

## Nathan Austin - The Lone Ranger

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As I like to do, I like to lead off with what I hope is a slightly vague question to get your brains engaged. So the question is, what do these following people have in common? And the Lone Ranger is one of them. Batman. The Cisco Kid, if you're old enough to remember.

I'm barely old enough to remember. The Cisco Kid. Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Who, Robinson Crusoe, Don Quixote. What do they all have in common?

Sidekicks. They all have sidekicks, and so our actual title is hero support.

I got to thinking about this not long ago because it occurred to me that one of the most important roles for a sidekick is to help out the hero. More importantly, a sidekick needs to help the hero without stealing the limelight or grabbing any of the glory for themselves. Isn't that, in a sense, the way we ought to behave with our brethren? And so it is that we title these thoughts hero support. What lessons might there be for us in looking at our fellow brethren as the heroes of the story and ourselves as merely the faithful sidekick, making sure they succeed through the humble means, whatever humble means we have at our disposal?

Now, isn't it human nature to crave recognition? Do you ever struggle with desire to be the best at something? I'm going to give you a silly. A silly yet true example. I've often enjoyed being the guy with the deep voice.

And, you know, we can often be our own harshest critics, and so that's one thing I said. Well, I have this really. I really like that I have a deep voice. But, you know, then I think there's brother Larry McClellan.

Tim Thomason had an amazingly deep voice. Vivian Cethesian, and so I. Well, so much for being the deepest voice, you know, and I have to remind myself that that's the way it goes.

And really, this is not something I should be spending my time worrying about, right? But the flesh wants to dwell on it and be jealous of the gifts that others have. But if we dwell too long on these things, we'll find that it only leads to our own discouragement, and so instead, shouldn't I be happy for my brethren that have these special gifts? This isn't supposed to be a competition.

We should not let ourselves be controlled by competitive fleshly desires, and so I wanted to take some time to look at ways we can be the best sidekicks possible. Supporting the hero instead of trying to compete for the glory.

Of course. Or rather, our course of instruction in hero support consists of the following six. Cheerfulness, rendering assistance, sharing knowledge or advice, appreciating and encouraging, listening and comforting and giving or demonstrating thoughtfulness. So we'll begin with cheerfulness. Matthew, chapter 5, verse 16.

Matthew 5:16 reads, Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Also consider Proverbs, chapter 15, verse 30, Proverbs 15:30, or Proverbs 17:22. Proverbs 15:30 reads, Bright eyes gladden the heart, and 17:22 reads, A cheerful heart brings good healing, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. While there are many aspects of the Scriptures that contain hidden wisdom, this concept is rather obvious when we focus on it. We have all seen someone who is miserable just radiate unhappiness in such

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a way that all around them are dragged down to their level of unhappiness.

And conversely, when a person radiates joy and good cheer, they can warm up the room. When we are cheerful, it leaks into everything we do. We find we have more energy, more motivation. We see the glass as half full instead of half empty. I came across an account of a woman whose mother is in a nursing home, and she specifically noticed that the simple act of a nurse smiling at her mother or making a joke can elicit a smile or even perhaps a joke in return.

And it can pretty quickly turn around her mother's attitude. Despite it being such a seemingly simple and minor act, the stress visibly goes away and is replaced with something more positive and relaxed. This same woman asks the caregivers about their attitudes and how they can maintain their level of cheerfulness. How do you do this? And their response is, well, it takes effort, but it makes the job easier and the patients happier.

So that effort is absolutely worth it. We are encouraged to be cheerful, not because it's required of us, but because it pleases the Lord 2 Corinthians 9:7 2 Corinthians 9:7 each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver. Romans 12:6,8 since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly. If prophecy according to the proportion of his faith if service in his serving, or he who teaches in his teaching, or he who exhorts in his exhortation he who gives with liberality he who leads with diligence he who shows mercy with cheerfulness.

The act of maintaining cheerfulness has two effects. One is raising up those around us through our contagious energy, but the other is Demonstrating that cheerfulness is possible despite the setbacks that we all encounter. Think for a moment. Can you identify someone you know or have known going through a terrible trial and yet somehow seems to maintain a cheerful attitude? I definitely have a few that come to mind.

I can personally attest that it is both humbling and motivating to me to consider the trials that our brethren face so courageously. When I remind myself that they can maintain this faith and hope and happiness through challenges so much greater than those I normally face, it shows me not only that it is possible to maintain this cheerfulness, but that I really need to reevaluate the kinds of things I allow to bring me down. Are they really as hard and as discouraging as I have allowed them to be? It goes beyond cheerfulness, and you could say it's about being something of a role model. We, through our positive behavior, can show our fellow brethren what is possible.

Sometimes just seeing that it is possible is enough to encourage others who are perhaps lacking or losing hope. Titus, chapter 2, verses 7 and 8. In all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us, and Psalm 118, verse 24. This is the day which the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. The first lesson in supporting our brethren is to be a positive role model, to put our efforts into maintaining good cheer, knowing that we will automatically be encouraging those around us, even if we don't realize it. Now, this time I'm going to be a little interactive. It's not required, but I'm going to pause for a moment and let you think about this. Can we think of a Bible character who exemplifies.

Exemplifies cheerfulness?

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And if you have one, shout it out.

David.

Apostle Paul. One more. Anyone? Jesus. What was the other one?

Rahab? Barnabas. Barnabas. Barnabas. Barnabas.

Thank you, and I was going to say Joseph. I think these are all good examples. Thank you. Now, lesson number two.

Rendering assistance. We all recognize John, chapter 15, verse 13. Greater love has no one than this. That one lay down his life for his friends, and perhaps it seems like this is talking about some kind of ultimate sacrifice.

That moment where the hero swoops in to rescue folks trapped in a collapsing mine, and he holds up the roof of the mine with all his strength until they escape, and then it collapses in and he perishes. He gave up his life for his friends. Now, this might be an example of laying down one's life, but it's not a realistic example. That kind of sacrifice only happens once.

The kind of sacrifice and assistance we are going to talk about is of the everyday sort. Consider for a moment the types of assistance you might appreciate receiving during the course of the week. Maybe it's just help with the dishes, help setting up the meeting hall, cleaning up after break, playing an instrument for the hymn, editing the board at the back of the room that has the study location for next week, pulling the groceries out of the car. There are endless things we could all help with, and therefore there are endless ways we might find to offer help to our brethren. Galatians, chapter 6, verse 2 bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward his name in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints, and how do we find these opportunities to serve? Do we check the list on the board? If there is a list, is there a chairman in charge of acts of service that notifies us when someone is in need? I'm intentionally being a little silly here to make a point.

The only way to find these opportunities is to look for them. They won't come looking for you or bite you in the face. We have to desire the opportunity to serve, and we have to seek it. Recall Matthew 25:40. The king will answer and say to them, truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.

If our effort and intent is to serve faithfully, we ought to be every bit as diligent in the service of our brethren as we are in caring for our own path. If we are looking for ways to serve our Lord, this is one of the most clear we know that each of us has special gifts, and we are told in First Peter, Chapter four, verses nine and ten Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

What we are talking about here is a mindset of service. It is a combination of looking for opportunities to serve and then taking those opportunities. In fact, coupled with our previous lesson, we would add, it's about taking those opportunities cheerfully. Hebrews chapter 13, verses 15 and 16 through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name, and do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such

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sacrifices God is pleased.

So let's think about that for a moment. Again, can we think of those that we read of in Scriptures who exemplify a spirit of service?

Again, feel free to shout them out. Moses Martha. Martha was on my mind. Paul that's another one on my mind. Absolutely.

So now we move on to lesson 3. Sharing knowledge or advice Proverbs 11:14 where there is no guidance, the people fall. But in abundance of counselors there is victory. I think this is a very important aspect of our mutual support in this room. We have a great deal of experience, and each experience is a gem of information that can be tucked away and accessed again at need.

I am reminded of the quotation. It is attributed to Mark Twain, but it is very hard to confirm where this came from. It reads, good decisions come from experience, and experience comes from making bad decisions, and while we all make bad decisions, we can help others avoid those bad decisions. Sometimes these lessons we have learned are not to be hoarded, but to be shared freely.

Matthew, chapter 10, verses 5 through 8. These 12 Jesus sent out after instructing them, do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as you go preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.

It is upon this last bit I most want to focus. Freely you received, freely give. Although Jesus is here talking about all the gifts given to the apostles, I think we can certainly apply this to our own gifts and certainly to the lessons we have been taught during our individual walks. If we have been granted these lessons, surely we can lend that knowledge to our brethren to bring them success, patience, and endurance. In fact, perhaps one of the best venues we have for this type of sharing is our Testimony meetings.

Psalms 119, verse 24. Your testimonies also are my delight. They are my counselors. One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is the distinction between providing this advice or a sharing of knowledge and controlling the decisions of others. I am certainly at the point where I am becoming uncomfortably familiar with this distinction.

Before now, Jamie and I were the source of the bulk of decision making in the lives of our children, but increasingly they are making decisions for themselves. To clear this up, Our baby is 21 years old now, and so we recognize this transition. Soon they will be making all of these decisions on their own, and perhaps they will ask for advice, and if so, they may or may not choose to take it, and that is how it should be, even if it drives me crazy.

And that is how it is with our brethren as well. Aside from the very specific parent child relationship, we are seldom in circumstances where we can expect to dictate the actions of another. Forgetting that leads to all sorts of trouble, because the friction that arises when we appear to be controlling makes us frustrated when things don't go according to plan, and it makes others frustrated when they feel imposed upon. This applies to both our actions and our understanding of Scripture. Matthew 23:10 12.

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Matthew 23:10-12 do not be called leaders, or master, or teacher, for one is your leader, that is Christ, but the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. In our lives, there are very few things we can concretely say are wrong. For example, you shouldn't injure someone else, you shouldn't steal. Likewise, in our understanding of Scripture, there are a small number of very clear doctrines.

The ransom, the kingdom, the resurrection. Outside these things, we have to provide liberty to our brethren. As faithful sidekicks, supporters of our brethren, we are in a position to guide and to suggest, but not to dictate. Our challenge is to do it in a loving manner that encourages our brethren to listen so that all may be blessed by the exchange.

I'm going to go off notes for a moment here. I'm just telling this for whoever's working with the translation, but I'm reminded of when I was a teenager and there was a particular point of contention, and one person in the class felt one way and the other person in the class felt the other way, and I remember a talk, pray without ceasing, and it was basically pray without ceasing that eventually you come to understand this point, and you know this troubles me, right?

Because this says that I have it right, and I'm so sure I'm right that you just need to pray that eventually you see it as right as I do, and this is, you know, this is the concern, right? Do we want to approach it in this MANNER? Colossians, chapter 3, verse 16.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God and Proverbs 27:9. Oil and perfume make the heart glad. So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. When I thought about characters that exemplified this when I was first putting these thoughts together, it was a couple years ago. It's funny, I did not pick this talk, by the way, for this reason, but there was a really great study on Naaman that came to mind, and it was Brother Joe, I believe.

And specifically one of the aspects of this presentation had to do with the slave girl sending him to Elisha and his servants, encouraging him to listen to the simple advice to bathe in the Jordan, and in fact, what better example of supporting the hero could we ask for? These sidekicks even avoided the limelight to the extent we don't even know their names, and yet, as Brother Joy pointed out in that wonderful talk, in a sense, they're the real heroes of the story. So I'm not going to ask you for suggestions for this one.

I already gave you a good suggestion. Lesson Number four Appreciating and Encouraging earlier we talked about our personal attitude and the need to display cheerfulness. This next lesson for us takes us one step further and works on building the self worth of our brethren. Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. There is a sort of social currency to the way we interact with each other.

It's all the little things we do or should do to demonstrate our love and appreciation for each other on a daily basis. We hold the door for someone we see they need a hand with their coat. We recognize when they do the same for us, and we specifically comment on it. Doing things for others is absolutely part of our job. We talked about this a short while ago when discussing rendering assistance.

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But if someone renders assistance over and over again and gets not one word of acknowledgement or encouragement for their efforts, then that effort can start to feel wasted. Now they might take to heart this lesson that their assistance is not desired or appreciated, and to be clear, none of us should be working because we want recognition. But neither should we fail to recognize these efforts in our brethren. This type of failure can lead to someone feeling taken advantage of, and this perhaps decays into bitterness and resentment.

Another related concept is making people feel valued. Don't we want our brethren to know that we value them? Do we actively look for opportunities to express this? For some it comes easy. For me, it's a struggle, and I know I need to work on this.

In fact, coming across this while preparing for a talk was a really great blessing for me. It's no exaggeration to say that oftentimes these sorts of preparations end up being far greater blessing for me than for you. 1st Thessalonians, chapter 5, verses 12 and 13 1st Thessalonians 5:12,13 but we request of you brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another also first Thessalonians but now Chapter one, Verse two we give thanks to God always for all of you making mention of you in our prayers. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 we ought always to give thanks to God for you brethren, as is only fitting because your faith is greatly enlarged and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.

While the first passage is highlighting the efforts of leaders in the Church, I think it is applicable to us all in the sense that we ought to appreciate the labors of all our brethren on behalf of the fellowship, and how wonderful is it to consider the impact Paul's words must have had on the churches to whom he was writing his heartfelt appreciation and thanksgiving for their efforts, for their love, for their well being. We could all stand to emulate that kind of attitude. How do we show appreciation? I confess I am still trying to learn this myself, but a few things that I have learned Pay attention when someone is speaking with you and maintain eye contact.

Thank each other for the little things. Make that effort to recognize each other for the work that we all do. Try to find one positive thing to say to your brethren, or if you're rusty like me, start with once a week, but work up to once or more daily. Start out your day with joyful anticipation, cheerfulness, because you are expecting to be with your brethren. That expectation will show in your countenance and mood and will snowball as others become caught up in it.

We, many of us, spend too much time out in the world and encountering the things that bring us down. I was reminded of this a while back on a trip to visit Los Angeles. Our conversation during this trip drifted to the culture of road rage down there, and I actually noticed several people getting upset at minor traffic, rudeness or errors. Does getting upset get you there faster? Moreover, is it going to leave you better off somehow than before you became upset?

Now, no doubt many of us need to work on this, and it is worth remembering that in a world that does not value or encourage others, we swiftly fall into antagonism and resentment. So we need to actively combat this with our positive words. It even gets harder with social media because at this remove, it's so easy to have those negative words. Proverbs 22:11.

He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious. The king is his friend. When we exhibit gracious speech, we benefit through a better mood. Our brethren benefit. Our relationships strengthen.

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As we build a tighter friendship and trust, we find it easier to communicate and listen and will grow more excited at the prospect of spending time amongst our brethren. Can we think of some biblical examples of appreciating and encouraging others?

Anyone? Mary, who anointed our Lord? Thank you, Job's friends.

We'll have a nice conversation later. If you needed something to talk about at lunch, now you have it. Jonathan. Jonathan. Thank you.

Lesson number five, Listen and comfort. Another tool in our utility belt is that of providing a hearing ear to those in need. Listening provides us a chance to demonstrate our love and appreciation for our brethren and often gives them a chance to open up about the things that lay heavy on their hearts. Philemon, Chapter two, verse three. At least I think that is, I abbreviated it.

It's either that or Philippians, but I think it's Philemon 2. 3. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

As we mentioned earlier, there's a time and a way to provide advice, but sometimes what is really needed is to provide your attention your sympathy. Proverbs 20, verse 5. A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out, and James, chapter one, verse 19. This you know, my beloved brethren.

But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Through patience and compassion, we can demonstrate a love for the brethren. Building a close relationship creates a safe environment for sharing the things that hurt us the most, and these things strengthen the bonds of our Christian fellowship. In fact, this overlaps with our desire to encourage our brethren and to share our own experiences and lessons.

Practicing each of these skills will build the others in the process. A related concept is that of comforter. We often read of the Holy Spirit as the comforter, but we can be comforters in our own Way. Proverbs 19:17. One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his good deed.

My own slightly altered version of this might read, one who is gracious to the poor in spirit and the depressed is gracious to the Lord and will be repaid for this good deed. If we are practicing our observation skills and noticing when our brethren simply aren't themselves, this is a signal to make more of an effort than usual, to employ all of our tools on their behalf, to be cheerful and encouraging, to ask, to listen, to let them know we appreciate them and are glad to have their fellowship. We each have our gifts. We all know the Scripture about some having skills to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc, and so some of us will naturally be better at listening or encouraging.

But we all have eyes, and we can all watch and learn from our brethren. Sometimes we will be watching and learning while they are lifting us up from our own trials. It is important that we approach this with a growth mindset, with the desire to grow and become better at the things wherein we are not as strong as we would like, and when it is done right, you will know Proverbs Again, chapter 25, verse 11 like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.

Who in the Bible do you think of when you think of listening or providing comfort?

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Barnabas?

Jesus? Absolutely. Lesson 6 Generosity and thoughtfulness Our last goal is to treat our brethren with generosity and thoughtfulness. Luke chapter 6, verse 38 Give and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

For by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you in return. Take a moment and try to remember the last time you received a truly thoughtful gift. A good example that comes to mind for me was a stocking stuffer I received a few Christmases ago from our oldest son, Quinn. It was a box of eyeglass wipes. Now, the reason this is a perfect example is that any member of my family can attest to the fact that my eyeglasses exist in a perpetual state of smudgedness.

I didn't even know you could buy eyeglass wipes by the box, and I never would have thought of such a thing as a stocking stuffer. But it was a perfect gift. It was inexpensive. But see, that's not the point. The point is, Quinn understood my needs, even the little inconsequential ones, and was thoughtful enough to notice and remember and do something about it.

Do we really notice our brethren? Do we think about them? Do we try to find these little ways that we can serve that are not expensive and not hard? But we notice?

Oh, it's the dreaded PHL Again. Is that Philemon or is that Philippians? It is Philippians, okay, because I just didn't think I'd be Philemon is so small. Philippians, chapter 2, verses 3 to 4 do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind. Regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Romans chapter 12, verses 10 and 13 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Give preference to one another in honor, contributing to the needs of the saints. Practicing hospitality Once again we are talking about changing our habits and developing an awareness of the needs of others, and isn't this a wonderful challenge for a Christian?

We know we are to be putting down the flesh. Romans, chapter 8, verses 12 through 14 so then, brethren, we are under obligation not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live for all who are being led by the Spirit of God. These are the sons of God.

So when exercising a love for the brethren, in developing a generosity of heart and a thoughtfulness of mind, we are strengthening our new creature, and there are no excuses here. It doesn't require you to slave away for a day or even an hour. You just have to be aware and take a moment to notice and respond. Thoughtfulness can be an action or a gifted object, but it can also be seen in restraint.

Perhaps you pause before responding with an unnecessary criticism. Maybe you refrain from making a judgment about the actions of your brother or sister because you consider the unknown struggles they may be experiencing or the facts that perhaps lay outside your knowledge. Thoughtfulness can be a smile, a word of thanks. It can be a handwritten note, a brief text message. It can be a phone call just to say you're thinking of that person.

And an interesting side effect is that doing good unto others feels good. The more we do, the more we feel good about ourselves and our choices. It can be energizing and lead us to crave it even

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more. Instead of falling into a cycle of poor choices, I encourage us all to try to create a cycle of cheerfulness. You will feel better.

Better. You'll make others feel better, and the feeling will grow. Proverbs, chapter 11, verse 25 the generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. It can be tough to always do this. We all have bad days.

We struggle with the flesh or Maybe we're trying to do good to someone and they're having a bad day. Maybe they respond unkindly or otherwise shut us down. It will happen, and at that moment we have a choice. Do we let it derail our actions and break the cycle, or do we mentally prepare for it, endure it, and choose to maintain our cheerfulness despite the setback?

Romans, chapter 15, verses 1 and 2 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.

So we'll summarize. Brethren, the ultimate goal is to remember that we are not doing these things for our own benefit. We are not seeking notice or reward from our fellow followers of Christ in our efforts to be the best sidekick, we can be the best hero. Support we make our brethren the hero of our story. We put them first and their goals become our goals.

When we start our day and approach our brethren with energy and cheerfulness, we will energize them and that cheer will spread to all. Our conversation will be more likely to be positive and reflect the glory of God, and if we maintain that cheer even through times of distress, then the brethren notice and we will show them that they have the power to do the same. When we make ourselves available to our brethren, when we seek to assist in any way we can, we let them know they are loved and that they are our spiritual family. They are important to us.

When we share our advice and knowledge with our brethren, we help them avoid the pitfalls that have befallen us. We let our lessons become their lessons, and we show trust when we give them the freedom to take their own path and learn their own lessons. Although we can worry about our brethren, we must trust in the Holy Spirit to guide them and simply do our best to support them along the way.

When we show appreciation and encourage our brethren, we build their zeal and stoke their sense of self worth, not inflating their egos, but instead building in their confidence that they can just as easily be a tool of the Lord as any of us. For we are all the weak things of the world. When we watch our brethren looking for those in need, and when we give them comfort and listen to their distress, we take some of their pain on ourselves to help them bear it in the knowledge that they are not alone, and we show them that they are worth our time and energy, and when we demonstrate thoughtfulness, we show our brethren that we notice them, that we think about them, and this means they are important to us doing all these things fuels us.

They create in our brethren a feeling of being valued, encouraged, empowered, and supported. Although we don't have our Lord's hand overtly guiding us like he guided David as he conquered Goliath, we do know that our brethren are with us in spirit. When we feel valued, we crave the presence of the brethren, and we feel open to asking the difficult questions because we feel safe in the knowledge that we are not going to be judged or criticized. When we see our brethren persevere through trial, we know that we, too, can persevere. So just remember that the person you see in the mirror isn't your priority.

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It's true you are the only person who can control your actions, but your influence can be felt far beyond your immediate vicinity. Use that influence to do good and to allow your fellow new creatures to shine. Amen.