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HEROIC FAITH

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

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VOMBOOKS

The Voice of the Martyrs

Heroic Faith

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A division of The Voice of the Martyrs

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THREE WAYS TO USE *HEROIC FAITH* RESOURCES WITH YOUR FAMILY, CLASS OR GROUP, AND CHURCH

1. **Scan the QR Code** and “Press Play and Pray” on the *Heroic Faith* videos. Viewers will be inspired by the faith of our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters and challenged toward a more heroic faith themselves.



Scan QR Code or browse to
vom.org/HeroicFaith

HEROIC FAITH

2. **Read *Heroic Faith*** and be inspired by additional stories and biblical insights into the heroic faith of persecuted Christians. Questions for individual reflection and family or group discussion are included at the end of each chapter.
3. **Bonus Material:** Visit vom.org/HeroicFaith to download additional *Heroic Faith* videos and questions for reflection and discussion for use with your family, class or group, and church.

*“There is no law that obliges Christians to be dull, lukewarm,
half-hearted. Christianity can be heroic.”*

—Richard Wurmbrand

INTRODUCTION

Heroes capture our attention. We admire the person who runs into a burning building to save the life of a stranger. We respect those who risk their lives to serve their country in the military. They selflessly put themselves in harm's way. They willingly pay a price they don't have to pay—a price they choose to pay. Often, those who chose to pay that price shy away from being called a hero, but their actions are unquestionably heroic.

“Heroic faith” is not a new descriptor for biblical disciples. For more than two thousand years, heroes of the faith have endured terrible suffering as they dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ. They choose to obey the Lord daily in order to advance Christ and his kingdom at any cost.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives us a look at those with heroic faith, including Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samuel, and David. The writer of Hebrews calls attention to the heroic faith of those

- » who through faith conquered kingdoms
- » who shut the mouths of lions
- » who quenched the fury of the flames
- » who escaped the edge of the sword
- » whose weakness was turned to strength
- » women who received back their dead, raised to life again
- » who were tortured and refused to be released

- » who faced jeers and flogging
- » who were chained and put in prison
- » who were destitute and mistreated—those of whom the world was not worthy.

While there is ultimately only one true hero of our faith—Jesus Christ our Lord—biblical disciples cannot help but read the descriptions of the saints of old in Hebrews 11 and be inspired by their examples of biblical faith. Their God-centered lives run counter to the fleshly, temporal pull of self-centered existence that must be put to death daily.

While we long for that type of heroic faith ourselves, our insecurities may cause us to think it is something we could never achieve. But every person listed in Hebrews 11 was just like us—ordinary people developing a more heroic faith over a lifetime of trusting God and walking in obedience.

What do biblical disciples, who possess a *heroic faith*, value and live out? How can our faith be *more heroic*? As you examine your life, what characteristics might indicate your faith is heroic?

In *Heroic Faith*, you will meet and be inspired by biblical disciples who exemplify the foundation and the fruit of a heroic faith. They see with an eternal perspective, depend upon God alone, trust God's Word, and live a sacrificial life. That foundation of heroic faith then bears obvious fruit that embraces courage, faithful endurance, unwavering obedience, and steadfast love.

As you read the stories of these persecuted Christian brothers and sisters and realize that we are knit together—united by the blood and lordship of Christ—may you be inspired by how they live with heroic faith.

To help you develop a more heroic faith, we have included questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter and free access to accompanying short feature films. As you learn from the examples found in God's Word and from members of the global body of Christ, we pray you will ask the Lord to examine your own heart and life, and walk with determination toward a more heroic faith.

The Voice of the Martyrs

CHAPTER 1

SEE WITH ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

“The prayers of the widows themselves are for the Aucas. We look forward to the day when [they] will join us in Christian praise.”

—Elisabeth Elliot¹

No one would have blamed them for leaving. They had been traumatized by the brutal murders of their loved ones, brothers in Christ, and co-laborers in a remote jungle in Ecuador. Why would they stay?

Headlines carried the news worldwide when the Ecuador Five, as they came to be known, gave the ultimate sacrifice for the advancement of the gospel. Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian were speared to death on January 8, 1956, by members of the Auca tribe (later known as the Waodani or Waorani), the very people they sought to reach. Only the day before, the five young missionaries initially met with members of the tribe, who had seemed friendly. Yet the Aucas retaliated the next day.

Less than three years after the tragedy, Jim Elliot’s widow, Elisabeth, and her young daughter, Valerie, along with Nate Saint’s sister Rachel, embraced a risky opportunity that God provided to live among the Auca people. Their acceptance of the challenge came only after many

hours of prayer—and ultimately, forgiveness, grace, and understanding, as well as a more informed perspective.

“The Auca was trying to preserve his own way of life, his own liberty,” Elisabeth Elliot wrote about her understanding of the Aucas’ actions to kill the missionaries. “He believed the foreigners were a threat to that liberty, so he feels he had every right to kill them. In America, we decorate a man for defending his country.”²

But what could motivate Elizabeth, who was still serving in Quito, Ecuador, to return to the place and to the people responsible for her husband’s death? Both Rachel Saint and Elisabeth Elliot possessed a perspective aligned more with the eternal than the temporal. In fact, Elisabeth’s biographer writes:

It was not “admirable missionary zeal” that spurred her, nor desire. . . . She had felt then that she didn’t care if she ever went to the Waodani or ever heard their name again.

It was something beyond duty or misty-eyed missionary visions that spurred Betty straight toward the Waodani. “All I want is what You want,” she wrote in a prayer in her journal. “I’ve sung it in tear-jerking missionary meetings, but I write it here with all of my heart—‘Where He leads me, I will follow.’”³

Elisabeth, and the other women whose husbands perished at the hands of the Aucas, had never stopped praying for the salvation of the members of this people group. “The prayers of the widows themselves are for the Aucas. We look forward to the day when [they] will join us in Christian praise,” she explained in *Through Gates of Splendor*, her memoir about the journey.⁴

Rather than remain focused on the image of lifeless bodies on a rocky jungle beach, she and Rachel saw what could be: a people claimed for Christ and his glory, added to the throng of nations worshiping around his throne.

FRESH FOCUS

Scripture records the stories of many others who viewed the world through a unique lens, one that allowed them to glimpse not a present but a future reality. This perspective, rooted not in a clock or calendar but in the timeless depths of eternity, allowed them to see as God sees—viewing the world through the lens of faith for the not-yet-realized, a faith we could call *heroic*.

Those who possess heroic faith see the world with eyes that understand, accept, and pursue the passion and priority of God. We find people like this throughout the pages of Scripture, where the writer of Hebrews has assembled many of them for us in that book's eleventh chapter. In fact, the Hebrews 11 listing of champions of the faith begins with a clear reference to their eternal perspective, describing faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Noah, whose story is summarized in Hebrews 11:7, viewed life through that different lens. Not only did he stand out amid the wickedness of his day, but he also persevered in following God's command to build an ark (Genesis 6:9–21). Rather than complain about the painful reality, he fixed his eyes on God's promised rescue.

Noah truly had eyes to see what had not yet happened. The perspective he gained moved him to act *immediately* in view of God's *not yet*—the Lord's promise of things to come. Think of the faith it must have taken for a man who lived far from any sea

and had never seen a flood (and, according to some Bible scholars, had never even experienced rain), to build a boat large enough to hold his family and a pair of animals and birds from every species (Genesis 7:2–3).

As with those of heroic faith today, Noah's faith rested on his ability to see the not-yet-seen—which flowed from his deep relationship with God, described in Hebrews 11:7 as his “reverent fear.” Scripture also refers to him as “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” who “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). This relationship served as the foundation for his unwavering trust in God's warning of judgment and his promise to preserve Noah's family.

The wicked culture of the day and the seeming foolishness of his desert construction project allow modern readers to picture Noah's neighbors jeering as he worked.

His story brings to life Paul's explanation of the Christian life in 2 Corinthians 5:7, where he says believers “walk by faith, not by sight.”

Noah's confidence was in the God who made the promise—a God whose nature and character he trusted. That assurance in God steeled his obedience in the face of ridicule from a faithless crowd. Noah's confident reality, seeing God as provider, was something others could not fathom.

Yet, it was more than simply seeing. That eternal perspective quickly stirred his heart and mind as he believed what God had promised him; he saw it as God described it. His faith-filled vision aligned his sight with God's power, allowing him to act on the truth of what he saw.

NEW PERSPECTIVE

“Sang-chul” saw a heroic faith demonstrated long before he embraced it. For years, the lies of North Korean propaganda held him captive.

Trapped in the darkness of spiritual bondage, he feared physical imprisonment and worse.

North Korean children are taught in primary school that all missionaries are to be viewed with suspicion, likening them to terrorists, and that they even might be dangerous.

Sang-chul ventured into Chinese territory one day while searching for mushrooms in a mountainous region. He met a kind stranger who volunteered to sell Sang-chul's harvest in a nearby Chinese village and return the money to help Sang-chul and his family survive. This stranger kept his word and brought back the full sale price of the harvest of mushrooms.

Sang-chul didn't know this kind stranger was actually a Christian. As the two continued to meet, Pastor Han revealed that his kindness was the result of his faith in Christ. That disclosure frightened Sang-chul.

But his new friend continued selling Sang-chul's mushrooms, returning each time to give him all the money collected.

One day, Pastor Han told Sang-chul that God is real, and there is hope for every person who believes in him. Sang-chul was amazed when he heard someone speak the name of God, for that was forbidden and considered an act of treason in North Korea.

Despite his fear, Sang-chul's gaze began to shift away from his circumstances, out of his spiritual darkness and toward the light of eternity. In time, he asked Pastor Han for a Bible. As he read it, Sang-chul experienced the same transforming power that believers throughout the centuries have received when they are rooted in the Word of God. Ignoring the risks to his own life, Sang-chul took the bold step of sharing his faith with family and friends. Even his wife, who at first opposed his relationship with the friendly pastor, came to follow Christ.

Later, the tragic news came: Pastor Han had been killed for his faith. The steadfast witness that brought life to more than a thousand people resulted in his death at the hands of North Korean assassins.

Sang-chul was inspired by the sacrifice of Pastor Han, both in life and in death, and hopes that his own sacrifice, when the day comes, will be worthwhile for others.

YOUR KINGDOM COME

Let's consider this for a moment. Is our way of seeing life and circumstances worth clinging to at all costs? Do we have such a clear perspective on the value of our everyday pursuits that we are willing to put them above all else?

Well-meaning people, even those who attend church regularly and live seemingly good lives, often miss God's best. The press of this world, the pull of Satan, and even the pursuit of good things turn us away from God and toward the world. This often results in our choosing to follow a way that leads to death. Like a mirage-borne vision of an oasis for a thirsty desert traveler, the quest for worldly pleasures such as wealth, status, influence, and possessions only end in soul-crushing sand.

Deep inside, we long for more—just like Sang-chul, trapped in the darkness of the lies his government told him. We find *more* only when we align our perspective with God's as he resets our hearts and our vision toward seeing as he sees. With that fresh perspective comes the understanding that the world in which we live has an expiration date; everything in it is fading away. Scripture tells us the end of our world lies ahead (Matthew 24:9–24). Heaven and earth will pass away (Matthew 24:35). When we die, judgment is certain (Hebrews 9:27).

A biblical perspective opens our eyes to see the kingdom of God in the midst of the mirage of this world; his kingdom becomes the standard by which we live our lives. Jesus made it clear: the kingdom of God—his rule and reign in all things—is not some far-off, heaven-only concept but has been fulfilled with his coming.

Jesus revealed this after his cousin John's arrest at the hands of Herod Antipas. Scripture says the Savior "entered Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15). He also taught his disciples to pray using these now-familiar but powerful words: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Nuanced in the meaning of the original language is the truth that God's kingdom would one day arrive, as Jesus had proclaimed. But it also reveals that we can see and know his kingdom today if we have eyes to see it—eyes that view life with an eternal perspective. As we face circumstances, trials, and opportunities, we must allow God to reset our hearts and our eyes—and continually look for his kingdom.

"THE SWEETEST TIME OF MY LIFE"

No one else would have described it as sweet. Instead, those who faced what one brother in Iran endured because of his Christian witness might have expressed bitterness, even hatred, toward their tormentors. But Iman, a former Iranian Muslim who now follows Jesus Christ, saw things from a different viewpoint—the fresh vision that builds a heroic faith.

By the fourth year of his salvation, Iman had knelt and prayed with more than a thousand people as they repented of their sins and committed their lives to Jesus Christ.

How many of the believers you know lead hundreds of people a year to Christ? This question is not nearly as challenging as Iman's arrest, interrogation, and imprisonment—all for the crime of sharing his faith. But through the lens of that faith, he explained how, as part of a network of young Christian leaders who provided both training and accountability, he saw this dangerous time as a divine opportunity:

When they arrested me for no reason, I just knew God was sending me to a place to witness. So, I didn't fight so they would take me to jail. They took me to the jail, and I saw two people who were bound because their crimes were very serious. When I came to those people, I told them, "God has sent me to save you."

So by faith, I believe that those who are around me, God has sent for me to share the gospel. So I shared the gospel very briefly, just about in 15 minutes, and they knelt and prayed to repent and receive Christ.

I had only those 15 minutes to share the gospel because after I shared the gospel, immediately after, the police came and said, "You have been very good, and you shouldn't be here. You are very kind to us, and we want to release you." They opened the door and said I could go.

When they opened the door to release me, I hugged those two criminals and they were crying and hugging me really hard. So the warden of the police was like, "You have only known these people for 15 minutes, and they act like you are family!"⁵

Iman maintained his faith-filled perspective even when, once again, he was imprisoned for his gospel witness. Fearing sexual

assault from the prison guards, he cried out to the God who held his trust.

“I learned to focus on the presence of Jesus,” Iman explained. “I said, ‘Whatever happens, it is worth it for what you did for me.’ I learned what it means to wrestle with God because at that point I told God, ‘Even if they rape me, I will not renounce you.’”⁶

Despite twenty-one days in solitary confinement—followed by a move to a larger prison and assignment to a cell filled with murderers, addicts, and mentally ill prisoners—Iman kept his eyes on his loving Father. He prayed for his captors, asking God’s blessings on their lives, marriages, and families. Guards were soon sneaking extra food to him—and fellow prisoners were asking how he maintained his positive attitude.

Thus began Iman’s prison ministry, which he called “the sweetest time of my life.”⁷ Locked in the dangerous cell for eight days, he saw twenty-four of his fellow prisoners come to Christ, two of them convicted murderers awaiting execution.

But what happened on the fifth day of those eight days in that cell was astonishing. Prison officials told Iman he could put up bail money and be released. Instead of rushing to free himself, he continued his ministry in prison for three more days—until the guards grew suspicious about his decision to stay.

“I believe that when God sends us to some place, he prepares and equips us for that place,” Iman said. “I knew I had a mission in that prison.”⁸

After his release, Iman submitted his monthly ministry report to his leaders. The account didn’t mention arrest, twenty-one days of solitary confinement, or time in prison—just ministry work: “In the past month, I was able to share the gospel with one hundred

people. Of those, twenty-four prayed for the forgiveness of sins and committed their lives to following Jesus Christ.”⁹

Several weeks passed before his leaders realized the truth—Iman’s ministry that month took place inside a prison.

“The day I was out of jail, I continued my ministry,” he said. “Until my last breath, I owe Jesus. Whatever I have done, it was the Holy Spirit in me. I know who I was. I was so weak before, so all the glory goes to Jesus. I am nothing; Jesus is everything. Without Jesus, I am the same [sinful, addicted] person that I was before.”¹⁰

God reset not only Iman’s heart and life but also his vision. Through the lens of faith-filled sight, he saw every trial and circumstance filled with holy purpose and gospel-centered intent.

LARGER THAN LIFE

As Iman learned, allowing God’s perspective to transform our own illuminates even the darkest circumstances. Imagine being in the sandals of the Hebrew teenager, David, sent to take food to his three older brothers who were soldiers in the Israelite army. Suddenly, the booming voice of a larger-than-life warrior blasts through the Valley of Elah where the two sides—the Philistines and the Israelites—have lined up, ready for battle. Goliath repeats the taunt he had made before David’s arrival: “I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together” (1 Samuel 17:10).

Many of us know what happens next. When no one else volunteers to fight this Philistine warrior, young David does. Where others see defeat, David sees opportunity as he looks at the situation through God’s eyes. Where others see their weakness, David sees God’s power. And where others see the impossible, David sees a miracle.

David sees with an eternal perspective that this is the moment for God to make his kingdom evident. This lens allows him to view the battle for what it is: a turning point in history, a spiritual marker in the lives of his family and his people.

But many Bible teachers see only what an initial glance reveals: an underdog defeating a threatening warrior. They emphasize the individualistic application that, with God, we too can fell our giants. Very subtly, this application suggests a society that says, “Our nation is good and favored by God; other nations are evil and undeserving of his favor.”

Although God does sometimes allow us to fell our giants, this simplistic lesson falls short of the true treasure found in God’s Word. Those with eternal perspective see a deeper, more expansive truth.

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Samuel 17:45–46).

When viewed through the lens of heroic faith, this oft-told children’s story reveals that the collision between Israelite David and Philistine Goliath had less to do with a self-absorbed conquering of personal giants and more to do with God’s redemptive purpose. David encountered and defeated this Philistine warrior “that all

the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.” The iconic battle reveals God’s rule and reign, his kingdom at hand, to the nations of the world—from the time the conflict took place to the present day.

Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint viewed their loved ones’ deaths with an eternal perspective rather than personal devastation. God turned tragedy into opportunity as they, like young David, followed with eyes of heroic faith and pursued his redemptive purpose, regardless of the cost.

“I would never go because I thought it would be ‘safe’—or for any other reason, such as ‘carrying on my husband’s work’ or whatever,” Elisabeth Elliot wrote in a letter to supporters of her decision to return to live and serve among the Aucas. “There is one reason alone: I believe it is simply the next step. It is the thing required at the moment.”¹¹

Pastor Han’s eternal perspective allowed him to continue serving his friend Sang-chul and sharing the gospel with thousands despite the constant threat of an oppressive regime. We can only imagine Pastor Han’s joy at the view he now has of heaven’s glories, all earthly joys and sorrows rendered dim. And as God transformed Sang-Chul’s outlook through his pastor friend’s example, the new follower of Christ moved from a self-focused fear to an eternity-driven faith.

When the apostle Paul addressed the Athenians, who seemingly had a temple to every god or goddess imaginable, he declared, “I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22).

At first glance, we might assume those Athenians were different from the majority of today’s people, those considered to be secular (“earthly and worldly,” to use biblical terms). However, whether or not they recognize it, most people today practice a sort of religion associated with their secular beliefs. Their desires firmly fixed on the fallen world, they consume information about it with near-devout

devotion—all from a perspective that excludes any notion of God’s power, plans, and purposes. This viewpoint lends itself to a secularist system of beliefs and practices that denies and even blasphemes the eternal—in other words, a powerful religion.

Do the pursuits and pleasures of this world dominate our lives via mass media and the devices that support it? Do we offer each day’s thoughts, time, and energy to consuming our earthly affections and then discussing them with others? Do we spend our time chasing the temporal and neglecting the eternal?

If so, we have fixed our eyes on the wrong kingdom. We have laid down the pursuit of biblical discipleship and settled for something much easier—but much less real. We have abandoned an eternal perspective and become consumed by one that embraces a lesser kingdom and a lesser glory.

“DO NOT FEAR”

February 29, 1948, began on a leisurely note as Richard Wurmbrand bent down to kiss his wife, Sabina, and stepped from his home into the brisk Bucharest air. The tall, thirty-nine-year-old pastor set out on his short stroll to church, winding from Olteni Street through the picturesque Vacaresti neighborhood.

The familiar walk took him by parked cars, but Richard saw few other signs of life at that early hour. The quiet Sunday venture freed his mind to think about the main points of his morning sermon while the historic buildings flanking the street reminded him of Romania’s rich history. He zigzagged his way to his church, where his wife would meet him in half an hour. Later that afternoon, he would officiate the wedding of their young friends. But for now, he followed his normal Sunday morning routine.

But that routine came to an abrupt halt when two men jumped out of a large black van and grabbed him. There would be no meeting his wife, no preaching his sermon, no officiating the afternoon wedding. Moments later, a cadre of Communist secret police forced him into the back seat of the van with a gun at his temple. As the vehicle barreled down the street toward an unknown destination, Richard stole glimpses of his surroundings through the windows.

He couldn't tear his thoughts from the politician who had committed suicide in prison only weeks after his kidnapping and arrest. *Will I suffer the same fate?* he wondered. But then he remembered a truth he had discovered earlier that year: The phrase "Do not fear" occurs exactly 366 times in the Bible, one time per day for an entire year, including leap year.

For Richard, it was providential that he was abducted on February 29, a reminder that he wouldn't need to fear what men could do to him. Fear was one emotion he would not allow to enter his prison cell. With God's help, he could endure torture, ill treatment, disease, and even death so long as others could see Christ in his eyes.

Once at their headquarters, the police manhandled Richard. They ripped off his tie, emptied his pockets of identification and papers, and stripped off his clothes. The laces of his shoes—which prisoners often used to hang themselves—were roughly removed.

This prison beneath one of Bucharest's main streets, Calea Rahovei, was new and relatively unknown. As its first prisoner, Richard knew his church members and the Romanian underground would never think to look for him here.

His concrete cell was narrow and primitive. A small box of sunlight entered the room from the window positioned too high in the wall

for prisoners to escape. Richard sat on a plank bed next to a bucket in the corner and waited for the interrogators. The waiting was the hardest part of prison—the hellish part. He imagined the questions his captors would hurl at him and the torture techniques they would apply to weaken his resistance.

The threat of physical pain had extracted information from other prisoners, but the fear Richard felt during his abduction was gone. In its place was a hardened resolve to suffer anything for the sake of the gospel. Richard believed God would empower him to stand up to the worst physical agony his abductors could impart.

“I know what fear is well enough, but at that moment I felt none,” Richard would later write. “This arrest, and all that would follow, was the answer to a prayer I had made, and I hoped that it would give new meaning to my past life.”

Richard sat in silence. Motionless as the stones surrounding him, he thanked God for bringing him to this prison. Each passing second became an answer to his and Sabina’s prayers to let them bear a cross for the sake of Christ. What strange and wonderful opportunity would blossom within these walls? What friendships with the guards could he build? Richard didn’t know. But he hoped God would shine through him as he suffered in isolation.

Biblical disciples see God’s kingdom at work in every circumstance, trial, and moment of their lives. With intentionality, they embrace God’s sovereign passion and purpose at any cost. They see with a lens that changes their ideas, motives, and actions, recognizing that his ways are the highest and best (Isaiah 55:8–9).

May their eternal perspective be ours.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Do you think Elisabeth Elliot's decision to return to serve the tribe that killed her husband reflects heroic faith? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. What do you think your fellow Christians might learn from Pastor Han's example?
3. Read Hebrews 11. This chapter reminds us that God gives each of us the opportunity to have heroic faith—not just people we consider spiritual superstars. Whose name (other than those highlighted in this chapter) comes to mind when you think of heroic faith, and why?
4. How would you explain to a new Christian what it means to see with eternal perspective? What questions might he or she ask? How would you answer those questions?
5. In light of this chapter's teaching, what is God saying to you about how your own perspective might need to change?

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Visit vom.org/HeroicFaith to view Sang-chul's story along with additional brief feature videos and digital resources.



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