

International Conversation Cafe

Biblical Topic: Hero Journey

Throughout history, people are inspired by those who show unusual courage and achieve beyond the ordinary. We call them heroes. Countries celebrate their heroes by setting aside certain days to remember them. They also have monuments and statues where their achievements are remembered.

Name people who are remembered in your country by special days? What makes them heroes?

Joseph Campbell, an American author wrote the book, *The Hero's Journey*. In his book, he details steps that heroes find themselves on. Their journey eventually transforms them. Though Campbell outlines seventeen stages, they can be condensed into three stages.

1. Departure or separation. This is when a person begins on a new path, a new journey.
2. Initiation. This is when the person meets difficult challenges. Often, they find a mentor or resource that helps them through the difficulty.
3. Return. This is when the person is transformed with new abilities, skills, and compassion they then can pass on to others.

The Bible is full of people who have gone on a path that is different from others. We recognize people like this for their courage, faith, and their accomplishments. For example, in the Old Testament, we read about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Elijah. In the New Testament, we read about Jesus, Paul, and Peter. For this discussion, we will look at Jesus Christ and see if his life follows the pattern of heroes that Campbell recognized. Notice Jesus' close relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you, I am well pleased. Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.
~Luke 3:21-23

Retell this story in your own words.

This is the beginning of a new life for Jesus, one of public ministry. From this point on, he was in the public eye. Stage 2 is about initiation and overcoming difficulties. This happens right after Jesus' public baptism and continues throughout his life.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them, he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ~Luke 4:1-3

The Holy Spirit, Jesus' helper, leads Jesus into a place where he will be tempted. What could possibly be the reason for allowing Jesus to be tempted?

Stage 3 is about the transformation heroes experience when they go through temptation and trials successfully. Luke goes on to explain the power of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ~Luke 4:14

From what you know about Jesus, how did Jesus transform the lives of those around him?

Perhaps it is helpful to think of these steps as cycles, something that we encounter over and over throughout our lives. This would certainly be true of Jesus. Though he suffered temptation from the devil in the first part of his life, we see at the end of his life he endured the most difficult temptation of all, rejection by people and God. The rejection by people was demonstrated as they accused him of blasphemy, which is saying untrue things about God. The crowd shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him," to Pilate who suggested that Jesus had done nothing wrong.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he cried out to God, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as he suffered for the sins of the world.

*What do you think Jesus meant by these words?
Why would God let Jesus go through such agony?*

Stage 3 is transformation. Because Jesus endured suffering on the cross, he rose to a position of influence and power greater than any other human being. Not only that, he offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who trust in him.

God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." ~Acts 10:36-43

Explain the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in your own words.

How does Jesus' greatest temptation result in his greatest transformation?

What about us? Joseph Campbell believed the Bible to be untrue and irrelevant to our lives. Yet the gifts that Jesus offers are forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life.

How do you think these gifts might be relevant to people today?

When people choose to believe in Jesus today, it also means going on a new path in life, with new values and priorities which is to love God and others. This path brings temptation but also it brings transformation.

What kinds of difficulties can a Christian expect to encounter?

What kinds of benefits can a Christian expect to encounter?

