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HULME



Afghan women must have well of courage

I don't know about you, but I've always had a pretty healthy self-image.

I don't think I could stand to live under the former-Taliban regime in Afghanistan, but many forward-thinking, career-minded women had to do it. We American women don't realize how great we've got it!

An e-mail message puts it into perspective: On the left is Katie Harmon, Miss America, wearing a swimsuit she chose for the competition. On the right is a typical Afghan girl, wearing the heavy, smothering burqa required by the Taliban regime.

Miss America is a junior at Portland State University, hoping to eventually get a Master's degree in Bioethics. Miss Afghanistan is forbidden from receiving any education at all and cannot read or write.

Miss America has worked as a lab assistant at both the Oregon Health Sciences University and the University of Puget Sound. Miss Afghanistan is forbidden from working.

Miss America's father is an engineer; her mother is a teacher. Miss Afghanistan's father was shot by a gang of Taliban militants. Her mother begs for bread scraps since she cannot work or remarry.

Miss America wowed the judges by singing a Puccini aria. Miss Afghanistan is forbidden from



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• commentary

singing or even listening to music of any kind.

Miss America will be traveling the nation non-stop during her reign. Miss Afghanistan cannot leave her house without a male family member, cannot drive, and cannot be out after dark.

Miss America is an advocate for breast cancer research. Miss Afghanistan cannot be treated by a male doctor, and for all practical purposes, has no access to medical treatment of any kind.

Miss America can date, marry, or divorce anyone she chooses. Miss Afghanistan will be stoned to death if caught in the company of a male outside of her family. She is likely to be sold into an arranged marriage to a man who already has two wives.

Miss America wears sunscreen on the beach to keep from burning. Miss Afghanistan cannot live in a house with windows unless they are painted black. Since she must wear a burqa outside, her pale translucent skin has not seen a ray of sunlight

in years. Miss America could have been disqualified if her swimsuit did not meet pageant standards. Miss Afghanistan can be flogged if the holes in the mesh covering her face are too large.

Miss America will decide how many children, if any, she wants to have. Miss Afghanistan will be pregnant 3-4 times more often than Miss America. Unfortunately, her babies are 25 times more likely to die in the first year. One out of four will not see their 5th birthday.

Miss America is majoring in speech communications. Miss Afghanistan is forbidden from speaking in public.

Miss America is 21. Since the U.S. life expectancy for women is 80, she's still a very young woman. Miss Afghanistan is also 21, but since the life expectancy for an Afghan woman is 43, next year she'll be "over-the-hill." (Afghanistan is one of the only countries in the world where life expectancy for women is shorter than for men.)

Miss America is a beautiful, intelligent woman, and everyone knows it. Miss Afghanistan could be a beautiful, intelligent woman, but no one will ever know it.

Please pray for the Afghan women and their country. May no form of the Taliban ever rule there again.

Bible stories about triumphs, trials are examples

My last five columns have counted down half of my top 10 list of reasons everyone should read the Bible. Reason no. 10 is the Bible's account of earth's creation; no. 9 is the Bible moves hearts; no. 8 is it is the only guide to religious truth; no. 7 is it is a guidebook for living and teaches lessons on life; and no. 6 is it chronicles the formation of the Christian congregation.

This week's column is about the no. 5 reason: The Bible's stories about men's triumphs and trials give examples for us to emulate today, and they build our faith.

People today tend to look for heroes among professional athletes, movie stars and other celebrities, and, especially since Sept. 11, many have viewed firemen, police officers and emergency medical professionals as heroes.

While these people have accomplished a lot in their lives, the heroes Christians really need are ones who have had extraordinary faith in God.

Hebrews chapter 11 condenses a list of faithful men and women of long ago; more details about their lives are found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) of the Bible. One thing all of these individuals had in common is faith in God.

Hebrews 11:1, 2 says, "Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident realities though not beheld. For by means of this the men of old times had witness borne to them."

Faith is based on something sure. Hebrews 6:18 says what it is we can be sure of, "in order that, through two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to the refuge may have strong encouragement to lay hold on the hope set before us."

God has made promises to mankind in regard to our eternal future, and He cannot lie. What He has promised will happen, and that is what His faithful servants have had faith in throughout history.

Hebrews 11:24-26 gives a glimpse of Moses' example of faith, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

What a fine example Moses set by choosing to serve God even though it meant giving up the riches and prominent position he had in Egypt!

Hebrews 11:32, 33 lists several other "heroes" from the past and their acts of faith, "The time will fail me if I go on to relate about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David as well as Samuel and the other prophets, who through faith defeated kingdoms in conflict, effected righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."

The man who stopped the mouths of lions is Daniel, whose story many are familiar with, who



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• use it or lose it

was put in the pit of lions for refusing to obey the king's order not to pray to any god or man other than the king. God miraculously protected Daniel from the lions overnight, and he was released in the morning.

Daniel had three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who faced a similar test of faith when the king of Babylon put up a gold image and required everyone to worship the image; anyone who didn't would be thrown into a furnace.

Verses 22, 23 say, "Just because the king's word was harsh and the furnace was heated to excess, these able-bodied men that took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were the ones that the fiery flame killed. But these other able-bodied men, the three of them... fell down bound in the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

King Nebuchadnezzar said in verse 25, "Look! I am beholding four able-bodied men walking about free in the midst of the fire, and there is no hurt to them, and the appearance of the fourth one is resembling a son of the gods."

God sent an angel to protect the men; they survived the fire and were rescued. But they surely must have been afraid of being thrown into the fire; it was so hot it burned up the men who threw them in! But maintaining pure worship of God rather than worshipping idols was more important to them than their lives.

Some may feel that they could never live up to such examples, but even the best examples among God's past servants were not perfect. Moses lacked confidence in his speaking skills and had to have his brother Aaron help him in approaching the Pharaoh of Egypt to ask for the Israelites' release.

Jonah was so afraid to do what God assigned to him that he tried to run away; he had to be swallowed by a large fish and he miraculously rescued before he would go to Nineveh as God assigned him to do.

Letter Policy

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After his rescue from the fish, Jonah went to Nineveh to proclaim that the city would be destroyed because of the inhabitants' wickedness. How did they respond to Jonah's message?

Chapter 3, verse 5 says, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

The Ninevites repented of their wickedness and expressed sorrow over their actions. Verse 10 says God decided to spare them. Was Jonah happy that his message caused the whole city to repent? No, he had said the city would be destroyed, and now it wouldn't be, so he was angry at God.

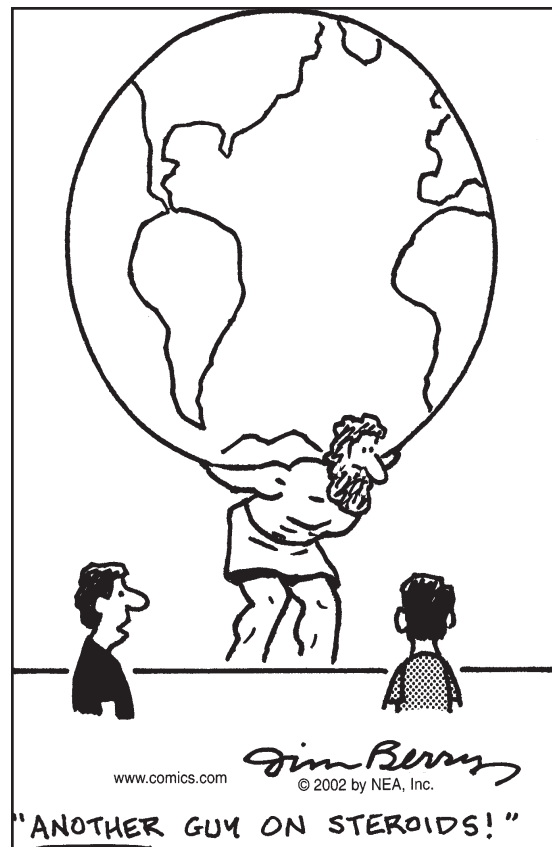
Jonah 4:1 says, "To Jonah, though, it was highly displeasing, and he got to be hot with anger."

It took another lesson from God to show Jonah that he should have had sympathy for the people of Nineveh rather than want them to die when they were sorry for their past wrongs.

This gives us confidence that God doesn't give up on us when we make mistakes or give in to wrong thinking; He tries to help us do better. He even allowed his son to suffer and die as a sacrifice for our sins.

An everlasting future awaits all who serve God faithfully, even though we make mistakes at times. This was a promise God's servants of the past looked forward to and one we can have faith in as well.

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