



Louie Zamperini

FINDING CHRIST IN COMBAT

One Soldier's Story

By Greg Wiens

Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption

By Laura Hillenbrand

Random House, \$27.00, 496 pp.

I seldom read fictional literature. I know that fiction holds powerful lessons, and I am not saying that one shouldn't read fiction, but I just rarely take the time to do so. However, I recently read a true story that could easily have been a work of fiction, so incredible were the details. I was glued to every page of this amazing account from the start. It is the story of Louie Zamperini, a world-class runner and 1936 Olympic bronze medalist. His name would not reach notoriety, though; World War II interrupted his running career. The book *Unbroken, A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand retells the amazing story of his life.

Louie's plane crashes in the Pacific Ocean, stranding him and his two fellow soldiers on two small rubber rafts. They spend 47 days on the open seas without water or food only to be captured by the Japanese and placed in internment camps where they endure dehumanizing conditions and torture for over two years. The atom bombs, which caused the prison guards to flee their post, were ultimately responsible for their escape.

Unbroken helped me piece together a number of epochs in our nation's history. Many world events from about 1930 to 1955, previously fuzzy to me, became crystal clear anchored in the reality of Louie's life. I also realized why so few veterans of this war in the Pacific arena would ever talk about their experiences. I had several uncles who fought in the war and they seldom every mentioned any details. When pressed, they simply refused to go there.

My emotions vacillated throughout my reading of the book. Elation upon Louie's discovery of food or water on the raft was followed by discouragement at his capture by the Japanese. I wondered where God was as he laid in torturous confinement and used for propaganda, untraceable to would-be rescuers because his captors refused to label him a POW. I was excited as he found a wonderful woman to be his wife after the war, then saddened as alcoholism and fits of rage wreaked havoc on his life. It became clear why so many men from this era struggled to maintain normal relationships after this. The human toll of World War II was staggering for generations to come.

Though *Unbroken* was not an overtly Christian book, there are inklings of spiritual activity throughout. In the book, miraculous occurrences like Louis escaping the sinking plane or pleas to God for water in exchange for his lifelong devotion are painted as nothing more than random happenings or cries of desperation, devoid of greater meaning. Even when Louie is saved from a sadistic Japanese prison guard by a fellow guard who is a Christian, the event does not carry greater weight in the telling of the story. In the last 10 percent of the book—almost a footnote—we discover that Louie does eventually become a Christian.

Unbroken is a story that will test your understanding of God's role in the midst of inhuman circumstances. It is a reminder of the human capacity for cruelty apart from Christ. It is a story that prompts reflection on how blessed you are to have been spared an experience similar to Louie's, and how shallow faith can become when untested.

Personally, the book reaffirmed my commitment to lead a Christian movement that is committed to changing the world through the power and presence of Christ. It was Christ who not only literally saved Louie's life, but also keeps people from acting like the savages that Louie faced. The scriptures point to the church as the mechanism for changing the world for eternity, and we should remain alert and diligent in our work as Christians to prevent the emergence of such an era ever again.

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