

What TIME's Person of the Year Says About Us

Facebook has released its annual list of the most discussed topics among its users. Look over the list, and notice how many are negative:

- The contentious U.S. presidential election
- Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris
- Syrian civil war and refugee crisis
- Nepal earthquake in April
- Greek debt crisis
- Same-sex marriage
- Fight against ISIS
- *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack
- Baltimore police protests
- Charleston, South Carolina, shooting and Confederate flag debate.

In a world filled with chaos and controversy, *TIME* magazine's Person of the Year selection is especially fascinating. Angela Merkel, a Lutheran minister's daughter and German chancellor since 2005, has been selected.

Nancy Gibbs, *TIME*'s managing editor, cites Merkel's leadership in managing the European debt crisis, her stance against Vladimir Putin's theft of Ukraine, her response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and her decision to deploy troops in the fight against ISIS.

Gibbs concludes: "Leaders are tested only when people don't want to follow. For asking more of her country than most politicians would dare, for standing firm against tyranny as well as expedience and for providing steadfast moral leadership in a world where it is in short supply, Angela Merkel is *TIME*'s Person of the Year."

The darker the room, the more obvious the light.

A survey of scholars recently ranked Abraham Lincoln the greatest American president, followed by George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt. What did these men have in common? They led the nation through almost insurmountable challenges. The president ranked last was James Buchanan, who preceded Lincoln in office and stated in his inaugural address that slavery was "a matter of but little practical importance."

Professor Reed Markham is right: "Successful leaders see the opportunities in every difficulty rather than the difficulty in every opportunity." Researchers have discovered that resilient people view tasks as challenges and opportunities for growth rather than as threats.

A psychiatrist who interviewed 750 Vietnam War POWs identified 10 critical elements in resilience: optimism, altruism, having a moral compass, faith and spirituality, humor, having a role model, social supports, facing fear, having a mission in life and training. Note the first factor on the list.

What is the secret to optimism in pessimistic times? Consider what God said to Joshua after the death of Moses seemed to imperil the Jewish nation: "Have not I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). Jesus applied this promise to you and me: "And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Where you go, God goes. What you feel, God feels. What you face, God faces. So see your challenges as God's opportunities. And know that your optimism is a powerful and persuasive witness to those you influence.

Oswald Chambers said, "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."