

## Chapter Three—Heroes and Heroines

### Introduction--

Every culture, every generation, has its heroes, increasingly their heroines. Not unusually, these individuals receive recognition because of some sort of feat, or series of feats, that puts them in relief to other parts of our society.

Not unusually, statues and other works of art commemorate those who projected a culture's values in war time. We should be more aware of those who provide what have to be called heroic efforts in non-violent ways. The Nobel Peace Prize is one world-wide known recognition. And, ironically, fewer peace-making honors are extended. We should have fewer honors extended that the award is based on essentially violent actions.

Whether in war or peace contexts, though, these persons tend to be noticed only in larger than life fashion. With humanity's drive to find significance, to be seen with, or participate with someone designated as bigger and better than the rest of us, no wonder the term hero/heroine worship came to be. The proliferation of promotional dynamics which are intended to shape our imaginations that look for heroes/heroines can be off.

The idea of worship connects our thoughts to the Integrity Wheel, of course. Finding our search for significance, direction, and character fulfilled in the worship of God is the basic premise of the Integrity Wheel metaphor. Worship of God has the effect of filtering the significance, direction, and character of persons, though—ourselves and others. We can recognize, in other words, penultimate figures who exhibit heroic characteristics. A reciprocal relationship occurs—worship of God points us to people who provide models of life worth living, who are heroes/heroines. And, heroes/heroines give us models of what a little piece, increment, facet of integrity looks and acts like.

And, in that thought lies the basis for most of the rest of this chapter. What are the marks, character traits, actions of heroes/heroines which happen all about us every day, but don't get the notoriety perhaps we've

been educated to think goes with being the hero/heroine? We cannot forget those lives which reflect day in and day out the etiquette and ethics that make us all better, point to visions beyond us, but who rarely, if ever, receive any public notoriety.

Traits of Heroes/Heroines—

Full disclosure requires that I say that five of the six traits following come from Fred Smith, You and Your Network (Word Books, Waco, TX: 1984) pp. 74-76, 93. The key text for this spoke, Heroes/Heroines, is 1 Chronicles 11:10ff (and its parallel in 2 Samuel 23:8-39).

Each of the key texts considered for the parts of the Integrity Wheel form the centerpiece of the constellation of Scriptures throughout the Bible which reflect a response to these archetypal dynamics that make up the wheel.

The 1 Chronicles/2 Samuel texts are extraordinary examples of this archetypal relationship between Scripture and the dynamics lying deeply within humanity. Certainly, though, even the not so careful reader will realize these passages are not about women, but the mighty men of David. With those female characters mentioned in chapter 2, Calling, the reader can begin to match these traits with other biblical passages. Associations should begin to build with yet other passages and female characters to demonstrate heroines spring forth from Scripture.

1. Heroes/heroines are real.

Heroes/heroines are not mythological or characters of fantasy, such as the “superhero” characters which have enjoyed a surge of impact on the American culture and beyond. They are people you can know, read about, learn about, be known through the media.

The Chronicler gave details about three of the mighty men. The merits of these three were built around prowess in battle and defending David. If one can get past these images—for this was a time when what has to be called barbarism was at the forefront of kingdom building—the reality of these three men was put forward. Those who first heard the story of Eleazar may have been close enough in time and location to go to the barley field described, for example.

Most every generation, in whatever culture, has locations they can see, or were part of, where heroic actions were displayed. Dynamics of freedom, justice, equality, independence, moral and ethical norms are implemented by real people for real people. These are actions which become one's heroes/heroines.

These episodes of the three mighty men can be too often used to support those among us who take opportunity to use force to bring about submission to an idea, group, or individual. The history of Christianity includes the series of Crusades often led by warrior monks. Many of the soldiers of those endeavors were spurred on by promises of salvation if they killed Saracens. To obtain substantiation for the use of violence is a too superficial reading and application of passages like 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel.

The Chronicler's exhibit of individuals' fighting skills should also be examined for the sense of courage that goes in the face of being outnumbered. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, being the one who takes on systemic/institutional matters which reflect sexism, racism, ageism, discrimination of any kind takes courage, and has to be labeled as heroic.

2. Heroes/heroines have a sense of dedication to a cause.

David was battle weary, cut off from his beloved Bethlehem. The Chronicler reported David's wish for a drink from the well in Bethlehem. We can assume this comment wasn't intended to be a command, rather a wistful, even nostalgic, statement. I doubt David was/is the only person who became sentimental about

life in another time. Maybe those moments happen for you when you are fatigued—emotionally and physically. Memories of better times, or how we remember as better times, can spawn wistful thoughts. Likely David had no intent of anyone really hearing his wish. But, the three mighty men overheard and proceeded to act on the wish, for it was something they could enact in service to their king. And, service to their king was of great seriousness to those men.

Evidently, the three did not have a conversation. Rather, like well disciplined athletes who understand the next play to be run is communicated by body language, a facial expression, a head nod, a hand gesture, they held the same intent and made their way out to make David's wish come true.

I do not think they worshipped David, though he was anointed to be the next king. They respected him; they protected him—because David was one who led them in the name of God, the one to be worshipped. For the three, they recognized they were about a cause that was larger than simply being the best soldiers on the field of battle. They were deeply involved in a struggle for survival as a people. And, ultimately, they were dedicated to the cause of Jehovah God, through their service to their king.

### 3. Heroes/heroines have focus.

What are you going to do after graduation? What will you be doing after you retire? These kinds of questions come from people who think they are experts on life. Notice if a reasonable response isn't given to their somewhat intrusive questions, they have all kinds of advice as to the what and how the next stage of life should go.

In these cases, too often, ironically enough, not only the interviewer but also the interviewee are looking for direction, something to give them purpose, a vision—and not just for today, but for life.

The three mighty men demonstrated they had settled upon a common purpose for life. And, that settledness happened before this night at the cave. From then on, this higher cause, the summum bonum Aristotle called it, formed the basis for what they did, and how they did it.

Concentration, focus, builds from dedication, which identifies a cause, but concentration zeroes in on that cause. Jesus asked the disciples to have single eyedness, focus, in life. The Apostle Paul said, “This one thing I do.”

One has to more than imply that the single eyedness Jesus called for is that of worshipping God and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. Paul recognized that following those main, two commandments were broad and deep enough to live all of life, to give starting points for dealing with any conundrum one faces.

Where dedication precedes and fosters concentration, it does not necessarily accomplish the goal identified. Concentration goes for the goal. Concentration gives the ability to think of the right thing to do at the right time. It could be called poise in the face of opposition.

#### 4. Heroes/heroines sacrifice.

The three mighty men not only broke through the Philistine lines to get a cup of water from the well at Bethlehem, but also came back through the Philistines with the water—an incredible feat.

Did these men display courage? Think about it—there’s a narrow line between courage and foolishness. Maybe those guys thought about the narrow line. Still, their sense of dedication and concentration on a cause moved them, literally.

Yes, courage was demonstrated, but courage framed and undergirded by the wrapping of their emotion, intent, and movement by a cause worth giving one’s life for.

Jesus asked us to follow him, take up the Cross, and die to ourselves—and live life to the fullest. As with the rest of the narratives in the Gospels, paradox reigns in this imperative from Jesus. In a survival of the fittest world, dying to one's self doesn't make sense, unless one finds a cause that's worth dying for.

And, just what can dying mean? From one perspective the dying idea can sound too masochistic. From another, the matter of dying can be perceived as rejecting one set of principles, values, and norms for another.

The call to follow Christ is fleshed out by statements like Paul's to the Romans—"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"; to the Philippians, "Think on these things;" to the Galatians "the fruit of the Spirit is. . . ." If we read the positive, virtue principled thoughts from Paul at only surface level, we'll miss the idea of sacrifice implicitly in them. That is, Paul knew that we have choices in life. We can follow after, live into and out of, those which can be called negative values—the opposites of those values to which Paul pointed. The opposites are selfish, ego-centric, both individually and corporately.

One who has died to those opposites gives the best testimony of the worth of dying to one's self—living a life of sacrifice to one's self for the benefit, the good, of the culture, society, the church, others. Such a life is a heroic life.

5. Heroes/heroines are consistent.

Read 1 Chronicles 11 and continue reading into chapter 12. The longer list of names of David's mighty men appears, along with some of their exploits. We have similar lists in our culture—distinguished service awards, halls of fame for one genre or another, alumni who have made good because they graduated from "our" school.

The distinct impression comes from reading 1 Chronicles 11 and 12, though singular exploits are listed, those examples of the mighty men's behavior are not the only heroic acts they performed. Those examples are representative, characteristic of who these men were, what they were like, how they treated one another.

One might imagine time traveling back to those men's lives, becoming acquainted with them, and especially recognizing their character. Imagine further disconnecting for a stretch of time from them. The list indicates that years later, these men would reflect the same character as before. As you could trust them then, so could you later.

Jesus' words of "Let your yea be yea and nay be nay" does not simply mean we answer questions only with yes or no. Rather, we are to be authentic, be honest, transparent, always.

A mark of heroes/heroines is that of integrity, wholeness, consistency—all the pieces of one's life fit together. There are not some principles, relational styles, operative for work, some for family, some for other relationships. An interesting exercise is to get to know a hero's/heroine's friends across the chapters of that person's life. Quite likely, those friends show a compatibility with one another, perhaps never meeting one another. Not maybe until they meet at the funeral of a hero/heroine do they discover the similarities of dynamics of friendship which have extended across the heroes/heroines gathered.

6. Heroes/heroines are mentors.

A hero/heroine can be identified at a variety of distances. Some of them may be virtually inaccessible. Others will be closer. The closer ones likely will express the style, skills, and personality of a master teacher. And, of course, master teachers come in lots of shapes and sizes. Though lecture is considered the weakest form of pedagogy, we can identify some master teachers are that because they are extraordinary communicators by way of lecturing. Other master teachers are known as such because of their prowess through other pedagogies.

We are drawn to some of our heroes/heroines because we can find some identification with them because of similar or same talents. The heroes/heroines are likely better with the talents than we are, though, and can exemplify ways to communicate their skills to us. Some sports teams, professional and otherwise, have player-coaches. They provide a teaching role but can play the game still.

Celebrities may dazzle us, and we are fooled into thinking they are heroes/heroines. They are not heroes/heroines, though. The difference is that heroes/heroines may draw our attention, even us, to themselves; but they enlarge us and model ways we do that.

Conclusion—

What should we do with this idea of heroes/heroines, and especially their informative and formative influences on us? One point is that we must identify who have been and who are our heroes/heroines. All of us have these figures, perhaps unconsciously; so, there is need to think on this theme of life and recognize who we admire, model life after, pay attention to their advice—both spoken and unspoken. As we become more conscious of those individuals, we may be surprised at who they are. Sometimes people about whom we've learned only a little bit, or had a short time of experience, have made an imprint on us. Relationships ranging between acquaintance to deep friendship may come to mind. Relatives, from close to distant, parents, uncles/aunts, grand-parents, cousins, and siblings can have heroic dimensions about them for us.

A little attention to the hero/heroine matters and we can note that in given situations we may notice the scene working into our consciousness of one or more of these heroes/heroines are informing our decisions. Probably we will ask at times, "How would \_\_\_\_\_ handle this?"

What do we do when we run out of heroes, however? It will happen. For our heroes/heroines have feet of clay. Notice the list of mighty men is different from 1 Chronicles 11-12 and 2 Samuel 23:8-39. Uriah the Hittite appears in both lists.

If you haven't caught up to the David narrative lately, Uriah the Hittite was the man who David had killed so he could take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. Two acts which can cause us to question David's label sometimes used: "a man after God's own heart." But, in the 2 Samuel list, Uriah is listed last. The writer/editor understood a journalistic principle still in place today. That is, people will read the headline, probably the first paragraph, and then the closing lines of an article. Putting Uriah at the end would surely

jar people who had idolized David. A tacit warning is “Be careful. David had blood on his hands, blood of one of his own mighty men. He coveted the man’s wife.” The underlying theme is that one’s heroes/heroines may act out in anti-heroic ways. The lesson to be absorbed is that we can learn how not to live from anti-heroes/heroines. See who they are, how they have behaved, and live 180 degrees opposite to those unheroic actions.

So, we may outlive our heroes/heroines by lifestyle or length of life. But, we will be on the right track with the overall biblical revelation even if we do run out of human heroes/heroines, as long as we keep our eyes on the ultimate hero—Jesus Christ. That’s the way the writer of the New Testament Hebrews described Christ: the pioneer of our faith, our trail blazer, our hero.

In many ways we are expected to follow the vision, the calling, the modeling, of our heroes/heroines not blindly but recognizing we are to become heroes/heroines for others. Our model of life should exemplify the best of God’s lifestyle for others to follow, to emulate.