

24: One Day At A Time

✖ Modern terrorism has plagued our world for decades, but it wasn't until Sept. 11, 2001 when domestic terrorism in North America was solidified as a legitimate threat. Ironically, it was just two months later when a groundbreaking television program known as 24 was first introduced.

Over the past seven years, the FOX network has fashioned the lead character of Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) into a figure of iconic proportions. Bauer is an enigmatic anti-terrorist agent who knows no boundaries in his quest to protect the lives of his fellow Americans. This fictional creation has become so beloved in popular culture, "Jack Bauer for President" t-shirts and other memorabilia have pervaded the public square. There are hundreds of fan sites dedicated to Bauer and a Google search of the name yields over 2 million Internet mentions!

Each season revolves around a single 24-hour period time with the non-stop action taking place in real time. 24's producers even provide a recurring digital clock mechanism (akin to a time bomb) to remind viewers of that fact. The program comes with a built in "Viewer Discretion is Advised" warning due to the pervasive graphic violence that makes 24 one of the most intense shows in television history.

Beyond the theme of terrorism, 24 is full of sub-plots involving the characters' histories and working relationships. But don't be mistaken. At the end of the day, 24 is all about Bauer and his uncanny ability to attract big time trouble with far reaching international repercussions.

In Season 1, Bauer loses his estranged, pregnant wife Teri (Leslie Hope) just as it appeared they might reconcile. In that same season, his daughter Kim (Elisha Cuthbert)-along with her mother-is kidnapped and faces constant danger. In

fact, his personal relationships are seemingly always in flux thanks to his demanding job and the perilous situations in which he often finds himself.

Over the course of seven seasons, Bauer has lost his job at the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) and been reinstated on multiple occasions. He has routinely acted as a rogue agent working against the government's wishes in an effort to get around its cumbersome rules and regulations. In season 7 (which has thus far revealed 12 of its 24 hours), CTU has been dismantled and Bauer is under federal investigation for torture-related crimes.

From the beginning, Bauer has also become a confidante to the Presidents. He has single-handedly saved the country from mass terrorism but lost many close friends in the process, most notably Tony Almeida (Carlos Bernard) who was apparently killed in the line of fire during season 5 only to return during season 7. Bauer even battled a heroin addiction during season 3 that had developed while infiltrating a powerful Mexican drug cartel.

While Jack Bauer might be a perfect illustration of the anti-hero-or the flawed good guy-you have to go back a few thousand years to find the original. His name was David. This famous Old Testament luminary went from nondescript shepherd to King of Israel in just a few short years (see 1 Sam. 16-31; 2 Sam. 1-24).

David is perhaps most famous for his defeat of the Philistine giant named Goliath, a victory that saved his people, but is also noted for his heroic battles against a lion and a bear while protecting his flock. As King, he was the leader of many great military victories. Even before he was anointed the nation's ruler, he had the ear of influential men including King Saul.

But thanks to his glaring character flaws, his reign was

anything but a smooth ride. Like Bauer, David endured many intense family conflicts. His son Absalom rebelled against him and died attempting to overthrow his reign. Some of David's household problems stemmed from his lust for women, an addiction that drove him to sleep with another man's wife-Bathsheba-and send him to the frontline where he would be killed in battle.

David also had power struggles much like the ones displayed in 24. He found himself at odds with his mentor Saul and his popularity as the giant killer eventually undermined the King's authority. Like Bauer, David felt the sting of personal loss when his best friend Jonathan (the son of Saul) died a warrior's death.

Just like Jack Bauer and King David, we all have the ability to do great things. But we are likewise flawed and imperfect and make plenty of bad decisions throughout our lives. Too often these mistakes keep us from reaching our full potential. If we're not careful, we can squander the talents and abilities that God has given us and exchange them for a life of mediocrity and unfulfilled dreams.

Both of these men have something else in common. They both realized that despite their interpersonal imperfections, there was still a greater cause that was worth fighting for. Bauer is driven by his desire to protect his country and its people from terrorism. David was driven by his desire to serve God and the people of Israel from its enemies.

And the amazing thing is that despite David's countless mess ups, he was still referred to as "a man after God's own heart" (see Acts 13:22). How can that be? Is it possible that God can use people to do big things even after they have made seemingly unforgivable mistakes? If you take David's story to heart, the answer must be a resounding, "Yes!" That's because God is faithful to forgive those who are truly repentant of their sins just as David was (see 2 Samuel 12:13).

When you get off track and start to lose your way, it might take a little longer to get to the place where God intended you to be. But following David's lead by asking for God's forgiveness and then moving forward in His grace will straighten out your path in a hurry. It might still take a while to get there, but you *will* get there nonetheless.