

GNITN

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But God: After the Capes Came Off

We All Have Our Heroes

If you were like me, you had a super hero that you couldn't get like enough. For me it was the Flash. It may seem silly, but I somehow wanted every comic book about him that came out. While others liked Superman or Batman or Spiderman or the Hulk, I thought the fastest man alive was better than them all. I remember that a special edition came out that I just had to have and my brother would go by the drugstore and on his way home from school I asked him to buy it for me. When he came home he didn't appear to have it and my young heart sunk. Then he took it from underneath his sweatshirt and smiled. Recently a television show came out and I had to watch every episode. My wife and daughter even bought me t-shirts with the Flash on them. And as you watch these podcasts those of you with eagle eyes may even notice I have a magnet of him on my desk. You see, my hero can do no wrong and in a fictional world that can happen. But in real life our heroes can and will let us down. They are, after all, human. At least that's what we're told. However, when they fail to live up to our expectations it seems to hit harder.

Christian "Heroes"

I put the word heroes in italics because it's not a good idea to elevate other people to that status. The reason? As I just said, they're not perfect. As the old saying goes, they put on their pants one leg at a time like the rest of us. But in real life we have people we look up to and as believers we tend to do the same thing as we did with our childhood idols. They have super powers and will always lead the way for us through the darkest nights. They always have the right answer, at the right time to bring about the right results. Christians like to have these people in their lives because everyone needs that person who is always there for them. Someone who never seems to let them down. We know that these people aren't perfect and that putting them on pedestals is a precarious thing, something that usually isn't a good thing in the end, yet we do it, time and time again. Like the Flash, he always had a way to save the day, to swoosh in with his super speed and be in two places at the same time to save the heroine and defeat the villain. We all saw it coming from the first frame of the comic or the beginning of the episode. How he did it was the interesting part. For Christians it doesn't always work out that way. And one story in my life stand out.

The Christian Comedian

Way back in 1972 a man named Mike Warnke rose to fame when a book he wrote called *The Satan Seller*. Here is how an [article](#) on him describes his rise to fame:

In 1972, Warnke's book The Satan Seller was released. Written by Warnke, with help from Balsiger and Les Jones, the book tells of Warnke being orphaned as a child and his introduction into Satanism. Further detailed is Warnke's participation in sexual orgies, alcoholism, and drug dealing; his rise in the ranks of Satanism to the level of "high priest"; presiding over Satanic rituals including magical spells, summoning demons, ritual sex including a kidnap and rape; the attempt on his life—a heroin overdose—that left him angry and disillusioned; his heroism in Vietnam; and how he found Jesus and came home as an evangelist. The story ends with Warnke

living happily in California with wife Sue Studer. In fewer than three months after the release, The Satan Seller had become a religious best-seller.

The book put him on the proverbial map:

The book launched Warnke into stardom within evangelical Christian communities. He became a popular speaker at Christian meeting places such as Melodyland in Anaheim, California. In 1974, Warnke moved his family to attend Trinity Bible College in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as a nine-month preparation for ministry. It was here, while among other charismatic Christians and recent converts preparing for a life of ministry, that Warnke met Carolyn Alberty and the two began an extramarital affair. Warnke also met Elijah Coady, an independent, schismatic bishop of the Syro-Chaldean Church, also known as the Assyrian Church of the East. Coady ordained Warnke as a deacon. Upon graduation, Warnke was again ordained, and he moved with his family to Denver, Colorado.

It was during that rise to fame I got to know Warnke although I highly doubt he would remember meeting me. He spoke at my church and then myself and a Christian band I was in would work together with him in Illinois from time to time in the late 1970s. One of my good friends and a band member even went to Kentucky to work for him or at least he planned on it. There were cracks in his life that seemed to come out during those times especially with his marriage to Rose Hall, but we trusted Warnke's version of the events. Then came the expose.

It Wasn't The Truth

In 1992 a Christian publication called *Cornerstone Magazine* decided to finally break the news that Warnke couldn't have possibly done all the things he said he did and all the stories about being in the military as a medic or all the Satanic parties he talked about just weren't chronologically possible. In short Warnke was accused of making it all up. From the same article we read this:

The Cornerstone investigation spanned from interviews with over 100 of Warnke's personal friends and acquaintances to his ministry's tax receipts. It revealed a number of inaccuracies and evidence of [fraud](#) and [deceit](#) in Warnke's accounts. During the course of Cornerstone's investigation, pictures of Warnke taken during the time he was alleged to be a Satanist priest were discovered. Rather than showing an emaciated drug-addict sporting long fingernails and waist-length hair, the pictures showed Warnke as a typical "square" of the mid-1960s. The investigation also revealed Warnke's claims that he and [Charles Manson](#) had attended a Satanic ritual to be false; Manson was in federal prison at the time, having no known ties to Satanic churches.

The investigation further uncovered that before joining the navy, Warnke had been involved with the college Christian ministry [Campus Crusade for Christ](#). The investigation also revealed the unflattering circumstances surrounding Warnke's multiple marriages, affairs, and divorces. Regarding one Christian intervention attempt, the Cornerstone article states, "[Don] Riling, Mike Johnson, Wes Yoder, and Mike and Carolyn were there. 'You'd have never guessed that this was a meeting of Christians,' says Riling. 'Mike and Carolyn were swearing the whole time, and they must have gone through a whole pack of cigarettes.'"

Most critically, the investigation showed how Warnke could not have done the many things he claimed to have taken part in throughout the nine months he claimed to be a Satanist—including his claims to be a drug-addicted dealer or a Satanic high priest. Before publishing, Cornerstone

contacted Warnke for an interview, but he and the magazine could not agree to terms for such an interview. Cornerstone revealed its story at the annual [Christian Booksellers Association](#) convention in June 1992.

To say I was devastated and disheartened would be an understatement. Many of us were. Warnke, to this day, says he may have exaggerated things, but they all happened. He feels that the religious community abused him. I went to his [web site](#) and there is nothing about the scandal or repentance for lying.

I Have Other Stories

But I think the point is made. Warnke is just one of the Christian “stars” in my life that I admired, but they fell short of my expectations. When I was in Bible college the chancellor was exposed as meeting a prostitute all the while he was holding world-wide evangelism crusades. He is still preaching and his church still has services now, but he never rose to the same level of prominence he had before the scandal. Even then I knew that putting people on pedestals only made their falls worse and even wrote an editorial in the college paper long before we knew about his moral failings stating that. But we as Christians have examples of leaders from the Bible that were less than perfect who God still redeemed and used. Abraham lied about his wife being his sister and even had relations with his servant to help God out with the plan to make a great nation from him. Not exactly a good plan and we’re paying for it even now. King David had an affair with Bathsheba and even ordered her then husband killed to cover it up. Abraham is called the father of faith and David a man after God’s own heart. Moses was a murderer, too. Even Samson, who had a thing or two about prostitutes himself, is mentioned in the Bible in **Hebrews 11** as being a great man of faith. The point is simple. These and other men were just like you and me. They were given to lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life as we’re told in **1 John 2:16**. But all of them fell and let down their supporters.

But God

All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God’s anger just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy; he loved us so much 5 that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, he gave us back our lives again[a] when he raised Christ from the dead—only by his undeserved favor have we ever been saved— 6 and lifted us up from the grave into glory along with Christ, where we sit with him in the heavenly realms—all because of what Christ Jesus did. 7 And now God can always point to us as examples of how very, very rich his kindness is, as shown in all he has done for us through Jesus Christ. (Eph 2:1-7, TLB)

You’ve heard me say it time and time again that those two words “but God” can turn even the darkest situation around. And it made the difference in all those heroes of faith who were less than perfect, but always let God raise them back up. King David had to deal with the results of his sin for the rest of his life, but he repented and God heard his cry as we see in **Psalms 51**: *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. 12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. (Ps 51:10-12, AKJV)*

My advice is to let only Jesus be your hero and put no one else in that spot in your life. Jesus never fails. And if you are the object of attention, stay humble and reject such adoration.