



"Real heroes are men who fall and fail and are flawed, but win out in the end because they've stayed true to their ideals and beliefs and commitments."

—Kevin Costner

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## **What Does It Take to Be a Hero? (Part Two)**

In Part One, we began to consider heroes and why some people are heroic. We recognize heroes when we see, hear, or read about them: They are people, as dictionaries tell us, who are noble, courageous, and achieve great things. But what is the difference between a hero and an ordinary person? Is it self-sacrifice? Is it [love](#)?

Plutarch, the first-century Roman biographer, writes that the essence of a hero can be defined by one word. Before we find out what that word is, we will contemplate what could be called the Bible's "heroes of [faith](#)." We find most of them listed in Hebrews 11. Space does not permit us to review them all, but we will look more closely at two of them, Joseph and Jephthah.

Joseph's story begins in Genesis 37, where the reader learns that his father, Jacob, loved him more than all his children because he was the son of his old age (verse 3). This favoritism was no fault of Joseph's, but because of his brothers' hatred, Joseph would suffer for years. His brothers hated him so much that they could not even bring themselves to speak peaceably to him (verse 4). To make things worse, Jacob made a special coat just for Joseph.

One day, Joseph had a dream about sheaves in the field—with their sheaves bowing to his—and when he foolishly told them the dream, it drove his brothers over the proverbial edge (verses 5-8). They began plotting to kill him (verse 18). If it had not been for Reuben's intervention, they might have succeeded (verses 21-22), but instead, they sold him into slavery in a strange land (verse 28). Despite the hardships he faced, including being imprisoned for thirteen years, he remained faithful to [God](#). When he met his brothers again, they did indeed bow down before him ([Genesis 42:6](#))! And with their lives in his hands, what did Joseph do?

Jephthah's early life contains some similarities to Joseph's. He, too, through no fault of his own, was expelled from the family by his brothers (his mother was a prostitute; [Judges 11:1-2](#)). Because of this, his brothers drove him from the land, declaring that he would not partake of their inheritance.

However, Judges 11 begins by describing Jephthah as "a mighty man of valor." The *Keil-Delitzsch Commentary of the [Old Testament](#)* adds that he was a brave warrior, a hero, living like a Bedouin, and word of his deeds spread. When the people of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead decided to recruit Jephthah to save them from the Ammonites.

When Jephthah heard their proposal, he said, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" ([Judges 11:7](#)). Jephthah was clearly skeptical of their proposal, and later says, perhaps calling their bluff, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" (verse 9). In other words, "Now that you need me, you're suddenly my friends and want me to be your savior. But it will cost you. You will have to make me your leader." With God's help, Jephthah does indeed fight off the Ammonites and goes on to judge Israel for six years. The apostle Paul includes him as a hero of faith in [Hebrews 11:32](#).

Do these two heroes of faith have anything in common with the three modern heroes mentioned in Part One? Again, what does take to be a hero?

According to Plutarch, true heroism is not about nobility or strength or boldness or even courage. The critical component in the ancients' view of the hero is compassion. To Plutarch and his contemporaries, heroes care.

*Compassion* is "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." It also contains an element of self-sacrifice or denying the self, that is, not caring for the self as much as for the good of others. This virtue allows the hero to plunge into danger, even to their death, to help someone in trouble.

There is no more excellent example of compassion than our Hero, our Savior [Jesus Christ](#). While hanging on the cross, beaten, bloody, and dying, He said of His killers, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#)). Consider the hundreds or thousands of people whom He healed and the thousands whom He fed when they were hungry.

How do we compare to this standard? How heroic—how compassionate—are we? Most of us will admit that we fall far short in the areas of compassion and heroism—and we do. The apostle Paul confirms this in [I Corinthians 1:27-28](#):

But God has chosen the foolish things of [the world](#) to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are . . .

However, the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised can sometimes do heroic deeds. In 1940, when Winston Churchill took over as Prime Minister of Britain, the British army and navy were decimated, and many believed the only hope was surrender to the German Reich. Thousands of troops had been killed or captured on the Continent, and the Royal Navy was severely crippled, but Churchill came up with a novel idea.

Maybe he was inspired by I Corinthians 1 because his plan involved calling average, everyday citizens to go out and confuse and misdirect Hitler's war machine to slow his onslaught against Europe. The British High Command

was appalled by his idea, but Churchill, undeterred, moved forward in forming his "band of misfits," as he called them. Perhaps it used the weak and the base, but his plan worked. The havoc his band of misfits created during the Nazi invasion slowed it down enough for the Allies to assemble and eventually stop Hitler. Churchill, too, is deemed a hero.

In the last verse of the book of Obadiah, the prophet ties his prophecy to God's Kingdom: "Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S" ([Obadiah 21](#)). These "saviors" are the same ones that God inspired Paul to call "the foolish . . . the weak . . . the base things of the world and the . . . despised." They are the heroes of the World Tomorrow, God's band of misfits, if you will, who will reign on Mount Zion with Him forever!

In 1984, Bonnie Tyler released a song called "I Need a Hero." If there is anything the world needs right now, it is a hero, our Hero, Jesus Christ. He is indeed coming, and His saviors—the weak turned heroic—will be with Him.

- Ronny H. Graham

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Compassion and Couch Potatoes](#)

by Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)

The failure to make a decision in fact represents a decision. Consequences—even of inaction—are inevitable; everything matters. The act of "passing" in a poker game affects all the players' chances to win. Among God's people, the consequences of indifference to service become particularly burdensome in the current context of geographic scattering and corporate fragmentation. Additionally, Christians who "sit out" opportunities to serve, becoming in effect couch potatoes, commit sins of omission which, if not repented of, lead to the Lake of Fire. Hence, service is a salvational issue; engagement with God's people is not an option, but a mandate; the Christian failing to gather with Christ becoming one who by default scatters with Satan. Hence, indifference is destructive; inaction is tantamount to active scattering. As the

Parable of the Good Samaritan indicates, failure to act can endanger even the lives of others, a fact which illustrates why passive indifference and active hatred are not opposites. Rather, indifference is in fact a species of hatred. Old and New Testaments teach that God's people are to "open their hands" to others, as opportunity affords, playing the cards (talents) God has dealt us, not "passing," knowing that everything we do—or don't do—matters.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Sixth Commandment \(Part 2\): War! \(1997\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A reason lies behind the devastating wars that have plagued mankind since the beginning. John Ritenbaugh gives the uncomplicated solution: Men have broken the sixth commandment!

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