

Culture



The cast of the second season of "Lost" is seen in a publicity shot. The series debuted in 2004 in a time of conflict and distrust as America reeled through the post-9/11 years. It is now available for streaming on Netflix.
(Newscom/ZUMAPRESS/St. Petersburg Times)



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July 13, 2024

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"Lost" changed my life.

The hit television series, which ran for six seasons on ABC from 2004 to 2010, debuted when I was in college. It was a spiritually rich time for me, as I tried to deepen my relationship with God and discern how to live out my faith in a broken world. "Lost" was the perfect companion to all of this reflection and questioning: a story about meaning, community and how we navigate life's great mysteries. Watching "Lost" was like having a spiritual director on my TV once a week.

Earlier this month, every season of "Lost" became available on Netflix. If previous trends of resurrected old shows are any indication, this move will introduce the series to a new audience and create a fresh wave of interest. Certainly, the series has a lot to recommend it: compelling mysteries and mythology and a diverse and talented cast, not to mention a sweeping orchestral score by Michael Giacchino.

But beyond those strengths, I believe that our current tumultuous moment in history is the perfect time to revisit the revolutionary television show. Even 14 years after it ended, it still has much to teach us about faith, connection and how we can only make it through this life together.



Jack, played by actor Matthew Fox, is seen amid plane wreckage in the first episode of the 2004-2010 series "Lost." (CNS/ABC)

"Lost," co-created by Damon Lindelof and J.J. Abrams, begins immediately after Oceanic Flight 815 crashes on an uncharted island in the Pacific. As the surviving passengers get their bearings, mysterious things begin to happen. An unseen monster lurks in the jungle, tearing through trees and killing the plane's pilot. They pick up a distress signal in French that has been broadcasting for 16 years. A very

out-of-place polar bear attacks the group.

And that's just the first episode.

The series debuted — with a record-smashing 18.6 million viewers — as America reeled through the post-9/11 years in conflict and distrust. The anxieties of that era defined the show, not least because the iconography of a crashed plane resonated with American audiences. But even more jarringly, the show dared to share a message of hope. In a world rocked by religiously justified terror (and a religiously sanctioned war in response), "Lost" argued for faith instead of fear.

The cast was expansive and diverse. Along with traditional heroes like courageous doctor Jack (Matthew Fox) or the resourceful Kate (Evangeline Lilly), there were characters that you didn't often see at the center of American TV shows, like Sayid (Naveen Andrews) a veteran of the Iraqi Republican Guard, or Jin and Sun (Daniel Dae Kim and Yunjin Kim), a struggling married couple from South Korea.

At first, all of the characters are strangers, to us and to each other. Each episode features flashbacks to one of the survivors' pre-crash lives, offering a fuller picture of each character. We develop empathy for initially off-putting or despicable characters, like sarcastic conman Sawyer (Josh Holloway). We come to realize they are all broken people in search of grace and redemption. Their obvious differences stand out at first, but as the story goes on we recognize the core humanity that connects them all.

Tensions naturally arise between the survivors, especially as new mysteries and threats arise. (I haven't even mentioned the Hatch, the Others, the time travel ...) But "Lost" is clear: The only way we make it through this life — stranded on a nightmare island or not — is in community. This idea finds expression in the first season when Jack tells the survivors: "If we can't live together, we're going to die alone."

Life is mysterious and frightening. It seems reasonable to hold ourselves apart, every person for themselves. But if we want to make it through this life at all, the only way is together.

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I loved the humanity of "Lost," but what really drew me in all those years ago was its deep interest in faith. It isn't a religious show, but it is unabashedly spiritual. An episode might culminate with a character allowing another to pray for him, or two characters reciting the 23rd Psalm. (Other faith traditions were well-represented throughout the series as well, but obviously the Catholic moments struck me most.)

Through flashbacks, we come to realize the survivors were all connected to one another before they boarded the ill-fated plane. Is it just a coincidence, or are they being guided toward a higher purpose?

This debate is embodied by the struggle between Jack and fellow survivor Locke (Terry O'Quinn). Locke is the group's survival expert and mystic, who sees the island as a sacred place; the series' "man of faith" to Jack's "man of science." Naturally, they often clash over how to approach the struggle for survival.

During one confrontation, Locke demands: "Why do you find it so hard to believe?"

"Why do you find it so easy?" Jack returns.

"It's never been easy!" Locke snaps. Then he softens: "I can't do this alone, Jack. I don't want to. It's a leap of faith."

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That was the heart of "Lost." Life is mysterious and frightening. We don't have all the answers, and we never will. It seems reasonable to hold ourselves apart, every person for themselves. But if we want to make it through this life at all, the only way is together. We need to risk trusting others, risk believing that we can grow beyond the sins that shaped our pasts. And when we open ourselves up to connection, we find grace and healing — and discover our true purpose.

One of my favorite episodes of the first season involves Hurley (Jorge Garcia) convincing the survivors to build a golf course. It serves no practical purpose and won't get them rescued, but Hurley realizes it's exactly what the survivors need: a chance to be refreshed instead of staying locked in survival mode, waiting for the next calamity.

Survival is pointless if we can't have joy, relationship and a sense of meaning. Hurley understood that the things we often toss aside first in the struggle to survive are actually the things most worth holding onto.

Today, we live in yet another time of war and division. We fear that we can't trust our neighbors; we may fear that we can't even trust ourselves. Connection and faith seem like a risk, or a fatal weakness. But this is why we still need stories like "Lost" to remind us that those things are what matter most. We live together or we die alone.

A version of this story appeared in the **August 2-15, 2024** print issue under the headline: Netflix reintroduces 'Lost' to a new generation, and the timing couldn't be better.