

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” Still pretty high expectations asked of us from Paul thousands of years later, and so I wonder who, today, might be the embodiment of those words that we may not realize. We must consider the fire-fighters scattered across millions of acres in the western states. It just might be those incredibly brave and selfless individuals have a rather similar mind to Christ as described in Philippians this morning. One such person was Michael John Fournier, who, on August 19, set out to fly a helicopter to drop water over the hills of western Fresno County in California, where the fires had been active for four days, growing to take over 1,500 acres. However, Fournier did not make it out alive: his helicopter crashed in the wildfires. He was 52 years young, leaving behind a wife and two teenage girls.

Sometimes, it’s helpful to know the story behind such people who embody those words from Paul: with no selfish ambition, looking upon the interests of others. So, I want to share with you a portion of Michael’s obituary to let you in on his own version of a Christ-like mindset, who made our world a better place:

Michael John Fournier was born on February 4th, 1968. He lived in Southern California for most of his life. He attended Charter Oak High School, [where] he began many life-long friendships, but none were more important and special to him than a bright-eyed cheerleader named Leanne. Mike never wavered from two of his life’s goals: first, he told his parents when he was 6-years old that he wanted to fly helicopters; second, he knew early on, that Leanne Lomonaco was the “pretty girl” he wanted for his wife...

As a testament to Mike’s character and will, he took a job working at [a sporting goods store] to help fund the hours of flight school he would need to obtain his pilot’s license. Mike could only afford one hour of flight time per session, driving over 100 miles to tackle his goal. In typical Mike fashion, he accomplished this goal and lived out his years livin’ the dream working for Mercy Air, So. Calif. Edison, Redding Air, Guardian Helicopters, Inc., and L.A. County Fire. On August 19, 2020, Mike died...doing two of the things he dearly loved, flying a helicopter, and helping people.

In 1995, he married his high school sweetheart, and the love of his life, Leanne. Together they formed an incredible family with the other two sweethearts in his life, Mikena and Rylee...Even though, he was a true man’s man, he was a “Girl Dad” to the core. He was a proud Dad to his favorite soccer player, Mikena, and the ultimate cheerleader for Rylee as she flipped and danced through her gymnastics routines during weekend competitions. His three girls were his life. It was not uncommon for him tear up as he talked about how much he loved them.

Mike had a smile that would light up ten rooms...Mike was a very special man; he was a mentor to many and a friend to all. It was not uncommon for Mike to show up at home with no shoes on because he gave them to a homeless man who he felt needed them. It would be impossible to detail the work this man did for people during his life. Mike made people feel special because, every soul was truly special to him. He understood what it was like to need help at an early age, so he made it his life’s work to make sure he would always be there for people [who] needed him.

Mike leaned on his strong faith in the Lord to help him with the trying times and to provide him a compass when navigating his busy family through life. When people met Mike, they knew they were in the presence of someone special, simply put, he left you wanting to be a better person...We lost a true angel. One who thought he was nothing more than an ordinary man, who was trying to be a better person. Mike can never be replaced, but Mike would want each of us to carry on, and to treat people the way he treated them: with respect, love, and kindness.

And then, the obituary concluded with what is deemed, “The Fireman’s Prayer.”

*When I am called to duty, God
Wherever flames may rage
Please give me the strength to save a life
Whatever be its age.*

*Help me embrace a little child
Before it is too late
Or save an older person from
The horror of that fate.*

*Enable me to be alert
And hear the weakest shout,
and quickly and efficiently
To put the fire out.*

*I want to fill my calling
And to give the best in me,
To guard my friend and neighbor
And protect their property.*

*And, if, according to my fate,
I have to lose my life,
Please bless, with your protecting hand,
My children and my wife.*

A Christ-like mindset, to be sure: because our Lord is the One who most certainly runs onto our mortal scene, onto our scene of guilt and shame, as far too many wonder if they can ever live up to the words of Paul, and if God could possibly love them if they cannot. This is our Lord who runs from the heavens into our broken world, into our fragile lives, and unleashes the most mind-boggling love and compassion to pull us out into God’s ultimate holy reality that we are adored, we are cared for, we are, in God’s eyes, worth dying for on a cross. The Christ-like mindset that says there is absolutely nothing that can happen in our life to keep our Lord out from the very scene of our heart that he calls home, too. Still to this day, Christ says we are the worth the fight of all eternity. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*To access the full obituary for Michael John Fornier via Tribute Archive, please visit:
<https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/18012579/Michael-John-Fournier>*