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D. A. Carson: When I was asked to write on a hero of the faith of my choosing, I began by running through my mind some of my personal favorites: John Chrysostom, Augustine, John Hus, John Calvin, William Perkins, George Whitefield, Andrew Murray M'Cheyne, Adoniram Judson, the Countess of Huntingdon, Charles Spurgeon, and many more. Then I ran through some candidates for the label from the twentieth century, some of them still alive, all of them remarkable: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John R. W. Stott, and quite a number of others. Then I thought of some gifted Christian leaders I have known from around the world, some of whom have suffered enormously, while others have exercised magnificently fruitful ministries, sometimes under appallingly difficult circumstances. Then I thought of Christian martyrs in Cambodia, among the Karen people of Burma, pastors in Iran, those

who have suffered and sometimes died in Indonesia and southern Sudan, only very few of whom I could name. Where should I begin? How can I possibly choose one, when temperamentally I have never fixated on just one person (save Jesus), just one book (save the Bible), or just one movement?

Finally I decided that, just as God overturns many of the categories that we human beings think are so important, I would do the same. I will tell you about Tom.

I won't tell you his last name, or where he served, because some who read these lines might guess who he is. Certainly Tom never thought of himself as a hero of the faith, not once. He was a largely unknown Baptist pastor, working in a very difficult cross-cultural context. In his mid-twenties, the Lord laid such a burden on him for this largely ignored people-group that he moved there and started to learn the language. During the course of twenty-five years, he planted two tiny churches. He never wrote a book. He was not asked to preach at large conferences. He never traveled overseas as a kind of influential ambassador of the gospel to Third World countries. He wasn't brilliant at the conceptual level, though he had a careful mind that paid attention to details. Administratively he was at best a plodder.

On the other hand, every day of his adult life he prayed, on his knees, for at least 45 minutes, and often much longer. He was a man of unimpeachable integrity, and amidst extraordinarily trying denominational conflict, he chose the path of rectitude without any trace of discernible malice towards those who tried to cut him up. He and his wife reared three children in the nurture and admonition of the

Lord. Dirt poor, at certain periods of their life they depended for their meals and for their clothes on quiet intercessory prayer, and nothing else. After twenty-five years of ministry, Tom became a tentmaker, supporting himself and his family, while he continued his ministry in his chosen people-group.

When he was in his sixties, he finally witnessed something of a movement of the Spirit of God, but the leadership was in the hands of others. He rejoiced to see the church grow, but deep down inside he sometimes wondered if growth had taken so long coming because he was not a sufficiently able and spiritual leader himself, and others, more gifted than he, had to appear on the scene. In his early seventies, his wife started drifting away in the long dementia associated with Alzheimer's disease. He cared for her for nine long years. Released from this responsibility, he started preaching and visiting and serving again. Tom ran quiet regional day-sessions to encourage young pastors in his area. After three years, he fell ill with some nasty flu, and had to be taken to the hospital. There a young doctor made a mistake, and prescribed the wrong medicine. Tom died. He was 81 years old.

In some ways, his ministry was quite ordinary. He preached countless sermons, he counseled many people, he prepared and led services, he wrote letters. He was astonishingly faithful in his visitation, not least evangelistic visits. Scrupulous to a fault, he devoted himself to his study, and although he was never a gifted orator, his sheep did not come away hungry. He was a meek man, and people often took advantage of him. In the early years of his ministry among the people to whom he was sent, there was a lot of virulent

opposition, including threats to life and property. He was hauled in by the police. Some other Baptist ministers in his area spent a total of eight years in prison, but during that time Tom managed to escape such treatment, only to see one or another of his children being beaten up by neighborhood toughs who were encouraged in their violence by the local religion. His stamina and sheer faithfulness were beyond reproach. When on occasion he was driven to despair, it simply meant he was driven to his knees. Persistence, faithfulness, integrity, loving lost sinners, caring for fledgling churches, keeping his peace, thinking well of people—these were the virtues that made him a hero of the faith.

Tom stands for a lot of other heroes of the faith. They look after three demanding children under the age of five, and still love them and read to them. They persevere with trust in God's wisdom even when they are scared and debilitated by the ravages of a terminal cancer. They use their retirement to help the most disadvantaged in one of the most impoverished and dangerous countries of Africa. It is rare to hear a whining complaint escape their lips. They smile easily, laugh quickly, forgive readily, love graciously, hope for better things incessantly. You will often find them carrying the heavy end of the load. When they make mistakes, they apologize, and try to put things right. Many of them are blessed with the gift of encouragement. They are known in only a very limited circle, and they eschew the praises of people, but their names are written large in the ledgers of heaven. They are described in Scripture: they are "overcomers," not because they are wiser or more famous than others, not because they are on TV, not because they float

above the humdrum problems that afflict mere mortals, but because in persecution they endure to the end, they retain sound doctrine when others follow some foolish Jezebel, they keep rebuilding their first love, and they live with one foot in eternity. These are the overcomers, the heroes of the faith. And Tom was one of them.

Tom Carson was my Dad. R.I.P.