



"A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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What Does It Take to Be a Hero?

While growing up in the 1960s, I lived on a dirt street in a small neighborhood, and many times after school, several of the neighborhood kids would gather to play baseball in front of my house. I remember coming up to bat and dreaming that I was playing in Game 7 of [the World Series](#). It was the bottom of the ninth, my team was down by three runs, and there were already two outs in the inning. The count was three balls and two strikes, but the bases were loaded—there was still a chance. It was now or never. The pitcher delivered the ball, and I hit a grand slam, winning the World Series! In an instant, I became a hero!

As kids, we grow up looking to our favorite athlete, singer, or actor as a hero when all he or she ever did was hit a ball, belt out a song, or play a part really well. Our heroes may have been skillful, but were they truly heroic? What does it take to be a hero? What makes a hero heroic?

A favorite sports personality of mine was asked in an interview, "People say you're a hero. How do you respond to that?" He said, "No, I'm not," adding, "Are there really any heroes?"

The words "hero" and "heroine" come from the Greek word *h r s*, which means "protector" or "defender." It is said to be etymologically related to the Latin word *seru re*, meaning "to safeguard." Dictionaries define a hero as "a person noted for nobility,

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courage, and outstanding achievements." A hero can also be the main character or another person in a literary work who, in the face of danger, combats adversity through impressive feats of ingenuity, bravery, or strength, often sacrificing his or her concerns for a greater good.

The word "hero" does not appear in the Bible, but "safeguard" does, yet only once. In [1 Samuel 22:23](#) (KJV), David assures Abiathar the priest that, if he stays with him, he will "safeguard" him. Even though the Bible does not contain the word "hero," how many of its characters do we consider to be heroes? David would certainly get more than a few votes. What is more heroic than killing a lion or a bear as a teenage shepherd or slaying a giant with a few rocks? Many would consider Samson a hero, given his many feats of strength. How could a person possibly kill a thousand men with a jawbone of a donkey? Do we have a favorite Bible character whom we consider to be a hero? There are many to choose from.

Some people think that heroes are born not made. Others, like author Brodi Ashton, believe that "heroes are made by the paths they choose, not by the powers they are graced with." How many police officers, firefighters, and emergency workers, perhaps unnoticed, perform heroic acts each day, risking their lives for the sake of others? Is someone who chooses these lines of work a hero? In the last few years, it has become popular to consider members of the armed forces as heroes, but does a person's choice to become a soldier make him or her a hero?

Science tells us that some people have higher levels of a certain hormone than others, allowing them to remain cool under fire. Given the same situation, those who lack high levels of this hormone tend to become stressed and panic. Does the presence of high levels of this hormone make a person heroic?

Andrew Carnegie, the nineteenth-century steel baron and philanthropist, made his fortune by his ability to read human nature, but heroes stumped him. He could not understand why someone would struggle and perhaps risk everything, even his life—and do it for free! He was so intrigued by heroes that he began hunting them after the 1904 Harwick Mine Disaster, in which 181 died, including Selwyn M. Taylor and Daniel A. Lyle, both of whom sacrificed their lives rescuing others. In the end, Carnegie gave up his search, never understanding what makes a hero tick.

Perhaps he should have considered [John 15:13](#), where [Jesus](#) says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Love can certainly play a role in heroism, but it is not precise enough to describe what makes a person act heroically.

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The Roman biographer Plutarch, a man of Greek descent, reduced heroism to one word. Perhaps by reading a few short examples of heroism, we can begin to figure out Plutarch's one-word definition. Many have declared the following three people to be heroes:

In World War II Poland, the Nazis sealed off a sixteen-block area in Warsaw, imprisoning a half-million Polish Jews. A social worker, Irena Sendler, managed to secure a pass allowing her to enter the Warsaw Ghetto each day. Appalled by what she saw, she began smuggling children out by whatever means she could devise. She stuffed some in gunnysacks or body bags and buried others inside loads of goods. Some she took out in coffins. She carried one baby in a mechanic's toolbox. Risking her life every day in 1942 and 1943, Sendler managed to sneak 2,500 children out of the Warsaw Ghetto! The Nazis eventually caught her, breaking both of her legs and arms and sentencing her to death. On her execution day, someone bribed a guard, and her life was spared. She lived to be 98 years old. Later, when others proclaimed her a hero, she said she did not think of herself as a hero because she should have done more.

Also during World War II, the 52nd Bombardment Squadron was ordered to attack Koriyama, Japan. The lead aircraft was responsible for signaling the other planes to attack. In that plane, Henry Erwin's job was to drop a marker, a twenty-pound white phosphorus canister with a six-second fuse, through a tube in the belly of the aircraft. Positioning the canister in the launching chute, he pulled the pin on the pilot's orders, but the flare flew back up the tube, exploding in Erwin's face before falling to the floor. Though Erwin felt his hair catch fire and his nose start to melt, he dropped to his hands and knees, feeling for the canister. Although it was burning at thirteen-hundred degrees, he picked it up, cradling it to his body with his forearm, and began crawling toward the cockpit. With his entire upper body burning, he yelled for the copilot to open the window, through which he dropped the burning flare into the sky. He then fell back, his clothing on fire and his face charred beyond recognition. The crew had to use the fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Although his face and hands were severely burned, he survived, spending the next two-and-a-half years in the hospital. Henry Erwin saved his crew, sacrificing himself.

On January 13, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the frigid Potomac River during an ice storm. Live television recorded what happened next. As the plane began to sink, six people emerged from the wreckage, clinging to the tail section still sticking out of the water. The freezing rain and winds were so brutal that it took twenty minutes for a rescue helicopter to arrive. It dropped a life ring into the hands of one survivor and lifted him to safety. Then something peculiar happened. The next person to receive the ring handed it to someone else. The chopper lifted her to safety and wheeled back. The

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same man received the life ring and again passed it along. He did this until no one was left. When the chopper wheeled back for the last time, he had vanished beneath the icy waters and was gone. The man, later identified as Arland Williams, Jr., a forty-six-year-old federal bank examiner, feared water and had avoided it all his life, yet he sacrificed his life in an icy river for total strangers.

What virtue did these three people have in common? We will see in Part Two.

- Ronny H. Graham

World News Highlights

[Mississippi River in Davenport Now Higher Than Historic 1993 Flood Levels — and Rising](#)

The Des Moines Register 03-May-19

[Aircraft Carrier Sent to Middle East After Indications Iran Planned Attack on Us Forces](#)

ABC News 05-May-19

[I Married Myself and It Was Truly Empowering](#)

The Telegraph 29-Apr-19

[Nearly One in Two Americans Takes Prescription Drugs: Survey](#)

Bloomberg/Quint 08-May-19

[Fbi: 850 Open Investigations Into Domestic Terrorism](#)

Associated Press 08-May-19

[Persecution of Christians Is Approaching Genocide Levels, Report Finds: Christianity 'Is at Risk of Disappearing'](#)

Newsweek 03-May-19

[Aging Baby Boomers Are About to Push Alzheimer's Disease Rates Sky High](#)

The USA Today 04-May-19

[Brunei Says It Won't Enforce Gay Death Penalty After Backlash](#)

Reuters 05-May-19

New Transcripts

[1000c: Why Liberals Love Illegals \(Part Four\)](#)

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 03-Jul-10

[1486c: Shooting At UNCC](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 04-May-19

Prayer Requests

New prayer request updates have been posted for the following people:

[Ella and Chet Allen](#)

[Carl Benefiel](#)

[Jane Clinton](#)

[Craig Sablich](#)

[Bupe Sakala](#)

[Margi Saxton](#)

[Paulette Williams](#)

[Carney Williams](#)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Unsung Hero](#)

by Ted E. Bowling

Ted Bowling, reflecting that parents serve as better role models than do entertainers and professional athletes, focuses on the hero characteristics of the stepfather of Jesus and the husband of Mary. Joseph exemplified the qualities of fairness, kindness, and humility, giving Jesus a solid moral and ethical foundation, coupled with an exemplary work ethic. Joseph endured the stigma, humiliation, and scorn of the Jews who believed the gossip that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock. Joseph was a provider, skilled craftsman, and a competent teacher of his trade, providing Jesus with the many construction and building metaphors He used later in His ministry. Joseph's willingness to work hard, sacrificing everything for the family while demonstrating godly kindness

and love, makes him a matchless hero.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Courage and the Dog Soldier](#)

by Mike Ford

Though we are surrounded and sometimes buffeted by numerous difficulties, trials, and threats, God is always faithful to provide what we need to endure and overcome them. Keying in on I Corinthians 16:13, Mike Ford illustrates what we must do to persevere through the tough times ahead.

Featured Audio Schedule

Daily Audio Programs

Hear previous sermons, sermonettes, and Feast of Tabernacles messages, **Sunday through Friday**. [Available from the homepage.](#)

Date	Title
Sunday 12-May-19	Psalm 8: God's Majesty
Monday 13-May-19	What Is the Church's Work Today (Part 2)
Tuesday 14-May-19	God Works in Mysterious Ways (Part Three)
Wednesday 15-May-19	Balancing Prosperity
Thursday 16-May-19	Hebrews: Its Background (Part Nine)
Friday 17-May-19	How to Become Rich

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