

## “My Hero”

*Hebrews 10:32-11:2*

**[1-title slide]** *Welcome, prayer.*

**[2-stage]** In the spirit of levity, allow me to teach you a short, one-man skit I learned as a child. This is an excellent way to pass time while sitting in a restaurant. All you need is a paper napkin.

*The villain: You must pay the rent!*

*The damsel: But I can't pay the rent!*

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*The damsel: But I can't pay the rent!*

*The hero: I'll pay the rent!*

*The damsel: My hero!*

*The villain: Curses! Foiled again.*

Doesn't that sound nice when some tells you, “You're my hero!”? Does anyone here want to be a hero? I want to be a hero.

**[3-who are your heroes]** Let me start by asking you, who are some of your heroes? Think back to your childhood, if you have to. Better yet, who are some of your favorite heroes in the bible? *(take down some answers on the white board.)*

There are some things all heroes have in common. They unite people. They persevere. They have a goal, and they use all the effort to achieve it. It's one of the things that makes our movies so popular. Despite all odds, the hero wins, even if it costs them their life.

I have some heroes, real and imaginary. For example, the 1995-1996 Northwestern Football team, who won the first Big Ten Championship for the school in over 60 years, and when to the Rose Bowl for only the second time in school history. NU hadn't had a winning season since before I was born. They even set the NCAA record for most consecutive losses (more than 30 games.) No one really believed in them, yet that team cast aside doubt, shunned tradition and worked hard. They believed in themselves. It was great to cheer for them.

Another hero I have is Spider Man. No matter how many times he gets knocked down, he gets back up. Spider Man isn't into fame and fortune. He's an average guy with an average job who got bitten by a radioactive spider and decided to use his power to help people. It's a great story that will never grow old.

**[4-church and candles]** Today is All Saints Sunday, which can also be called All Souls Sunday. To be clear, not all those we remember today were Saints or Christians. But they were all children of God and loved by us. They were all heroes to someone, and that's why we celebrate their lives.

How do we identify heroes in the world today? Sometimes it's easy, especially if they're in a movie. People like to talk about heroes. The world thinks of heroes as talented, successful, famous, self-sacrificing, courageous, strong, kind, even humble. “You'll never believe what they did! Wow! I hope I could be so brave.” Heroes are the people we hope we can emulate.

**[5-Do I want to be a hero?]** While it is easy to identify heroes, it is less easy is to answer the question, “Am I a hero, too?” Our doubts hold us back. “What if I'm not a good enough? What if people find out about my past? What if I screw up? Then no one will think I'm a hero.” I think most people would say, “I would like to be a hero. I'm just not sure I have what it takes.”

Today I want to tell you, you absolutely can be a hero. And you don't have to be someone you are not. The secret has nothing to do with radioactive spiders and flying. God uses all sorts of regular people to demonstrate his grace and salvation. The book of Hebrews lists many heroes of the faith, and tells us how we can join them.

**[6-things a hero does]** We read from Hebrew 10:32-39, 11:1-2, which explains how to be a hero of faith. Some of these Christians were experiencing incredible challenges and persecution. The author of Hebrews wanted to give them a pep talk. He says things like, “Have confidence. Don't shrink back. Have faith. Stand side by side with those who are insulted and imprisoned. Wait on God's reward for your faithfulness.” That's good advice.

**[7-biblical heroes]** Remember those names we listed earlier? Hebrews chapter 11 goes on to list these heroes of the Bible by name. Maybe you

recognize some of them: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab (yes, the prostitute!), Gideon, Samson, Esther, Deborah, David, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Daniel, and so on. These are the heroic men and women in the really cool Bible stories we love to tell our kids.

**[8-what they did]** What did they do? The end of chapter 11 of Hebrews compiles the following list of their mighty acts:

A Hero...

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1) conquers kingdoms               | 5) escapes the edge of the sword                |
| 2) administers justice             | 6) becomes powerful in battle                   |
| 3) shuts the mouths of lions       | 7) routes foreign armies                        |
| 4) quenches the fury of the flames | 8) gives women their dead back, raised to life. |

That’s a cool list. Wouldn’t you love to have some of those powers?

Actually, those are miracles God did through them. It would have been amazing to see the three men survive the furnace or Daniel survive the lions, to be there when Elijah called down fire from heaven, or Moses parted the Red Sea. Like we said, these are the stories we love.

**[9-how they suffered]** Here’s the thing, though. Their lives were not all guts and glory. No hero in the Bible had a perfect, charmed life. They all faced dilemmas, depression, persecution, betrayal. Listen to some of the horrible stuff they went through:

- |                        |                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 9) torture             | 15) death by the sword            |
| 10) jeers and flogging | 16) wearing sheep- and goat-skins |
| 11) chains             | 17) destitution                   |
| 12) prison             | 18) mistreatment                  |
| 13) stoning            | 19) deserts and mountains         |
| 14) being sawed in two | 20) caves and holes in the ground |

That list sounds painful. Do you really want to wear goatskin and live in caves? I’m seen some messy kids’ rooms in my life, but nothing quite that bad. (Although, kids, next time your parents complain about your bedroom, just say, “Elijah lived in a smelly cave and he turned out ok.”)

**[10-What they received]** Why did biblical heroes do these crazy things and put up with this horrendous treatment? What was their incentive? Hebrews gives us three reasons:

- 21) The world was not worthy of them. (Hebrews 11:38)
- 22) They gained a better resurrection. (Hebrews 11:35)
- 23) They were commended by God. (Hebrews 11:39)

**[11-scripture]** The reason they became heroes is that they trusted God and persevered, no matter what. **Hebrews 11:13** says, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.” For good or for bad, they chose God’s side. They had faith; they were “sure of what [they hoped] for and certain of what [they did] not see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Do you really want to be a hero? The majority of you, I hope, are still saying yes, but maybe some of you are starting to get nervous about that goatskin thing. All joking aside, becoming a real hero of faith has a price.

**[12-You don’t have to be perfect]** Sometimes we get the idea that we have to be perfect in order for God to use us. I like to point out that both Moses and Paul were murderers, and that’s the opposite of perfection. God specializes in making people something greater than they think they are. That is exactly the point. If we could do it ourselves, it wouldn’t be faith, and we certainly wouldn’t give credit to God.

Heroes are born in a time of adversity. If you are going through a tough time right now, guess what? God can use that. If you see someone suffering, and you can stand beside them, comfort them, and simply be their friend, you are a hero! I took a course on Mental Health First Aid last week, and the presenter reminded us, “You’re not there to diagnose, provide easy answers or good advice. You are there to express your care and concern, and get them to the help they need.”

**[13-Man praying]** The world needs heroes right now, and my personal conviction is, those heroes should come from the church. Brave, humble, godly people who are not afraid to make mistakes, not afraid to stand in the gap for someone who is lonely, oppressed, friendless, or without hope. We don’t need

more perfect people – there aren’t any! We need more forgiven people, people who look to Jesus, the ultimate hero. The one, Hebrews 12:2 tells us, who endured the cross and sat at the right hand of the throne of God. Billions of people throughout history have died, many of them for good causes, some of them even on other crosses. The difference is, by his example, by saving us when we were at our worst, Jesus dealt with our sin and provided the answer, the example we needed, to be a hero to others.

**[14-Jesus, cross]** Jesus was the ultimate hero, the perfect sacrifice for all of us. (Hebrews 10:10) He rose again to prove that nothing could stop his love from reaching to us, and his Spirit is inside us, giving us the courage to face our battles with faith.

**[15-Paradox]** Do you want to be a hero? Jesus loves you and wants the best for you. We don’t have to die the way he did. But there are two things needed to become a hero, a paradox we must embrace. First, accept who we are, just as God accepts us. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God.” God loves you unconditionally. The first part of the hero paradox is, you’ve got to love yourself the way God loves you.

The second part is this: In his love for us, Jesus tells us, we have to change. Matthew 16:24 says “If anyone would come after me (Jesus), he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Heroes grow. Disciples grow. Growth is painful and difficult, but it’s worth it.

**[16-title slide]** Be a hero. Persevere for Jesus. For the sake of your friends, neighbors, family, and our world. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Be a hero of faith. Look to Jesus as your example. Embrace who you are, and with the knowledge of God’s love, become the hero God wants you to be. You can be the Moses and Elijahs and Esthers of old. Cling to the promise of the things hoped for and believe in the things yet unseen that God will show you.

Let’s pray.

Lord, please help us to embrace all that we are and learn to deny ourselves for your sake. Help us to persevere. Help us to set our sights on the promises above that last forever, and not on things below. Keep us looking to Jesus as our ultimate hero, and rely on his strength to continue to bring others into your kingdom. In his name we pray. Amen.

## LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

Living God, our Guide and Guardian,  
Who sits on the throne and delivers us into eternal life,  
we give you thanks for the saints of every time, tribe, and tongue  
who now rest in the shelter of your embrace.  
We set aside this moment to remember  
Those who are dear and precious to us  
Who have died during the last twelve months.

*As each name is called, ring a bell and/or light a candle in honor of each person.  
Where possible, have family members or close friends of the person named come forward to light a candle or rise where they are sitting.*

We bless you for the life and love of these dear souls,  
Be present with them and with their friends and family who remain in this life.

On this All Saints Sunday, we also remember  
that we too are living saints,

members of the family of God  
with all the saints of the past, the present, and the future.  
And so, we remember:

**We are God's children.**

**What we shall be has not yet been revealed;  
but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him,  
for we shall see him as he is.**

**So today and every day,**

**may we put on Christ and live as saints  
who tend the poor,  
comfort the mourners,  
learn from the meek,  
affirm those who seek righteousness,  
offer mercy alongside the merciful,  
and work for peace with the peacemakers  
until Christ comes in final victory  
and we feast as the family of God  
at his heavenly banquet. Amen.**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2023.*