

## **Rethinking Heroes** by Jon Gauger

These days, I am re-thinking heroes. Re-thinking that short list of people whose character leaves such an indelible impression. No secret that at midlife, much of the shiny glint of earlier heroes has lost its luster. Cynicism, it would seem, has a way of expanding along with a middle aged waist line.

That doesn't mean there aren't any heroes out there. Not at all. In fact, let me introduce you to three of my newest heroes. I've changed their names to respect their privacy, but the details of their extraordinary lives are entirely factual.

First, there's my friend, Jim. His wife, Karen, is battling cancer--has gone through a disfiguring surgery that is emotionally devastating. When Jim and I last spoke, his wife was in the 8<sup>th</sup> week of a 28 week chemo therapy regimen. As Jim and Karen look at the future, they think of their young son, of long range plans that now appear *out* of range. But remarkably, Jim and Karen are hanging in there. More than that, they happily point out the many snapshots of God's grace that now adorn the walls of their souls. Landscapes of love and kindness and generosity they could previously have only imagined.

Then there's my pastor friend, Darrel. At age 86, the previously healthy and unusually energetic Darrel is now told he has Parkinson's disease. This would be bad enough except that he has to this point been the steady rock that his ailing wife has leaned on for her support. What now? Nobody knows for sure, but the forecast doesn't exactly look sunny. Yet Darrel takes it all in stride. Is even contemplating a missions trip that most healthy adults would consider daunting beyond attempt. At the other end of the age spectrum is a tiny infant named Hope. She was supposed to be born mid-July...but arrived instead just before Easter. Hope weighed a scant 2.2 pounds, and the prevailing assumption was that despite modern technology, she simply wouldn't live. But Hope simply hasn't given up. She breathes with the help of a respirator, her delicate wiggly fingers defying odds, her tiny lungs gasping for life itself. As of this writing, she is recovering from open heart surgery—serious stuff for a healthy adult, let alone a two pound preemie.

Despite their extreme age differential, all three of these people share a common thread in their story: a near-lethal blow threatens their physical survival. Yet far from giving up, they are holding on. They have made the decision to smile, when everything around these people would invite them to scowl—or scream. Their enlarged capacity for life—at the very point where death seems to be suffocating—is nothing less than grand. Slaying dragons, by contrast, is much safer sport.

So...being a hero, I'm learning, is more about the unseen than the visible. Sometimes the choice to smile is valor itself. Sometimes, just taking in the next breath is an act of profound courage. Heroes, it turns out, inhale life one gasp at a time, valuing moments the rest of us haven't yet the perspective to treasure.

**Psalm 90:12. So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom.**

Rethinking heroes, I'm Jon Gauger for PTA.