
Heroes

BOB HEERSPINK

Heroes are part of the fabric of our culture. Looking for models in life, we strive to be like people with the qualities we want. We place them on pedestals and sometimes try to be just like them; but sometimes those desires turn into idolizing. How do heroes fit with our faith? Should Christians even have heroes; or maybe to say it another way, if Christians do have heroes, should Christian heroes look different? Today's *Groundwork* examines what the Bible says about our heroism culture. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, do you have any heroes?

DAVE BAST

Well, if you put it like that, the first person that comes to my mind is Ernie Harwell; he is the longtime radio announcer of the Detroit Tigers, my favorite baseball team; but more importantly, he is by all reports a wonderful human being and a very fine Christian; and last summer he announced that he has terminal cancer, but he used the occasion to deflect attention from himself. He gave a testimony about his faith in the Lord; he has put his life in the Lord's hands; and he was really self effacing – a self-effacing hero, that is kind of unusual.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, one of my heroes has a similar personality to that, though a very different profession. He was a pastor whom I worked with early in my career, and he was a leader in the church, Cal Bolt; but he was this humble person that a young pastor like myself could call up and say: hey, Cal, I have questions. I am frustrated about this in ministry. He always had time for a cup of coffee. We would get together, he would share, he was never overbearing, and he was the kind of person you would say: I would really like my ministry to look like his ministry. I want to be like him.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I guess that is maybe the definition of a hero; somebody we would like to be like, at least a true hero. We seem to have a need to look up to people, don't we, as human beings?

BOB HEERSPINK

Every person has a need to look around himself or herself and say: hey, who could I be like? You know, the old song *Cat's in the Cradle*, I want to be like him; I want to grow up and look like my dad or my mom or someone I respect.

DAVE BAST

But, a lot of the time we kind of confuse heroism with celebrity. The people whom we exalt, whom we look up to, are famous for being famous...

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

The definition of a celebrity. I remember reading a line by C. S. Lewis once who said that if we abolish the aristocracy in a traditional society we are just going to substitute millionaires and movie stars and put them above us.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and that has often happened in our world today. There was a study out about who are your heroes; and it is very interesting to look at the people who made the list. The interesting thing is, they were even people who didn't exist. Superman and Spiderman made the list.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but mostly it was celebrities, politicians – a few politicians – sports stars, movie stars; and so often, people like that, you know, they have made a lot of money or they are beautiful in appearance, but their lives aren't quite so appealing.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; you really wonder what people are trying to emulate in their lives: Is it the richness, is the famousness, or is it...

DAVE BAST

Yes, the character, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

The quality of their personality?

DAVE BAST

Exactly. So, that brings me to the question we want to ask: What about for Christians? Is there a specific kind of hero we should be looking for? Should we not have any heroes? What does the Bible suggest?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, it is interesting, if you actually do a word study of the word *hero*, and see how often it is used in scripture, it is hardly used at all. Very seldom does the Bible actually use the word *hero*; but one place it does use the word is with the story of David and Goliath.

DAVE BAST

I think we all know that one. I don't know that we even need to read it, but...

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, you are going to say, of course, the obvious hero there is David, but the person who is called the hero in 1 Samuel 17 isn't David, it is actually Goliath. He was the Philistines' hero.

DAVE BAST

So, if you look at that story and just key on the term *hero*, that tag is put on Goliath, not David.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; because in that story what was really happening was, David and Goliath were going to square off, and whoever won this individual – this personal – battle was going to win for their whole nation.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; the two armies are lined up on opposite sides of a valley...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And Goliath is this champion – this hero – of the Philistines.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

He is 9 feet tall and covered head to foot in bronze armor and he has a spear the size of a weaver's beam; and he comes out to issue his challenge; and nobody on the Israelite side dares to respond...they are shaking in their boots.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; if you think about Goliath, he is a classic hero; he is a celebrity; and...

DAVE BAST

And a superstar.

BOB HEERSPINK

A superstar, and...

DAVE BAST

He is the go-to guy.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

The guy you want to put the ball in his hands when the game is on the line.

BOB HEERSPINK

And King Saul of Israel is looking for his own superstar because, you know, when David volunteers for the job he pulls David off and says: hey, we have to get you decked out in my suit of armor. You have to go with your approach to heroism the same way that we are going to... We have to go up against Goliath the same way he is coming against us.

DAVE BAST

It kind of makes me wonder why Saul didn't put his armor on himself, you know. Wasn't he supposed to be the champion? Wasn't he a head taller than all the other Israelites?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, he was a celebrity, maybe, but he wasn't going to be their hero.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he was a coward.

BOB HEERSPINK

But David doesn't buy it. David goes into battle, as you know, with those five smooth stones and his slingshot, and you know, what does he say? He says: I come against you in the name of the Lord – in the name of the God of Israel.

DAVE BAST

I think it is... To me, the key point is to realize that David is just a teenager. He is a boy, and Goliath points that out and laughs at him. Do you dare to come against me with your little shepherd's sling? But what makes David heroic is not just his courage... I mean, it is tremendous courage, sure, but his confidence comes from the fact that he is utterly convinced that God is calling him to do this thing...

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And that God will give him the strength to face down the giant, and even slay the giant.

BOB HEERSPINK

His heroism is born of his relationship with God, and his confidence that he is doing the work that God has asked him to do. The real champion there in the end is going to be God. He is the one who slays Goliath.

DAVE BAST

Yes; to me, this puts us on the right track for real heroism as far as Christians are concerned. It is the heroism of faith – it is the heroism that dares to say: Not my strength, but the Lord's presence with me will enable me to face this giant; whatever it is that is in front of me.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that puts Christian heroism in a whole different light. We will pick up that theme in just a minute.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scripture as the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. Earlier, we were talking about heroes, especially from a Christian perspective, and looking at the story of David and Goliath, and of course, any discussion of heroes in the Bible should point us straight to Hebrews Chapter 11. It is the great roll call of the heroes of faith...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

It starts with Abel and goes on to Noah and Abraham and David and many others; and this is sort of the climax of that chapter: Hebrews 11:32:

And what more shall I say, for time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets; ³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, you look at that list and the author of Hebrews doesn't get any further than Gideon. We think that we don't have any heroes in the world today. The Bible, in that chapter, says there are so many

heroes out there if you look at the Bible as a listing of heroes, that it doesn't even get us to David or any of the other kings.

DAVE BAST

He doesn't get out of the book of Judges.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

This is comfort to any preacher who has run out of time and hasn't been able to finish his message, you know.

BOB HEERSPINK

And they do such amazing things! There is such courage there that is demonstrated in what they do. The guts that are demonstrated in these lives, and yet, what strikes me is these are people who have their faults and failings in very, very significant ways.

DAVE BAST

Well, the key isn't how great they are or their natural abilities. In every instance, the writer says, it is by faith; by faith, by faith. That is how they did what they did.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is the theme; and if you think about how David confronted Goliath, it was with faith in the God of Israel; and it is the same kind of theme that is coming out here in this passage.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and as you pointed out earlier, these are far from perfect human beings. I mean, just take David. We have been looking at the wonderful story where he slays the giant, Goliath, but I think most people who know the Bible know how he turned out later in life. He was far from perfect.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and you have people like Jacob and Moses and Rahab. You know, all of these people have blemishes in their lives, and yet, what unites them all is faith; and that is really the theme which begins this chapter. In fact, Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith. Let me just share that.

¹Faith is being sure of what we hoped for and certain of what we do not see.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I love the idea of staking our lives on the promises of God. That is really what faith is.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

That is what faith means. Take Abraham earlier in this chapter as a great example: By faith, it says, Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going, and just on the sheer promise of God: I will give you a land and I will give you descendants, Abraham pulls up stakes and sets off into the unknown future; and it even goes on to say that even the Promised Land wasn't the real fulfillment of that promise because they were looking for a better country, a heavenly country.

BOB HEERSPINK

These are people who staked their whole lives on faith in God and faith in the promises of God. It is so different from what people today think about as faith. So many people think of faith as merely believing God exists...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Or if I die I go to heaven...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

But that is not the kind of faith that necessarily transforms lives. These people lived out their faith day by day in ways that really put themselves on the line.

DAVE BAST

Real biblical faith is living your life and facing the challenges of daily life as if God is real and as if the promises in the Bible are true.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is exactly the kind of heroes that we need to look for today, because they are there – they are out there.

DAVE BAST

Sure; and they are all around us. They are not celebrities. They are not people who are famous for this or that or the other thing. They may be people in our own family, maybe our friends; but people who demonstrate that quality of living on the promises of God.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, my mother had polio when I was only a year old. She never walked again; and she was a model of someone who lived out her faith; not only accepting her disability by faith, but saying: Well, okay, how do I put myself into the life of the Church using my disability in service to others? She would look around and say: Who needs my encouragement? Who can I reach out to? There are all kinds of people like this in the Church who are really models of heroic faith today.

DAVE BAST

I remember interviewing once a woman named Diet Eman – and I know you know her, too – she lives here in our town. She was in the Netherlands as a young lady when the war broke out and the Germans invaded, and she just kind of, by accident, got into the business of hiding Jews; and you think, okay, there is a heroic person, but it didn't start out that way. She was an ordinary person who suddenly found herself in a circumstance where she had to live in obedience to God and not to humans.

BOB HEERSPINK

And, you know, I think of my father-in-law, who hid Jews during the war, too; and when you talk to him afterwards you would say to him: you were a hero; and he would say: No, I was just doing what I needed to do as a Christian; and I think that is a mark of Christian heroes. They don't see themselves as heroes, they simply see themselves as living out their faith and responding to the challenges of life that come their way today.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and it may not be the Nazis – it is probably not going to be for you and me – but there will be a challenge that will demand heroism from us, and I think that is the next thing we want to look at; not just do I have a hero to look up to, but...

BOB HEERSPINK

How can I be a hero?

DAVE BAST

How could I be a hero?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. So, let's address that in just a moment, Dave; but first, we want to talk about how you can join us in this conversation on our website.

DAVE BAST

It is listeners like you that make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures. There, we will continue to reflect on today's discussion about heroes, but also many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives; and we would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the topics we are going to talk about in the future is doubt. Does doubt have a place in real faith; or when doubt crops up should we try to get rid of it as quickly as we can? What do you do if you doubt? Share your thoughts on that question. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website: groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

BOB HEERSPINK

Okay, Dave; we have been talking about the famous heroes passage in Hebrews 11, and we noted that the common trait among all the people who were listed there was faith.

DAVE BAST

Yes; faith is the key to heroism in the biblical sense of the word, in a Christian sense. It is living as if God is real even when circumstances may make it seem like he is not there; or it is living...it is staking your life on the truthfulness of the promises of God. It is saying: I think the Bible is actually true and I am going to live my life as if it were even if I don't feel it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, if we want to bring this down to our own level, we really have to push a little beyond Hebrews 11, because after all those examples of faith, it is the first verses of Chapter 12 that really get into the challenge for us as to...

DAVE BAST

Kind of how to apply...how to apply Hebrews 11; because originally those chapter divisions weren't there...

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

So it just flows right through.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, there is this wonderful image at the beginning of Hebrews 12. Let me read it:

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin, which clings so closely; and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us; ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

DAVE BAST

What a wonderful image that is! It is really an extended metaphor, and it is obviously drawn from athletics...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Specifically, from the race. We have recently...earlier this year...watched the Olympics, and that is a great analogy for what is being described here in Hebrews 12.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, I watched the cross-country ski races, and they always ended in the stadium.

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

These skiers would be coming closer to the stadium; they would hear the noise in the stadium, and then they would come in, in front of these tens of thousands of people standing on their feet, cheering them as they made their way to the finish line.

DAVE BAST

Right; and they are exhausted; or you think of the marathon in the summer Olympics, how that always ends in the great Olympic stadium, and there is this lone runner, completely spent with the effort, and that is what Hebrews 12 is talking about. This is the contest now, the training is over, but we are engaged in the race. We have laid aside the weights that cling to us – the sins, says Hebrews 12 – and we are striving for the finish line, and we are looking beyond the finish line to the Lord Jesus, who ran the race before us. We are surrounded by all of these witnesses. They are also people who finished the race ahead of us. They are the heroes...

BOB HEERSPINK

They are cheering us on.

DAVE BAST

Right; but it is Jesus where we want to fix our eyes because he is at the end of the victory line.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, the kind of heroism that the Bible is calling us to isn't just an occasional heroic act. It really is a life of faith.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And we are only going to run that kind of race if we keep fixed on Jesus.

DAVE BAST

I mean, in all likelihood, we are not going to be put in a situation where we are going to do the daring, headline-making kind of heroism. We are not going to be walking down the street and there is a burning house with a child upstairs, or there is somebody drowning in the lake and we dive in and pull them to safety. That doesn't happen to most of us; but the day-in day-out slog of life, the marathon, the keeping going when it is hard, that is the kind of heroism that we are called upon to give.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think of people in my own life who I would describe as heroes, and they are not going to get written up in the papers, but they are living out a life of faith. I think of one couple that has adopted nine kids, and you say what a challenge, but they not only adopted nine children, but some of these are special need kids. They have really put themselves out there because they see this as God's calling, God's specific vocation, for their lives, and they are going to live it out in the long haul.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; you know, it is not easy and it is not glamorous...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Christian heroism – to be a hero can be very painful. I think of a man who I know quite well. He is from Iran, and a year or so ago he was arrested because of his faith in Christ. His only crime was to be witnessing to the Lord Jesus. He was held in solitary confinement; and as I talked to him afterwards when he was released he said it was horrible. It was a terrible experience. You know, we tend to glamorize this and think: Wow, somebody who has literally been put in prison for his faith. Well, it is hard; and again, that is maybe an extraordinary circumstance, but the point of us is, I think, that if we are going to be a hero, as we should, we need to pay a price.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and that is where the focus on Jesus comes. We are just not going to hang in there to sacrifice the way we are often called to do unless we maintain that close link to Jesus, who is both the model of our faith and the one who empowers our faith.

DAVE BAST

And who, says Hebrews, for the joy that was set before him...

BOB HEERSPINK

Ah, yes.

DAVE BAST

Endured the cross and despised the shame. Ultimately, you know, the Christian life – the Christian race – is all about joy; and yes, it is hard; yes, there is pain; but there is a joy beyond that that goes beyond the cross that we may have to bear, and leads home ultimately to where Christ is. So, you know, to me the question is, what am I facing? How am I called to be a hero in everyday life? I mean, maybe it is writing a letter to a prisoner or I think of these guys I know who go every Saturday to the county jail and offer people Bibles and offer to talk to the prisoners and to pray for them; that kind of week in, week out sort of ordinary obedience.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is really asking the question: what shape does faith take in my personal life? And for each of us, that is going to be different. When we have an answer to that, we have really discovered the source of our real joy in life.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I have a friend who likes to say that real discipleship means following Jesus, not just observing...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, what does it take to follow Jesus – to run the race that he ran? And what is that specific thing that I am being asked to do?

BOB HEERSPINK

And then, as we do that what we will discover is amazingly people will look at us and say: you are one of my heroes!

DAVE BAST

Yes; hey, how about that?!

BOB HEERSPINK

Me?!

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; because you are living out your faith in the Lord.

DAVE BAST

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join and the conversation.

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