


Where Have All the Heroes Gone?

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

There are no more Davey Crocketts and Alamos to remember, just superstars and media personalities. But don't give up hope—there are still some real heroes, but you have to look for them.



The battle ended shortly after 5 a.m. March 6, 1836. One hundred eighty-three brave men had barricaded themselves in a tiny church mission called the Alamo. Outside the mission fortress Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, commander of the Mexican forces, raised the flag of "no quarter" and commanded his more than 2,000 troops to take no prisoners.

The blast of the bugle signaled the rush. Three times the attacking columns were repulsed. The Texans gave ground foot by foot until only a handful were left. Still they fought. Finally, overwhelmed by the odds, the last man lay dead. The Mexicans had won. But had they?

Of the victors, only the name Santa Anna is remembered—and that in infamy. Yet even after 150 years the names of those who chose to die rather than surrender to tyranny are household words to all Americans. Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, William Travis—they are our heroes.

And what of James Bonham, age 29? When it became apparent Santa Anna was going to attack, Bonham slipped out of the Alamo under cover of night and rode his horse 95 miles to Goliad to try to get help. The commander of the Texas army shook his head. He had no troops available. Bonham had a decision to make. Would he return to the Alamo, or would he stay put in order to live and fight another day? He returned to the Alamo, fighting his way through the enemy lines so that he might die with his comrades.

The next day Commander William Travis drew a line in the dust with his sword, urging those "determined to stay here and die with me" to cross over. Legend records that all but one stepped over. Jim Bowie was too ill to walk and asked to be carried over on his cot. The next morning Santa Anna attacked—and they all died.

Forty-six days later the Texan forces routed the Mexicans at San Jacinto, fighting under a slogan which has shaped our nation: "Remember the Alamo."

A prayer, written the next year, captured the heroism of those men: "If they preferred to die a thousand times than to basely bow to tyranny, what a brilliant, what an illustrious example they have bequeathed us."

Heroes! Are there any left?

Ask today's teenagers and they will quickly list their heroes. Rock stars, movie idols and various other degenerates. Recently a radio disc jockey polled 188 teenagers in a Jacksonville, Florida, mall. Topping the list of heroes were 1. Prince, 2. Madonna, 3. Michael Jackson. Not a single one named his or her mom or dad.

Ask today's housewife about heroes. She will list various soap opera and television characters. Rarely, if ever, will a wife put her husband at the top of the list.

Ask today's business/professional man and he will tick off names like Lee Iacocca, Peter Ueberroth, T. Boone Pickens and General Chuck Yeager.

When asked who her hero was, Jane Fonda smiled and said she watches Jane Fonda workout tapes on TV. She's in love with herself.

One teenager told me his heroes were Michael Jackson, Brooke Shields and Boy George. When I asked a group of kids in our church, they listed Jesus, Mr. T, Rambo and Spiderman. Strange company, but at least they listed Jesus first.

The interesting thing is no one ever names anyone he knows. Heroes are made for us by TV, movies, records and tapes. On the international scene we list those non-persons chosen

by the media as our heroes: Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, or Winnie Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa.

Heroes? Maybe, maybe not.

The problem: All these people are simply images on a tube or voices from a speaker. Ask today's Christian to name his heroes and he'll list Pat Robertson, Kenneth Copeland, Fred Price or Jimmy Swaggart. These are all good people—but heroes? They, too, are merely images created by the media, people we've never touched. We know virtually nothing about them except that every day they invade our homes via tube or tape and influence our lives. All are non-people who come and go at the flick of a switch.

A while back I asked our Sunday morning congregation to write down the names of their heroes. When they finished I asked how many had listed their dads. Eight people raised their hands. One of them was my son.

It's a good exercise. Think back to childhood. Who were your heroes—the ones you wanted to be like when you grew up? I would have listed my older brother, Clay, at the top of that list. Much, much later, when I was 40, I

would have put my dad there. Over the last few years I've added my wife. I think I'd like to be like her when I grow up.

There is a bigger question. Are you a hero to your own children? To other children in your church or neighborhood? Who looks up to you? Why?

Why not?

Maybe to clarify this we need to define what a hero is. The biblical definition of a hero is a man who stands his ground and does not flee. These are the men and women who consider the odds, make value judgments, and take their stand.

Men like William Travis, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and James Bonham.

I've always been intrigued by the great moral decisions made in times of crisis and conflict. If preference is given to that which is morally right, these decisions might cost a man everything he owns—but they bring the unabated blessing of God.

A few years ago I attended a meeting of world leaders of the Anglican Church in Singapore. Archbishop Bill Burnett of Capetown, South Africa, was speaking one afternoon. He was talking of the sinful practice of apartheid, saying he knew the time was now that the nation should

grant recognition to the blacks. He said he also knew that when that happened, it was entirely possible that what happened to Rhodesia would take place in South Africa. The blacks would take power and instantly erase all white cultural marks. The names of the streets, cities and even the name of the nation would be changed to represent tribal culture rather than European culture. The great cathedrals would fall into disrepair. The jungle would move into the city.

Then he said something so significant I wrote it down word for word: "My identity is not in Anglicanism. It is in Jesus. I knew when the Holy Spirit took over my life, without my permission by the way, that I would have to make a decision. And if the Anglican Church tried to quench what God was doing in my life, and tried to stop me, I would have to say, 'I love you. You have nurtured me. But I will have to leave you, for I must go with God.' "

That, it seems, is the mark of a hero.

In 2 Samuel 23 we find a list of heroes called "David's mighty men." These were ordinary men: farmers, foot soldiers, husbands and fathers. But they did extraordinary things. They stood their

ground in the face of overwhelming odds.

One of those men, Shammah, was a farmer. Like the other farmers he had tediously dug his well, tilled his soil, planted his field and tended his young crops. But at harvest time the wild Philistines came up from the plains, planning to chase the farmers off their lands and reap the crops for themselves. All the other men fled, but Shammah refused to be pushed around. He stood his ground and defended his field single-handedly. Like the defenders of the Alamo, he would rather die than give in to tyranny.

Others, seeing him out there fighting alone, took heart. They joined him, putting the Philistines to flight. But Shammah was not fighting to inspire others, he was fighting because it was right—whether anyone stood with him or not.

That's the stuff heroes are made of.

The apostle Paul, preparing young Timothy to be appointed as bishop of Ephesus, and Titus as bishop of Crete, knew there would be problems in the church which would discourage them. They would be tempted to say, "If only others acted differently, then I could do my job...." He repeats to them a Greek phrase: *su de*. It means, "but as for you." Paul tells them to get their eyes off others, for a hero never looks around. He just looks ahead.

It is the same thing Jesus told Peter in John 21 when Peter questioned the loyalty of the other disciples. *Su de*, Peter. "But as for you, follow thou me." Heroes do what is right because it is right—not because others do it or don't.

Brigadier General Chuck Yeager, whose book was at the top of the best-seller list for a long time, is renowned as the nation's top test pilot. He was the first man to break the sound barrier in a jet aircraft. When asked if he had ever felt fear, he said, "Well, yes, when we first started flying combat I felt a little bit of fear. But I didn't let it interfere with performing my mission. Combat was the greatest training in the world for me. What it taught me is that if you don't have any control over the outcome of the flight, don't worry."

In other words, when you realize things are beyond your control, you can stop trying to control them—and do what you have to do.

That, too, is the mark of a hero. A hero is one who does what his hand finds to do, and lets God control the outcome. He does not manipulate or try to force results, he simply obeys day by day, hour by hour, and leaves the outcome to God.

It's the difference between being a man

of God and being God's man. All Christians are "men of God." But others seem to be not only called, they are chosen. Who are the chosen? The ones who respond to God's call. They are God's men. They never make things happen. They never try to control the future. They are simply available for God to control them, to let God use them to make things happen.

These are the heroes.

Who are they? They are too numerous to list. The genuine heroes are today's moms and dads, big brothers and big sisters, those who choose to be models of Christ for the sake of others coming after them.

They are the men and women who could do anything, but opt for the ministry or the mission field instead.

They are the two-mite widows, the prayer warriors, the businessmen who make decisions based on Christian ethics and run the risk of losing a client, or a job.

They are the sports heroes who refuse to take drugs, who choose to live faithfully with their wives, and maybe—like Eric Liddell of *Chariots of Fire*—refuse to run on Sunday.

They are the politicians who vote their conscience rather than give in to pork barrel pressure.

While the free world applauds Corazon Aquino, we need to remember the real hero was her husband, Nimoy, who after committing his life to Jesus under the ministry of Charles Colson, returned to the Philippines knowing he might die, but believing his death could light a fire which would set his people free. That, it seems, is real heroism.

The world is longing for true heroes—not actors. Look around you in your church. Who are the heroes? Probably not the pastor or the staff. The real heroes are the people who stand by the staff, who tithe even though they are earning at the poverty level, who refuse to compromise for the sake of pleasure or self-gain, who faithfully obey the Lord in the little things, who overcome great personal handicaps for the sake of right.

Where have all the heroes gone? They're right here. Look around. They're not on screen or tube, they're sitting in the choir, teaching Sunday school, faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission in some jungle location, honoring Christ with their lives. These are the real heroes. ■

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