

Message: Overcoming Our Flaws

Do you like movies?

Esperanza and I do. Friday night is date night and we often find ourselves at a local movie theater, watching the latest thriller, action or SciFi movie.

There’s one thing I’ve noticed about movie heroes and heroines.

They aren’t perfect. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker, Katniss Everdeen or Triss Prior, they all have flaws and weaknesses. Despite their shortcomings, these heroes and heroines overcome their weaknesses to become something more.

The heroes and heroines of the Bible are also imperfect, except for Jesus. From Abraham to Paul, the great people of faith were real people with real flaws and weaknesses, but God worked through them despite their issues. God shaped them – through their flaws – into the heroes they became.

Why? Because God’s power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Let’s explore what that means.

Here’s an example. “Captain Jack Sparrow and Jacob share a major character flaw. They’re both deceivers who exploit the needs and emotions of others to get what they want. Jack is a fictional captain in *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. He’s an opportunist whose motto is, ‘Take all you can. Give nothing back.’ Not a very heroic motto.

Jacob is the son of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25-50). His name means ‘he grasps the heel,’ meaning he’s a trickster who takes advantage of others. Jacob took advantage of his older brother Esau’s hunger to get Esau to sell his inheritance. Then he tricked his blind father Isaac into giving him Esau’s blessing. Esau was so mad he wanted to kill his brother, so Jacob had to run away.

Both Jack Sparrow and Jacob had the tables turned on them. Jack was literally eaten by the kraken, while Jacob was tricked into marrying the wrong woman! There were heavy consequences for their treachery.

In the end, however, both were redeemed. Jack sacrificially saved his friends, freed the Caribbean from a tyrant and was regarded as a hero.

Jacob is remembered as a hero of faith and the founder of the nation of Israel. Jacob humbly asked for his brother’s forgiveness and depended on God alone for his needs.

I’m comparing fictional characters with real people, but it’s okay to do that. On-screen characters are drawn from real-life examples. Here are some other comparisons you may want to consider:

- Esther and Violet from *The Incredibles* were fearful.
 - Simon Peter and Lightning McQueen were filled with pride.
 - Jonah and Harry Osborn from *Spiderman* suffer from anger.
 - Moses and Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings* have a dark past.
- Let’s follow up on this one....

Moses exiles himself (Exodus 2) because he killed an Egyptian he saw beating an Israelite. God speaks to Moses and tells him to return to Egypt and save the Israelites from Pharaoh’s cruelty and slavery (Exodus 3). Moses is afraid. He seems to try out any excuse he can think of not to go, but through God’s strength he eventually overcomes his fears and his people are freed.

Flawed humans become great heroes – thanks to God. In fact, all great stories point out a basic truth: we all have flaws to contend with. Their lives aren’t easy, but they overcome their weaknesses in a way that inspires us. That’s because they point out another truth. With God working in, and through us, we, too, can overcome our flaws and weaknesses and be heroes.”¹

We can be heroes for today. But, to do that, we first have to admit that we have flaws. And that’s hard! You see, our faults make us become distant. Rather than admitting we’re weak, we made a mistake or we did wrong, we withdraw. “Going into the cave” is the euphemism. When we are challenged by our weakness or flaws, we withdraw – from conversation, from the presence of others, from the church, from responsibility. We prefer silence to sharing, loneliness to togetherness, exclusion to openness, darkness to light.

Heroes choose action over retreat, even when there’s high risk.

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tyf/hottopics/faithvalues/even-heroes-arent-perfect.html?start=1>

One of the damaging myths of our culture is that weakness is bad.

We have the false perception that the strong always take advantage of the weak. That’s not true. True character and will is demonstrated when we’re faced with failure, loss or tragedy. That’s why we remember heroes. For example, we remember the firefighters and police officers who went into the twin towers on 9/11. We remember Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Joni Erickson Tada and others. We remember “no name” heroes who step up to help people in all kinds of situations and circumstances. Real heroes aren’t seeking fame. They’re just someone like you or me, put in a position to help.

We’ve been talking about heroes who help others. They inspire us.

There are also heroes who help themselves. They’re just as important but even more invisible. I’m talking about the heroes who are willing to admit they have a problem and ask for help.

We don’t think of these people as heroes, but they are.

If you’re battling abuse or addiction and you’re willing to admit it, you’re a hero in my book. You’re following a path that leads to life and health, no matter how long it takes. The most important step is to admit the truth: we have a problem we can’t handle. Without the will to recover, life will continue to spiral out of control. Without the will to admit the truth, we don’t own the problem. It’s someone else’s fault. The blame game, manipulation and finger-pointing will continue.

Paul wrote, *“I have the freedom to do anything, but not everything is helpful. I have the freedom to do anything, but I won’t be controlled by anything”* (I Corinthians 6:12 CEB). The great paradox of abuse and addiction is that we have a false sense of self-control even while we’re making our most self-destructive decisions.

We choose to give weaknesses and flaws power over us. We have the false perception that we can control our addiction, no matter what form it may take. We’re lying to ourselves! In our confusion, anger, pain, discontent, sadness and denial, we give away our freedom to choose life. The result: we choose dependency. We can be addicted - dependent, to almost anything - drugs, alcohol, sex, work, eating, smoking, television, hoarding, relationships, even religion!

Heroes face those decisions with hope by faith. They turn to God for the strength and courage to make the choice to stay strong, ask for help when they stumble and fall, and tell others the truth, no matter how painful it may be.

Jesus said, *“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (John 8:31). When asked what he meant, Jesus said, *“I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin [intentionally doing wrong] is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can’t come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through”* (vv34-25, The Message).

Whether you want to call it a higher power, the pure Spirit, God or Jesus, it’s when we realize we need help – the grace of a being who transcends the world as we know it, that we’re on the path to true freedom. God’s grace goes out into the world, bringing about good things, drawing us to Jesus for love and protection. When we turn to and embrace God, we find the power to overcome, even if only for an instant. But seconds add up to minutes, minutes to hours, days, weeks, months and years.

The recovery process isn’t quick, even if there are sudden life changes. The tendency and temptation will always be there, waiting for us to relapse. We need to do the work to remain in God’s presence through prayer, reading God’s Word, spending time in a small group. Building a few, close friendships with others is important. Maybe we’ve learned silence. Regaining our voice is difficult, but an important part of the healing process.

That’s the kind of hero we can be.

There’s one, other hero to talk about. This hero is the spouse, parent, brother or sister, family or children of a person struggling with addiction or abuse.

These are my heroes! They’re the ones who to listen even when the words are hard, sharp and hurtful. They love even when they’re rejected

and their heart is breaking. They persevere and have courage, even when tough love is at it's toughest. They remember they aren't the Messiah. They can't save another person. Only God can do that, if the person is willing to believe. And, I hope, they learn over time to forgive themselves. That's important but difficult. When we want the best for others, but we can't help them overcome their flaws after months and years of trying, it's time to know that God loves you. Forgive yourself.

This is a tough message today, but it's also a message of hope. It's tough because the kind of love Jesus is calling us to have takes character and will power. James wrote, *“Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way”* (James 1:2-4, The Message).

The bottom line is this: trust God.

No matter how hard it may be. No matter how often you may want to “throw in the towel.” No matter how unqualified you feel, trust God. God knows we have flaws. After all, God made us. And there's a reason for our flaws: they lead us to depend on God so we can overcome our weaknesses. It isn't easy to do, but when we depend on God alone for hope and courage, we learn a truth.

With God working in, and through us, we can overcome anything and live a healthy life. We can be heroes for today.

Let us pray...

Fill us with your Spirit, the spirit of love and truth. Show us how to pray, to seek truth and to find ourselves in you. Help us to choose life, not death. Give us the courage to admit the truth to ourselves, to You and to others. Lead us the path to health. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Psalm 17:1-7, 15 (NRSV)

Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right.

If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

John 8:31-38 (NRSV)

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

Psalm 17:1-7, 15 (The Message)

Listen while I build my case, GOD, the most honest prayer you’ll ever hear. Show the world I’m innocent - in your heart you know I am.

Go ahead, examine me from inside out, surprise me in the middle of the night - You’ll find I’m just what I say I am. My words don’t run loose.

I’m not trying to get my way in the world’s way. I’m trying to get *your* way, your Word’s way. I’m staying on your trail; I’m putting one foot in front of the other. I’m not giving up.

I call to you, God, because I’m sure of an answer. So - answer! bend your ear! listen sharp! Paint grace-graffiti on the fences; take in your frightened children who Are running from the neighborhood bullies straight to you.

And me? I plan on looking you full in the face. When I get up, I’ll see your full stature and live heaven on earth.

John 8:31-38 (The Message)

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. “If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.”

Surprised, they said, “But we’re descendants of Abraham. We’ve never been slaves to anyone. How can you say, ‘The truth will free you’?”

Jesus said, “I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can’t come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through. I know you are Abraham’s descendants. But I also know that you are trying to kill me because my message hasn’t yet penetrated your thick skulls. I’m talking about things I have seen while keeping company with the Father, and you just go on doing what you have heard from your father.”