



HEROES:

Ordinary People
ExtraOrdinary Lives

Paul W Newell





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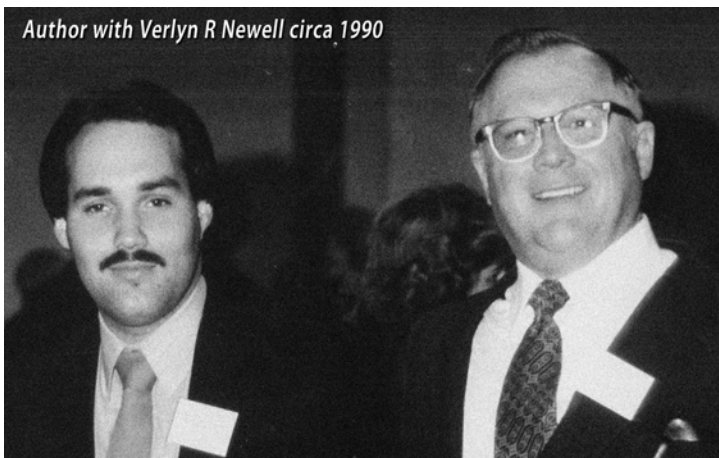
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<http://churchforfamily.com>

HEROES: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives
is dedicated to the greatest HERO in my life,
my Dad, Verlyn R. Newell.

Dad has lived a steady life of husband, father, and Pastor.
I've learned what it means to be a loyal husband from my Dad.
I've learned what it means to be a wise father from my Dad.
I've learned everything I know about pastoring God's people
from my Dad.
And I've learned what it means to be a real HERO from my Dad.

Thank you, Dad, you are my HERO.



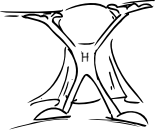


TABLE OF CONTENT

Forward.....	VII
1. Why We Fail.....	3
2. When We Fail.....	11
3. Choose Me!	19
4. Why Consequences?.....	27
5. What's Your Weird?	31
6. Weird Stuff.....	39
7. Second String Hero.....	43
8. Unlikely Hero.....	53
9. Signs of Doubting	63
10. Warning!	73
11. Less Than Best	83
12. A Few Good Men.....	95
13. Designer God Syndrome (DgS).....	101
14. Unintended Consequences.....	107
15. What Did You Say?	117
16. Also Mentioned	121
17. Extraordinary Parents	125
18. Headstrong Hero: Part 1 Going Down.....	133
19. Headstrong Hero: Part 2 Falling Down.....	141
20. Whatever!.....	149
21. For Sale	153
22. Loose Livin' Genes.....	161
23. Redeemed	171
Epilogue: Meet Your HERO.....	183

FORWARD



This book is the result of a loving relationship with a group of present day heroes: the covenant members and attenders of ChurchForFamily.com in Beaumont, California.

HEROES began as a broken up sermon series that spanned almost two years; a little here and a little there as God lead through both circumstance, need and knowledge. Some of the chapters never made it into public sermons, they were just too hard to speak. Spending time with some of the nastiest of human attributes can have a debilitating effect on a pastor, not to mention a writer. And that's where the HEROES of ChurchForFamily come into play.

ChurchForFamily is a safe place. It's a place where individuals and families can connect with God, and with each other. It's a comfortable place (if metal chairs and school lunchrooms can be called comfortable), not because of the locale, but because of the Spirit that resides in it's people.

You don't have to be perfect to feel at home at ChurchForFamily. It's OK to come as you are: broken, shattered, weary and wary. It's also OK to come if you feel whole, attached, excited and enthused (God in you!). ChurchForFamily is a place to grow into the HERO that God purposed you to be. There is acceptance, care, and commitment.

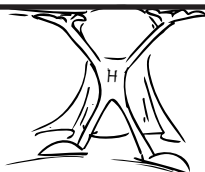
It is in that Family that God has shown me being a HERO is not about living above or apart from others; HEROES thrive best within community. We all get to live together within our "extraordinary ordinairiness".

Within the pages of the Old Testament book of Judges there were miserable failures and incredible successes, but the reality is that God loved each of His children just the same. He pursued them and provided a means of redemption for each one who would trust Him.

That redemption story continues within ChurchForFamily. I'm grateful that I get to live among so many ordinary people who are living extraordinary lives!

Paul W Newell, January 2010

HERO SEARCH



THEY LOST FAITH. THEY HAD NOT PRAYED. THEY HAD NOT SOUGHT GOD'S DIRECTION. THEY JUST LAID DOWN THEIR WEAPONS AND WALKED AWAY. THEY HAD LOST THEIR DEPENDENCE ON GOD.

IT WASN'T THAT GOD WAS NOT WITH THEM; THEY WERE NOT WITH GOD! THEY FAILED BECAUSE THEY HAD LOST FAITH IN GOD; BUT NEVER FORGET, OUR LACK OF FAITH DOES NOT DIMINISH GOD'S POWER.

1

WHY WE FAIL



EVERY STORY

Every great story begins with a crisis and ends with a savior. There is a reason; of all the stories ever told, the best pattern themselves after the Greatest Story Ever Told. Every great story begins with a crisis and ends with a savior, a HERO.

We like the word HERO. Somehow, it brings confidence into our souls. It brings hope: HERO! We like HEROES. We get to relish in our helplessness when we have a HERO. In some way the crisis is no longer our fault; neither the circumstance we are in, nor the salvation we seek. Our HERO rushes in to save the day at the last possible moment. Our HERO soothes our hurts and turns our discouragement into inspiration. We can rely on our HEROES to do everything for us.

We have grand ideals for our HEROES. They must be handsome, strong, charismatic, and most of all extraordinary. Yet, for the most part, HEROES have always been, how shall we put it, ordinary.

Most HEROES are simply ordinary people who lead extraordinary lives. They look like the rest of us. They eat the same foods, go to the same jobs, and wear the same clothes. With few exceptions, most HEROES are just like you and me. They are ordinary people who, by some means, do extraordinary things.

The Old Testament Book of Judges is a book of HEROES. The characters we read about were not supermen (even Sampson was “normal” most of

the time), but they were extraordinary. Yet, even in their extraordinariness, they all had huge, gaping faults. These HEROES were human to the core. Their humanness makes their stories all the more compelling to the rest of us. Ordinary people living extraordinary lives; somehow, if they can be HEROES maybe we can be HEROES too!

The HEROES throughout the Book of Judges show up during the darkest hours. They are regular Joes and Janes who allow God to use them in powerful ways. While everyone else is doing “*whatever seemed right in their own eyes.*” (17:6) these men and women were focusing their eyes on Someone else: God.

WHY BOTHER WITH HEROES?

Why do we need HEROES in the first place? That is the first question the Book of Judges seeks to answer. Long before we encounter any heroic deeds, the stage is set for the participants. It draws a grim picture.

The LORD was with the people of Judah, and they took possession of the hill country. But they failed to drive out the people living in the plains because the people there had iron chariots.? (1:19)

Notice two tragic words near the middle of the verse: “*they failed.*” It is subtle yet powerful, “*they failed.*” The casual reader might drift past the words, but this is the first time that failure had been ascribed to the Israelites since near the beginning of their Promise Land conquest. The LORD had brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land of Canaan. God had promised the Children of Israel complete victory once they arrived. God instructed them to drive out all of the inhabitants of Canaan and assume control of the country.

Jericho, a fortified city that sat at the gateway to the Canaan heartland, marked their first battle. It was an incredible victory. God showed Himself in miraculous ways to prove to Israel that He was with them and they could trust Him. God also told them that everything they found in Jericho was to be given as an offering to Him. In future battles God would allow them to keep the plunder, but the spoils of Jericho were to be set apart solely to Him. It was the *first fruit* of the land.

The battle of Jericho appeared to have gone exactly as instructed, that is until Ai. Ai was the next city in line to be conquered. The little town was no comparison to Jericho and obviously no match for the mighty army of Israel. The conquest of Ai seemed a sure thing, so easy in fact, that consulting God wasn’t necessary. They devised a simple plan and headed out, leaving the majority of their army behind. They would be home for lunch, or so they assumed.

It was a complete rout. Ai’s tiny army chased the Israelites away and in the process killed thirty-six of Israel’s finest soldiers. Israel’s courage evapo-

rated; paralyzing fear had set in. They were utterly humiliated; they had miscalculated their enemy. Worse yet, they had not consulted God and as a result, they had overlooked a huge problem: one of their own had kept some of the spoils of Jericho. They had miscalculated their enemy and had disobeyed God's instructions.

The Israelites had failed! It would be their last failure for some time. The Jericho sin was dealt with and failure was turned into victory as God, once again, had Israel's obedient attention.

After the failure at Ai, Israel compiled a perfect record of victory; until Judges Chapter One.

But they failed to drive out the people living in the plains because the people there had iron chariots. (1:19)

They had snatched defeat from the sure hands of victory. How, no, *why* had they allowed it to happen?

The answer to the how and why gives us a glimpse into why we need HEROES, why we need ordinary people who are willing to live extraordinary lives.

GOD IS LOOKING FOR HEROES BECAUSE SOMETIMES WE FAIL

What caused their failure? Why had the Israelites failed to drive out the people of the plains? Surely, iron chariots were less of a threat than fortified cities such as Jericho!

Why did they fail? They failed because God was not *"with them"*. That was a severe pronouncement; God was not *"with them"*.

Our assumption is that God is always *"with us"*. We even have a Bible verse to quote, *"I will never leave you, nor forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5). If that verse is true, and the Bible is always true, how could it possibly be that God was not *"with them"*?

Notice the passage again. Go back to the beginning of the chapter, read a few verses and you will notice a pattern. *"...the LORD gave them victory..."* (1:4) *"The LORD was with the people..."* (1:19)

The Lord was with the people. Everywhere Israel fought, the Lord was with them. Read the Book of Joshua and you will see the Lord right there, all the way. God was with them as they fought in the mountains. They put their trust in God and He brought them victory. He was with them all the way to the first chapter of Judges. Something changed, however, when they faced the valleys. That something was chariots.

These were no ordinary chariots. These were advanced weapons of warfare. The Canaanites had developed the technique of attaching two chariots together with a pole between them and lances on the poles.

Additional swords would protrude from each axle. These were no ordinary Sunday afternoon riding chariots; these were ultimate shredding machines. They were deadly. It is no wonder the Israelites were afraid.

Afraid? Wait a moment, how could they be afraid? Wasn't God with them? Hadn't God brought them victory in the hill country? Wasn't God just as powerful against chariots as He had been against whatever or whoever they had previously faced? *"If God be for us, who can ever be against us?"* (Romans 8:32)

Afraid? It wasn't so much their fearfulness as it was their faithlessness.

LOSING FAITH

The Israelites lost faith. They had not prayed. They had not sought God's direction. They just laid down their weapons and walked away. They gave up and didn't even bother to field an army. They had lost their dependence on God.

It wasn't that God was not with them; they were not with God! They failed because they had lost faith in God.

PICKING AND CHOOSING

A sure sign of losing faith in God is picking and choosing God's promises.

The Israelites had faith "there", but not "here", in spite of God's promise to be with them through the entire conquest of Canaan. They believed God when they were conquering the hill country, but they refused to believe and obey Him in the valleys.

The problem with picking and choosing which of God's promises to accept is that we pick the easiest promises and ignore the hard ones. We tend to believe only the little or easy promises in the Bible.

We believe God can forgive our sins, but we ignore the promise that He will give us freedom from those same sinful actions if we obey Him.

We believe God can provide for us, but we ignore the promise that He will bless us if we give back to Him His tithes and offerings.

We believe God will heal us when we pray, but we can't come to terms with the need to give up our pride and allow Him to heal a broken relationship.

We believe God loves the world, but we refuse to walk across the street and talk to our neighbors about Jesus.

We love to pick and choose which promises to believe, which commands to obey.

"Whatever God has promised He is able to perform; and if the promise is suitable to my case, I am to grasp it and expect to see it fulfilled."

Our responsibility is to act in obedience based on God's promises.

If the Israelites had shown the same obedient faith in the valley that they had shown in the hill country they would have been victorious. Much later, in Chapter Four, Barak would take on General Sisera who commanded nine-hundred of these chariots. Not only would the Israelites defeat the chariots, they would send Sisera running like a wounded dog. The only difference between “there” and “here” was obedient faith.

The Israelites failed because they had too little faith. Then again, maybe it was the other way around, maybe they had too much faith. They had too much faith in the wrong people. They failed because they had too much faith in themselves. The Israelites had come to believe that the hill victories were due to their own efforts.

We do that a lot. We ask God for help and then we assume all the responsibility and take all of the credit! We actually believe that it is our effort that wins the victories. Somehow, because we have to do our part, we assume that God’s part isn’t much of a part after all!

If the Israelites genuinely believed that they had conquered the hill country all by themselves, they were certainly justified in believing that they were no match for the chariots in the valley.

If you are going to take on the difficulties of life on your own, just assume defeat now and be done with it. If you are going to attempt to live your life by your own power, accept failure; it’s inevitable.

We believe that God helps us to a point; the point at which we can help ourselves. We ask from God and then assume the responsibility for granting our own request. We actually believe the foolish cliché, “God helps those who help themselves.” We ask for a miracle and then rationalize we have to perform it. We forget that it isn’t a miracle if we can do it. Miracles start where we stop. It is when we have passed beyond our own abilities that we enter into God’s.

“Noah didn’t row or steer. Once there was no shore, it was up to God. We need to get away from the shore of our own limitations! Then trust Him.”

Billy Graham said, “One with God is always a majority.”

The Israelites had too much faith in themselves and not enough in God.

We need HEROES. We need ordinary people to live extraordinary lives because such lives are lived trusting God. Too many believers are placing their trust in themselves and settling for ordinary.

Faith is never meant to be temporary, circumstantial or convenient.

**Why do we need HEROES? We need
HEROES because sometimes we fail.**

GENTLY WAITING

And though we may fail, God never does. Our lack of faith does not diminish God's power. He is still able. For whatever His reason, God has chosen to work through ordinary people. For His own purpose, God will wait for us. He will not bully us unto trusting Him; He will gently wait. God's promises and God's power do not change. He is waiting for us to accept them and live in the victory He offers.

The owner of the table lamp stand has several choices. He can either screw a low wattage or a high wattage bulb into its socket. Plug in either and there will be light. The power obtained through the lamp stand is the same no matter which bulb is placed in the socket, only its display will change. Too many Christ-followers are choosing to live low wattage, dimly lit lives when God's power is available to illuminate so much more. It is what we do that allows God's power to shine through us.

God is looking for HEROES because sometimes we fail.

We do not have to act as if God is not there. We can live with the assurance that He is inside us. We do not have to pick and choose God's promises. We can trust that He has not changed; He does not change. God's power is always the same.

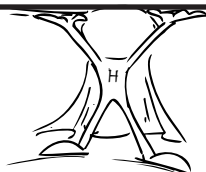
We do not have to put our faith in ourselves. We can trust God and take the risks that in reality are not risks with God on our side.

God is looking for HEROES to trust him in the valleys as well as on the hillsides.

As you approach the chariots in your valley remember that God is the same God who helped you through the last battle. It does not matter that the location has changed. Trust Him. Obey Him. Then, watch for the victory.



HERO SEARCH



GOD WILL USE YOUR FAILURES, IF YOU ARE WILLING TO GIVE THEM UP. YOU CAN BREAK THE SIN CYCLE. AT ANY POINT, YOU CAN STOP IT. YOU CAN GIVE UP YOUR FAILURES AND ALLOW GOD TO USE THEM TO KEEP YOU CLOSE TO HIM.

2

WHEN WE FAIL



“HELP! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!”

There are times when we find ourselves in similar circumstances to Mrs. Fletcher.¹ We need HEROES because “we’ve fallen and we can’t get up!” We need HEROES because sometimes we fall down. We don’t want to fall. We don’t want to fail. It is inevitable, we will stumble. We fail. We fall and we can’t get up.

Depressing, isn’t it? It is an inescapable truth we must accept. Forget the self-help bookshelf at Barnes and Noble. Click right past the positive thinking gurus on your television set. Avoid a Google search at all costs. There will be times when you fail.

It’s not like traffic court. “I’m pleading guilty, Your Honor, but I have an excuse. ‘Guilty with an excuse.’” Failure doesn’t work like that in real life. There are no excuses, at least not any good ones. There are many good reasons, but no good excuses. Failure is failure, with or without an excuse and each failure is accompanied by its own unique consequence.

Now for some good news: there are HEROES. There are HEROES out there who can help us when we fail. There are HEROES who can show us how to be HEROES and how to overcome the consequences of our failure.

WHEN WE NEED A HERO

Inevitably we will fail; then what? What do we do with our failures? The Israelites faced this dilemma at the beginning of the Book of Judges. Joshua, their leader had grown old, but there were still battles to face. For the first time since Ai, they were facing real failure. The consequences of incomplete obedience were starting to hit them hard in the face (and in the valleys).

The first chapter of Judges is the story of failure. Sure, there were minor victories, but the victories were always incomplete. The Israelites never quite finished the job God had called them to complete. Incomplete obedience led to incomplete victory.

The second chapter of Judges is what we used to describe as a “Come to Jesus meeting.” God brought the Israelites face to face with their failure and its consequence.

“And the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim with a message for the Israelites. He told them, “I brought you out of Egypt into this land that I swore to give your ancestors, and I said I would never break my covenant with you. For your part, you were not to make any covenants with the people living in this land; instead, you were to destroy their altars. Why then, have you disobeyed my command? Since you have done this, I will no longer drive out the people living in your land. They will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a constant temptation to you. When the angel of the LORD finished speaking, the Israelites wept loudly. So they called the place “Weeping,” and they offered sacrifices to the LORD.” (2:1-5)

Harsh words, to say the least! That was tough. For the first time in years, all of Israel had gathered in one place to hear God speak. For the first time in years they were going to seriously listen to God. It was to be an exciting time; after all, they were “God’s chosen people”. They were living in the Promised Land, enjoying its benefits.

What should have been a happy, joyful meeting turned out to be anything but joyous or happy. God called Israel together and laid out the big one: You failed Me. You failed yourselves. You have done pretty much everything I told you not to do and, to top it off, you failed to complete the job I gave you. Here is your end of semester report card: FAIL!

God’s words of judgment struck them like a gavel and shook them to their souls. They heard the message: they had failed God. They ended the meeting in tears. They offered “sorry offerings” to God and cried so much that they renamed the place Weeping (Bokim).

Israel could have used a HERO right then, yet, as it turned out, they became the HEROES themselves. At their point of failure, God had refused to give up on them, and as a result, they did not give up on themselves.

"After Joshua sent the people away, each of the tribes left to take possession of the land allotted to them. And the Israelites served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him-those who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel." (2:6-7)

Talk about a turnaround, the Israelites heard the wake up call ringing loudly and they answered it! God had laid out the consequences of their limited obedience (limited obedience is nothing more than disobedience) and they repented. God had turned their failure into a tool to help them give up their failure.

Here is a universal truth: God will use your failure - if you are willing to give it up. Read that again. God will use your failure - if you are willing to give it up.

God is looking for HEROES who will give up their failures.

The Israelites had failed. Now the question was, would they give up that failure or hang on to it? Far too often we hang on to our failures. We fail and we fall. However, instead of learning from our failures, we insist on living in them.² We accept failure as the forgone conclusion instead of seeing it as part of a process. We may fail, but when we do, we certainly don't have to stay in failure mode. The Israelites did not.

GIVING UP OUR FAILURES

God will use your failure if you are willing to give it up.

Giving up your failure means ACCEPTING GOD'S CONSTANT.

"I said I would never break my covenant with you..." (2:1)

God had promised. He had made the promise to Abraham hundreds of years before He reiterated it at Bokim. He had reaffirmed His promise over and over again. These were God's chosen people and He was not leaving them. Yes, they had failed Him. Yes, they were going to forfeit some of the blessings God prepared for them, but they were still His people.

When we fail, we need to remember that God never stops loving us. When we give our lives to Him and accept His forgiveness and eternal life, it's for keeps. God never lets go! God's love is the one constant you can count on. You may fail; God never does.

Giving up your failure means ADMITTING YOUR INCONSISTENCY

As sure as God's consistency is, we need to honestly face our inconsistency. No matter how hard we may try, we mess up. That's not an excuse; it is a reality.

"...Why then did you disobey my command..." (2:2)

One sure way to fail is to assume you never will. We are most likely to lose control when we take on the attitude that we've got it all under control. *"If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth."* (1 John 1:8)

The solution is not to deny, but to confess. *"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."* (1 John 1:9)

Still wish to deny your inconsistency? *"If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts."* (1 John 1:10)

Centuries after God spoke at Bokim His people are still struggling with acceptance.

Giving up also means ASSUMING THE CONSEQUENCES.

Verse three is a tragic statement.

"Since you have done this, I will no longer drive out the people living in your land. They will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a constant temptation to you." (2:3)

That first phrase sends chills all the way to the bones; *"Since you have done this..."* It's hard to hear. I have failed. I have repented and sought God's forgiveness. I have been granted forgiveness, but still, I must face the consequences of my sins. Wounds may heal; scars remain. The limp of the leg from fighting God all night lasts for a lifetime (Genesis 32:30-31).

The reason it's called sin is because sin hurts. Sin always damages.

God was not just going through the motions for practice. His commands to drive out the Canaanites, destroy their altars to false gods, and refuse to make alliances with the enemy; each of those commands was for Israel's own safety. The Canaanites were dangerous, wicked people; they were living under a death sentence and Israel was minimizing their threat. The

Israelites were living with death row inmates and treating them like misdemeanor parolees.

God had commanded that Israel wipe out the wickedness of the Canaanites and they had failed to complete the task. Now the people and things they assumed didn't matter, the things they overlooked as harmless or too hard to deal with, were going to cripple them and be a constant source of temptation. Thorns and temptations do not kill, they handicap. You can pull thorns out. You can overcome temptation.

However, if you don't deal with sin, sin will deal with you; that's the consequence of sin. You may assume sin is fun; it ultimately destroys.

You must accept God's Constant. He will never give up on you! You have to admit your inconsistency. Don't assume you won't. And, you have to assume the consequences; even forgiven sin hurts.

Giving up ultimately means AVOIDING THE CYCLE.

A sad reality settles in after verse seven; one that we often overlook.

*"another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD..."
(2:10)*

Carved into verse ten is the ultimate consequence of forgetting.

"Then the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight and worshipped the images of Baal...Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, bringing them defeat, just as he promised. And the people were very distressed. Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves to other gods, bowing down to them. How quickly they turned away..." (2:10-17)

Do you see the cycle? They turn away from God and wallow in sin. They reap the consequences of their sin and failure. In distress they cry out to God who sends them a HERO to deliver them, but before long they are right back where they started, turning away again. It is a vicious cycle, a downward spiral.

But get this, you can break the cycle! At any point, you can stop it. You can give up your failures and allow God to use them to keep you close to Him.

Accept that He won't fail you. You can trust Him enough to obey Him. Admit your inconsistency. Don't assume you can go it alone. Assume the consequences and realize that God uses them to teach and test you. And then, avoid the cycle; don't go far down that path. Don't go down that path at all.



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1. Mrs Fletcher was the helpless woman who called LifeAlert in the 1987 television ads
 - 2 Further reading on learning from your failures, see John Maxwell's Failing Forward, Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success. Thomas Nelson. ©2000

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