

The Prophetic Implications of 'Logan's' Box-Office Busting Weekend

"You may want to marry my husband."

So headlines a *New York Times* column that has gone viral. Amy Krouse Rosenthal is dying of ovarian cancer. She has been married to "the most extraordinary man for 26 years" and planned on at least another 26 with him. Instead, she wrote a deeply moving essay about her husband in hopes that "the right person reads this, finds Jason and another love story begins."

Reading her tribute, I wanted to be as caring as Jason. If I were a wife, I would want to be as courageous as Amy.

We need more models of courageous caring today. What does it say about us that *Logan*, the bloody final installment in the "Wolverine" series, topped the weekend box office? Or that nudity at a Paris fashion show is making headlines? Or that Facebook is testing artificial intelligence tools as it tries to help curb the suicide epidemic?

In days like these, our culture can use the best models we can find. But the answer to our challenges isn't so simple.

Stanford professor Albert Bandura is widely considered America's greatest living psychologist. The recipient of 16 honorary degrees, he is best known for pioneering "social cognitive theory." In essence, Bandura believes that students learn by observing models and replicating their behavior. If imitation enables students to accomplish their goals, such success encourages them to perform similar behaviors. Over time, the successful student becomes a model for others and the process multiplies.

Prof. Bandura would agree that Rosenthal's article has been popular in large part because it inspires us to follow the example she and her husband have set. Imitating success is a popular self-improvement method in our secular culture. But I'm convinced that it's not enough to take us where we need to go, for three reasons.

First, if we merely imitate our models without truly understanding their behavior, we will struggle to apply their example to different circumstances. What works in starting a church may not work in leading an established congregation. Unique challenges sometimes call for unique approaches.

Second, modeling assumes that we can do what our models do. What if their gifts are greater or at least different from ours? As a young pastor, I sometimes tried to preach like the great preachers I admired and was far more frustrated than fulfilled.

Third, modeling does not seem to include or encourage unique initiative. How would it explain Moses at the burning bush? John the Baptist in the wilderness? Peter at Pentecost?

I've taken you down this rather abstract road today to make a simple point: We need the unique power of the Spirit to become the unique individuals God intends us to be. Instead of trying to become someone else, ask God to make you all you can be today. Paradoxically, the more you become God's best for you, the more you become like your Lord.

And the cry of the human heart will be met in you: "We want to see Jesus" (John 12:21b). {eo}