may see an empty seat for a few weeks, but it doesn't hurt as much. Even if you are personally invested in the person, if you haven't been the spiritual parent in his or her life, it still doesn't hurt as much.

The apostle John writes, "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth" (2 John 4). This is the greatest joy, and it makes all the effort worthwhile, but hearing how our "children" fall away can be the source of the greatest pain also. There is a cost to being a hero, a lonely one. Though it is painful to invest our lives in people who fall away, still God has called us to be links in the chain of faith, and it is worth the cost.

### ***Leaving a Lasting Impact***

*A hero finishes strong and leaves a lasting impact after he or she is gone (2 Tim. 1:12).*

There is one quality of a hero that is the ultimate test of a heroic life. How you finish at the end, and what you leave behind, is the final exam of a hero's life.

I used to compete in triathlons; well, I used to *participate* in triathlons. There is a big difference. All of the participants would line up at the same starting line. When the gun went off, we would start running at the same time to cheers from the crowds. We all felt the rush of adrenalin and the hope of a successful race.

The starting line and the finish line produce very different feelings for the people in a race. A few receive even more applause at the finish line than at the starting line. For the participants like me, the finish line is a welcome end, but there is only a trickle of applause from a few remaining relatives anxious to get home. The applause at the beginning feels great, but I have come to realize that it is only the applause at the finish line that really matters.

Paul writes to Timothy, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (1:12). Paul put his trust in God to keep him during all the suffering until the day when his race was over.

As he wrote to Timothy, he was close to the end. He could even see the banner overhead that read "finish" in bold letters. He was kicking harder with strength he didn't even know he had as his heart soared with the hope

that the end was so close. At this point he held nothing back but gave every ounce of strength, knowing he would soon be able to rest. Paul would leave everything on the course and have nothing left when the race was over. Near the end of this letter he wrote of his hope:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6–8

Like any competition, the number of people who start the race is greater than the number of those who finish. And of course the number of those who win the race is much smaller—only one per race. Paul was a winner, not only in how he lived his life, but in how he anticipated his death. Others would knock his reputation and spread lies about him. He would suffer imprisonment and execution as a criminal, but he knew that he would face a righteous Judge who would ultimately crown him with glory. He always kept this in mind and encouraged others, like Timothy and us, to have the same hope. It is fine to merely participate in triathlons, but when it comes to your spiritual life, anything shy of winning the race is a failure.

## What Is a Disciple?

It may sound a little grandiose to use the word *hero* when I am speaking about being a disciple. But, you see, I think that being a disciple in God's kingdom is indeed grandiose. The word *disciple*, however, has been used and abused so much that its meaning is no longer clear. It no longer has the romantic, larger than life connotation it should have. Because the Greek word can mean “pupil,” we have turned discipleship into a lesson in cognitive learning—the more you know, the more advanced you are in following the Master. But that connotation is just not sufficient. Moving from workbook five to workbook six is not an adequate understanding of discipleship.

*Follower of Christ* is in some ways a better term than *disciple*, and I use it frequently. It is too easy these days to be called a disciple, easier still to be called Christian. One is called a follower of Christ or a hero, however, because one has earned the title and proven he or she is worthy of it. I intentionally use the term *hero* in this book, because of the following:

1. *It is an action word. Disciple is a thinking word. It connotes learning, which is very important, but hero goes further.*
2. *Many consider themselves disciples, but to be a hero is something special.* When we hear the word *disciple*, we think of a spiritual understudy or apprentice. If we're called a hero, our heart soars. Who doesn't want to be considered a hero?
3. *It speaks to a dire need in all of us, and especially in our culture today.* Our nation needs heroes. There is a void in this category, and it cannot be filled by religious students. A follower of Christ should be a hero, not just a spiritual understudy.
4. *It accurately captures the idea of someone who is called to search for and rescue the life of another, even at his or her own expense.* This is what being a disciple is all about: search and rescue no matter what it costs us. Jesus said that the world would hate us because it hated him. We are called to do more than learn information. Discipleship is a call to a lifestyle that sacrifices itself on the cross for the betterment of others.
5. *People want to be heroes, and why not?* What makes a person memorable is the life he or she leads. The reason comic books sell so well, and movies about their superheroes sell even more, is that deep in all of us is a voice crying out to be significant—to be a hero.

Why do we make heroes out of celebrities today? Are we so lacking in real heroes that we applaud the pretend ones and grant them the respect that true heroes deserve? We take an actor who plays someone of importance and grant him that same importance. Actors may feel a little insecure with such power, knowing that in fact they were just pretending to be someone great, rather than actually being someone great. For this reason, perhaps, they begin to feel the need to live up to expectations, and that's when we get actors speaking out about issues of the day, as if they deserve to be heard. But in reality they are just good pretenders. So why do we listen to them?

Of course there are always exceptions. Ronald Reagan was an actor who became a politician and did some rather incredible things. We do not remember him as an actor but as a president. All people have the opportunity in life to do something of significance, even actors, but only a few seem up to the task. Simply spouting an opinion as if it merits more consideration than the opinion of others is not being heroic. It is just being arrogant and opinionated. The real issue is not what you think, but what you do about it.

I think, because we know that people like Britney Spears, Barry Bonds, and Tom Cruise will ultimately let us down, we end up manufacturing fictional

heroes with super powers that can never let us down because they are not real. Spider-Man, Superman, the new characters on the NBC show aptly named *Heroes* all point to our crying need for heroes. They are extraordinary people who are vastly different from the rest of us because they have special powers.

We need real heroes not pretend ones. I admire Tiger Woods's golf swing, but I can't say this makes him a hero. I have no interest in taking anything away from Mr. Woods, but heroes are people of substance and character who will sacrifice themselves for a greater cause, not just birdie on the ninth hole to take a lead in the Masters.

On that memorable January day, Wesley Autrey, on his way to his night shift, stopped by the hospital to visit Cameron Hollopeter. Cameron had only some slight bumps and bruises, and Wesley did not have any injury at all. Until that day these two men were complete strangers, but then they had an experience that they will never forget. We all learned a lot about the man named Wesley Autrey that day.

"I don't think I did anything heroic," Autrey later commented. "I just saved a life. I don't call myself a hero, because the real heroes are overseas dying for you and me." He may not think what he did was heroic, but we do.

My hope is that after reading this book you will go through the same quick thought process that Wesley did while standing in a safe place on the platform. When you see a person in need, you'll think, *Someone should help that person*. And then you will think, *I should help that person*. I hope you will take a risky leap to rescue someone in need, because you think it is the right thing to do. You too can be a hero. And there is a super power that is available to you. The next chapter will unlock that power for you.