

What Color Are Your Stretchy Pants?
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Have you ever thought about what it must be like to be Super Human? Great? Super Good? Exceptional? Uniquely important to the world?

Spiderman 3 has just blown past all former records for the largest opening weekend in box office sales at theatres in the United States. For the record, I thought the first two films were the better movies. That being so, Spidey 3 still inspires the wanna-be superhero in me. Even the third installment of the webbed wonder boy's adventures stirs me enough to want to put on my own stretchy pants.

In the last couple of years I have thought much about the whole superhero thing. It seems, if Hollywood's success with hero-adventure movies is any clue that many in America and around the world think about the heroic ideal. Why is this? What is it about heroes, superheroes, and other marvel working caped types which draw us so intently? I think I am beginning to understand.

Several months ago, in my home, a curious encounter and a really silly, but really great movie brought this issue into sharp focus for me as I was wrestling with who God has made me and what He is calling me to be and do with my life.

Here is what happened.

"Dear God! No. Not this!" And then, "Son, what in the world are you watching?" These are the words I spoke late one night, not too long ago, after walking in on my teenage son watching the unthinkable on the television in his room. As a guy, you might think I should be a bit more understanding, a little less shocked. After all, I was a teenager once. And yes, the testosterone raged in me as well. However, as a father, devoted to God, striving to instill Christian values in my son, this type of behavior came as a major blow.

It is one thing to wrestle with one's own demons. It is something quite different to be rudely awoken to the reality that your offspring, your only son, has demons you prayed incessantly he would never have to deal with. Walking into my son's room that night, hearing the moans, slaps, and other sounds of fleshly activities, it was all so unbearable. To see my son mesmerized by these kinds of primal urges displayed in Technicolor on the tube was a blow unlike few I had experienced as a father. The sweating bodies, the shirtless participants, and the raw, uninhibited interaction were enough to make me crazy with fear and anger. How could my son, the one I had groomed for 14 years to pursue a thoughtful and restrained life, be given to this kind of immorality?

"This is garbage!" I thought to myself. Instantly, fear of my son's future and lifelong addiction consumed me. I looked at my son as a disappointed obedience trainer would look at an obstinate Labrador, and yelled, "Wrestling! You are watching wrestling! Turn that mindless garbage off right now, son! Don't you know this is why America is in the moral abyss it is in? Just because the rest of the country watches this crap, doesn't mean we watch this junk in our home. We have higher standards in this house. Turn it off, pick up a book and expand your mind. Don't make me take this television out of your room!"

Not too many moments later I remembered how, as a young kid, I absolutely loved JYD (The Junk Yard Dog). I realized that my son's longing to be the big bold super-figure was also mine.

The desire still lurks. In fact, it is growing. What I find, as I draw closer to God's heart, is that the hunger to be a human hero grows.

A few months after this incident my son and I were watching Jack Black's movie *Nacho Libre* together, laughing hysterically, and cheering for Nacho as he pursued his dream, his *calling*. Soon thereafter, my testosterone fueled son and I were shopping for our stretchy pants and scratching the superhero itch deeply rooted within us. His color of choice was red, mine was blue. Don't laugh. As Nacho reminds us, "Sometimes a guy likes to wear stretchy pants. It's for fun". We have yet to find the knee high wrestling boots.

Life can be fun. It can actually be adventurous when we find ourselves and pursue that for which we were created. Nacho Libre, a somewhat goofy movie, finds its strength in the deep seated passion of its principal character to "find himself" and his quest to pursue his dream, his divinely inspired dream. That dream is, in essence, the same dream that each person who lives and breathes has in his or her heart. This dream is actually our consuming passion to know why we are here and what we should be doing with our lives. Finding this dream sets one on the path of exhilaration. The loss of this dream leads to the kind of individual and communal misery and emptiness with which we are too familiar.

This quest for the "ideal" in our life is, I think, what captures us so much as we watch movies like Spiderman, Batman, and yes, Nacho Libre. We all want to know that we can BE GREAT. Intuitively, we seem to understand that we were created for something more than the life we are living. Mediocrity is just not enough. Spiderman, ultimately, stirs that hunger within us to dream about what life would look like if we were able to cast off our meager existence and embrace a bigger dream, a dream for the Best Life God has for us.

Settling for less than Best: the Black Suit

Spiderman 3 brings the reality of good vs. evil into fantastic light. This battle of forces, one against the other, rages in each of us. What is so compelling about Spidey 3 (though again, I liked the first two better), is the plot twist which demonstrates that even the best among us, the super figures among us, wrestle with the less than honorable impulses which reside in the depths of one's heart and mind.

The struggle for Spiderman, for Nacho, and for us, is the same. The daily battle to embrace the easy way, the alluring way, and often, the dark way, tugs at each one of us. As the movie demonstrates, our cravings for vengeance, recognition, flattery, respect, and ego scream out for their fulfillment. It is so much easier to give into the pull of the black suit, isn't it? When we lose focus the dark side is always there to wrap itself around us and shackle us to its destructive ways.

What about this black suit though? How is it that we are so drawn to it? Why was Spidey so tempted to leave the promise of the red suit and its good deeds for the empty offerings of the dark side? In truth, his struggle has been the struggle of humanity

since Adam and Eve. That original breaking of boundaries unleashed the tide of darkness that still runs ramped in our world. The doctrine of original sin is a common sense reality.

Scripture has suggested to us that the pursuit of godliness is the key to an abundant life, and the key to a successful defense against the darkness of our own hearts. David, the greatest king of Israel, amidst his fame, riches, power and privilege, found this reality to be so. When David submitted to the black suit and found himself in the throws of adultery and murder his soul was wrecked and the carnage worked its way through his family. When David found his passion directed toward the heart of God he found a life so full of beauty, artistic expression, and glory that few in history have been able to capture the thrill of living with such singleness of vision as David did. The Psalms are replete with amazing testimonies of David's intimacy with God and still capture the hearts, minds, and souls of readers thousands of years later.

The "promise" of the black suit is unveiled in our day in vivid detail on television news nightly. It shows up in the voice mail messages of raging celebrity fathers, the jail sentences of gorgeous, empty, drunk, party animal actresses, and on the videos of stammering-drunk celebrity fathers video-taped by their young daughters. The "promise" of the black suit shows up in our own lives in the wreckage inflicted upon ourselves when we make poor choices morally, relationally, and otherwise. The "promise" of the black suit shows its power to be deadly when our college and high school campuses are plagued by mass killings. The "promise" of the black suit is shown to be false each and every day if we are willing to view life realistically. Anna Nicole, John Belushi, and many a lost rock star or movie star tell us of the "promise" of the dark side. Likewise, the demise of many well-known preachers, evangelists, and political leaders speak to us of the remains of life lived in the black suit.

The scriptures compel us, "Come, let us reason together". Is it reasonable to choose our own desires and ideas when God offers us a clear plan for right living? Is it reasonable to embrace lust, sex without boundaries, greed, revenge, limitless pleasure, and selfish ambition, when God has already instructed us as to the results that will be obtained?

If we are to abandon the trap of the black suit, as Spiderman ultimately did, we must choose to change our focus. The word repentance, scripturally, denotes a putting down of one thing and a choosing of another. It is a turning from one direction and a traveling toward another. To repent is not to "confess" a laundry list of rules broken every now and then; rather, it is a conscious decision to live in a different manner. More directly, it is a decision to allow oneself to be made into a different person. We cannot do this. Only God can work this kind of miracle. We must however, say to Him, "I am tired of the black suit. Please, change me and put another suit on me".

Just as Spiderman eventually came to see how entrapped he was by the all-consuming desires he was prisoner to while in the black suit, we must recognize that in the end the patterns of living the selfish life are methodically robbing us of our true selves and all we can be. The questions arises, then, "How do we escape?"

A New Suit: Becoming something new

Psalms 27:4 reads, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.

Our ability to put on a new suit, a red suit in the case of Spidey, depends upon our focus and desire. As the Psalmist indicates here, the consuming passion which anchors the soul is that which is bigger, better, and beyond anything this world can offer. If all of life, real life, meaningful life, is reduced to one quest, it must be, as the Westminster Confession asserts, the quest to know, love, and enjoy God forever. Nothing else in all of human experience compares to this experience. No beauty, even that of a man or woman, the crown of God’s creation, can compare to the beauty of the Lord.

David found this to be so. Smitten by the beauty of an enthralling, and married, woman, whom he viewed as she bathed, he chose to disregard the safety and protection of the God fearing King’s robe, and made a conscious choice to disrobe himself from God’s agenda and pursue her. In the end, a Hamlet-like scene unfolded. Beauty is to be pursued, beauty as defined by God. Not all men, women, careers, or opportunities are God’s plan for us, no matter how attractive they may be to us.

I love beautiful things. In the past I have been a part of interior design businesses. I have bought and sold art, collected vintage watches, bought and sold fine furnishings, and pursued the hobby of photography. Beauty and design speak to me. I believe we were created with an attraction to beauty because God, in His very nature, is beauty defined. Design speaks of a designer. For me, to walk into, live in, or to help someone design an inspiring environment is pure joy. The explosion in home decorating and design-shows on television, I think, demonstrates that people in general have an innate sense of structure, design, beauty, and long for a “space” where form comes together. This is a hint of how life is to be lived. Who is not captured by the sight of a world-class athlete who has refined the body in amazing ways? How lovely are those whom God has blessed, male or female, with abundant physical beauty? Beauty is all around us. It is there to inspire us and to point us upward.

God has given us a design for life. A spectacular life unfolds when we put on God’s suit for us and we follow His plan uniquely formed for us. When we view the artistic beauty of scripture as merely “rules” or “puritanical laws” we sever ourselves from the potential to live a beautiful and inspired life. Without putting on the super-hero costume, the stretchy pants God intends for each of us, we have no hope of finding a life that thrills us. Our uniquely designed plan, we must remember, unfolds amidst the safe boundaries of scripture. Just as Spidey found his most heroic feats performed in his red suit, the suit he was *intended* to wear, we find the life we were meant to live in our quest to focus on God’s plan for living. Our benchmark for such a life, is none less than Jesus who said, and literally meant, “I am *the way, the truth, and the life.*” God gives us one option because He knows, as the Psalmist found out, that only in Him can we find wholeness, and only in Him can we be made *new*.

This just makes good sense. If God does exist, does it not make sense that He would define, construct, or build a framework that His creatures could follow? A loving God would not allow for 6 billion varying “truths”, differing truths. How could a good God, with a plan for His creation, extend love, if He provided no roadmap to follow? Those who wish to embrace the idea that no absolute truth exists, must also embrace an unknowable and unloving deity. For if no truth, real truth, knowable truth exists, then one persons’ belief in murder on demand cannot be viewed any differently than another’s belief in greed, or another’s belief in polygamy, or another’s belief in pedophilia, or another’s belief in snake handling, or another’s belief in, well, you name it.

God, by definition, is a unique being with a certain set of characteristics. In finding out who He is, as He has revealed Himself in scripture, we find our blueprint for building a life worth living. We can never fulfill our thirst to live life to the full short of turning toward God’s way of life. It must be the *one thing* that directs all activities, decisions, desires, emotions, and pursuits. This is how we are made new. It happens as we surrender ourselves to the superhero of superheroes, the one who gives us power, grace, joy, peace, poise, and overcoming abilities.

God’s word offers us a sure and inspiring hope when we turn from the dark suit and “put on” the new suit He offers us. In the very moment we open our hearts to Him He creates something new in us. The scriptures say, “Behold, the old is gone and all things have been made new”. Just as Spiderman came to realize the destructive chaos associated with the black suit, so we too are called to realize how disjointed and unfulfilling our lives are when detached from God’s artistic plan for us. In the end, Spiderman found he was able, willing, and ready to “put to death” the darkness within him, and he found a renewed passion to embrace the call of the good suit. We must do the same. We cannot hope to achieve this death to the darkness within us that causes us to make destructive choices, however, until and unless we turn to God and ask Him to make us new.

Stretchy Pants of your own

At the end of the day we all want to know that we matter. All human beings need to know that they are in some way a unique feature of life on this planet. Jesus demonstrates just how much we matter in all of His interactions with others. When those with afflictions were brought to Him and were longing for His touch, He had compassion. When those who were oppressed by the religious “leaders” of the day were in need of inspiring truth, He gave it. When the outcasts of society were in need of grace and dignity, He offered it. And when people who were created to know, love, follow, and enjoy Him made a wreck of their lives as they turned to the way of the world, He brought the hope and power of a changed life.

So here is the question. How are you living? Do you know His plan for you? Would you know it if it ran you over? Have you found your own stretchy pants?

In the movie Nacho Libre, Jack Black, plays the part of a man who desperately wants to do something worthwhile with his life. Apparently, he had come to the realization that life lived the way most people lived it was not enough. Thus, he decides to commit his life to Godly reflection and service to orphans. Sounds good enough, right?

The only problem for Nacho is that, while he wants desperately to live a life worth living, he feels somewhat trapped in the monastery. He wants to serve the kids, but he feels the religious leaders around him have lost all passion, creativity, and beauty. He wants to be the best he can be, but he feels that his long lost dream to wrestle has left him with a gaping hole in his soul. And he wants to know the joy of loving a woman, but he feels that the rules of the monastery forbid such human interaction. What is a man to do?

Eventually, what Nacho comes to find out is that God is not a God “in a box”. That is to say, God often works in ways that are more creative and unexpected than we could have imagined. He still works within His clear guidelines as revealed in scripture, but in ways that surprise us. In contrast to Adam and Eve, who were deceived into thinking that the only way to a fuller life was found beyond the boundaries (this is what the enemy of our souls always tells us), Nacho comes to find that God’s good plans and creative genius are boundless. He came to see, like Spiderman, that each time we go beyond the lines God has drawn, we only bring pain, confusion and doubt. And he came to find that embracing God’s unique plan for us can be unexpectedly, humorously, and inspiringly joyous and can reach, lift, and inspire others.

Nacho saw his dark desire to wrestle for fame, fancy ladies, and money transformed into a desire to provide a more adventurous and bountiful life for the orphans. Likewise, Nacho came to the unexpected realization that the life of an individual pursuing *the one thing* (as in Psalm 27) we most need is a life beyond anything we could ask or imagine. Nacho found that his calling was to serve God creatively, authentically, and joyously. He was able to do so while retaining his priestly robe (a metaphor for the Godly life), all the while wearing his “stretchy pants” (the uniform of the wrestler) underneath. The metaphor we find here is that of a man who finds his unique gifting and calling and who has been won over by the romance and thrill of Godly living. As has been suggested, there is nothing so boring and ultimately unfulfilling as separation from God and nothing so lovely and inspiring as orthodoxy (right belief).

The good news is that God is still in the business of creating such superheroes. God is still calling and creating individuals who will pursue Him with devotion, passion, humor, and sincerity. He still wishes to make colorful characters who will serve the interests of others, those who will care for the underprivileged, those who will protect the oppressed, those who will defend the fatherless, those who will care for the widows, those who will mentor the orphans, and those who will do the unexpected and love the unlovely.

So, what color are your stretchy pants? Will you ever discover them? Will you suit up? Will you take off the black suit that so entraps your life? Will you put on the new suit God has for you?

Just as Spiderman suggests, “We all have a choice”. And as the scripture suggests, “Choose *this* day whom you will serve”. *Today* could very well be the day that defines the rest of your life. This could be the day you are made into a superhero, a super-lover, a super-forgiver, a super-leader, a super-father, a super-mother, a super-artist, a super-attorney, a super-giver, a super-trainer, a super-missionary, a super-____. You and God fill in the blank!

And now, as you get ready to offer the prayer below as a true expression of your heart to God, remember, what the scripture offers is true, “no eye has seen, no ear has

heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him and are *called* according to His purposes”. Suit up today!

*Here is a simple prayer to help get you “suited up”:

“God, I have chosen to live in the black suit of sin, meaninglessness, and life apart from your will for me for too long. Today, right now, I ask that you would make me new, create a new heart in me. Transform my thinking about life, truth, and you. Heal me spiritually, and make me what you are calling me to be. Make me your person, pursuing life your way, and give me a hunger to make you my One Thing in life. Make me a beautiful example of your love. And help me to live every day in the new suit you have created for me. Amen”

If you or someone you know read the article above and prayed this prayer, I would love to hear from you about that. Please, take time to share your story with me at my email address: soulstormwriter@yahoo.com

Also, please, be aware of my *new venture*, **Optimus** (from the latin “Best”). This organization is being set up to lead and equip people to choose the Best life and to make the Best choices as they follow God’s plan for them. For more on this new venture simply email me at the same address above and on the subject line write “Optimus”.

Financial Gifts and Support for Optimus and StormKat can be sent to:
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Grace and Peace,
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