

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Unbroken

What Louie Zamperini's Story Can Teach Us about Perseverance and Forgiveness

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

The movie *Unbroken* was released on Christmas to big business. The film earned more than \$15 million on its first day of release, with many moviegoers apparently attracted by the crazy-but-true story of Louie Zamperini.

Louie could've been one of the best mid-distance runners of the 1930s and '40s, and he went to the Olympics as a 19-year-old in 1936. However, World War II derailed his running career. He wound up becoming a bombardier in the war, was shot down in 1943, and spent 47 days on a life raft with two companions, most of that time without food or water.

He was rescued by the Japanese, but that proved to be of dubious comfort. For the next two years, he was imprisoned in progressively worse POW camps, plagued by hunger, disease and abusive guards. The worst guard was nicknamed "The Bird," who regularly beat Louie and ripped him across the face with his belt buckle.

Throughout his horrific experiences, though, Louie never lost his will to live. He continued to persevere through almost unimaginable hardship. When he returned home, he came to believe God was with him, all the while protecting him.

Zamperini survived the war unbroken, and five years after the war returned to Japan to meet with most of his former captors—and forgive them.

Talk About It:

Louie experienced a few lifetimes' worth of hardship during his two years in Japan. Some people would have a hard time believing in a kind and loving God after what he'd been through. Yet Louie's faith grew. Have you ever gone through a time that tested your faith? What saw you through that time?

Louie came to believe God had a plan for his life and that his suffering might've been a part of that plan—not that He caused pain but eventually used it for good. Do you think good can come from pain? List some examples. Have you ever gone through a period of suffering that eventually was beneficial? How have you seen God work through difficult times? How have you seen God protect people in those times?

Louie went on to forgive his tormentors. Is that something you could do? Have you ever forgiven someone for hurting you? Was it hard? How does it look to forgive someone? Have you ever said you've forgiven someone and discovered you didn't really mean it? Why is forgiveness so important?

What the Bible Says:

"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us

to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).

"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'" (Matt. 18:21-22).

Paul Asay has written for The Washington Post, Christianity Today, Beliefnet.com and The (Colorado Springs) Gazette. He writes about culture for PluggedIn and wrote the Batman book God on the Streets of Gotham (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book The Good Dad. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Check out his entertainment blog at Patheos.com/Blogs/WatchingGod or follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.