

The Power of One

One book I will own forever is *The Power of One*, by Bryce Courtenay. I go back to it every few years, and it's one of the very few novels that remain on my bookshelf after I've read it. It's the story of a boy growing up in South Africa, and how his character is built from the culture and injustice of his country. It is a story about seeing the true nature of humanity, and following one's own moral compass.

Last week, the world lost Nelson Mandela, one of the finest human spirits God has ever made. If ever the phrase "The Power of One" could be used about a life, it was his. A nation built on discrimination, violence, injustice, and inequality was transformed with the power of this one life. I have no idea what religion Mr. Mandela practiced, but I am convinced that his life was the embodiment of Christian behavior.

Faith, forgiveness, and dignity were the basis for everything he accomplished. During his 27 years of imprisonment, his captors and guards became his friends because of the character and patience he displayed. Anger and resentment were seemingly not within his ability. Yet Nelson Mandela was always the first to dismiss any notion that he was a saint by any stretch of the imagination. I once visited a church where the signature song was "A Saint is Just a Sinner Who Fell Down, Then Got Up." That was how this man lived his life-always trying for the higher ground. When his biographer was assembling his writings, Mandela told him not to edit out the negatives. He wanted the world to know him for his most human self, with anger, mistakes, and resentment. He wanted us to see the journey that is striving for what is fundamentally right, for ourselves, for our God, and for our fellow human beings.

He loved his country, and never stopped believing that it could be transformed into a place of just society. I cannot imagine a place

more undeserving of that hope than South Africa was, with its racist government and the stunning poverty of its black majority. But Nelson Mandela kept trying for that higher ground.

His saga is famous, and I don't have to tell the entire story here. What Nelson Mandela accomplished is incredible. But he was not a Christ figure. He was one man who set the tone of forgiveness, tolerance, and justice for an entire country full of others who persisted in their faith that the world could be better. He was the father of his country, without a doubt, and led through example, just as our parents did. And he kept trying, failing, and trying again.

This, to me, is Mandela's greatest gift to the world. None of us are perfect, and we don't need to be. Persistence in following our faith is a long and difficult journey. We must face problems in our lives with love and faith. We must all feel that we, not just great heroes, hold the Power of One.

Peace,
Lori Ramsey