



What Makes God Great—The First Trait

Years ago I broke my leg in seven places skiing. They had to put a metal rod through the main shin bone to hold it together, screwing it in place with four screws. With a cast on my leg, for several weeks I was wheelchair bound. Our family lived on the campus of a middle school in a mobile home and part of the responsibility we had in living there was to each night go around the school, check to make sure all the classroom doors were locked and make sure no one was vandalizing the school or creating a problem on campus. The first week after my surgery, my children wanted to go around the school with me and push my wheelchair. It was in a strange way, a great time of bonding. As we started out, I heard a lot of noise out on the grass field, and it sounded like a group was there partying. I could see perhaps eight to ten young adults blaring their music and talking loudly. It looked like they were drinking and so I began to approach the group with my oldest son pushing my wheelchair. He was about ten at the time and our second son and preschool daughter were with me. Assessing the situation, I realized this might not go well because of how old the group was and it looked like they were gang members. I told the kids to leave and go home and ask their mom to call the police but Jacob, my oldest son refused to leave me. He pushed me toward them and without warning they surrounded us, men and young women. I told the group they had to go as they were too noisy and clearly they were drinking. Several of the guys started to threaten me, wanting to look tough in front of the girls. As I tried to get my son to run off, he refused to leave me, standing behind my wheelchair holding the handles so he could push me wherever I needed to go. My son's courage astounded me. For a few minutes it looked pretty bad.

We find examples of courage throughout the Bible. King Saul and the army of Israel was in a precarious situation. Only six hundred Jewish soldiers, none of whom had swords, faced a great army of well-armed Philistines, more, the Bible says than there is "sand on the seashore". Jonathan, the son of King Saul didn't want to wait for his dad to decide what he would do and so he left with his servant and approached a group of twenty Philistine soldiers in a fight to the death. With just his armor bearer servant behind him, Jonathan boldly attacked the Philistines, not fearing for his life but eager to defend his country. **In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.** (1 Samuel 14: 14 NIV) The courage of the widow Ruth is a great example to us. She left her homeland to go with her mother-in-law Naomi in Naomi's return to her native Israel. Not knowing the language, the customs or anyone there, Ruth bravely moved to Bethlehem, despite Naomi arguing that she would be better off staying in Moab. **"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.** (Ruth 1:15-18 NIV)

We could mention David and his courage facing Goliath, Deborah leading the Israelites against the vast armies of the Canaanites, Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Mary Magdalene risking her life to go to the tomb of Jesus or John the Baptist preaching against the sin of the Jewish religious leaders and the King of Israel. I recently read of a surprising account of courage in nature. The female wood duck lays her eggs high in the hollow of a tree forty to a hundred feet from the ground. As the ducklings are developing in the eggs, the mother duck listens for the sound of the ducklings peeping inside. She begins to communicate with them even while they are still in the eggs, getting them used to the sound of her voice. Then, just after they peck their way out of the shell, the mother duck flies down to the ground and calls for each of them, just a day old, to jump from the nest to the earth below. Their wings

undeveloped and unable to help, with just the down covering them as protection against the fall, they bravely take the leap. By way of comparison, it would be like one of us jumping from a height of four hundred feet to the ground. Those ducklings who don't trust their mother or are afraid to jump out of the nest will die there. The only way for them to survive is to courageously take the leap and risk all to start their new lives.

For the next few weeks, we are going to ask the question, "What makes God great?" Let's consider the courage of God. It is understandable if it is hard for you to think of the Lord as courageous given all His power. Take note though of what the Bible has to say of Jesus. **Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.** (Hebrews 4: 14-15 NIV) We are not going to argue the case of Jesus being God. He is God. That being said, this passage tells us that Jesus faced every sort of test we do. He encountered every type of trial, possible disastrous outcome, potential for ruin we also face. Don't get tripped up by the use of the verb "tempted". It is just as well translated tested, put to trial, given hardships.

What does this tell you? God has been up against it and faced real danger, real risk. Consider the time Jesus read from the scripture in His hometown and insisted that God often chose non-Jews over Jews to show His power and kindness because Jews many times didn't love God or believe in Him. Jesus knew full well this would infuriate the Jews there and He told them anyway. **All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.** (Luke 4: 28-30 NIV) How about when Jesus announced to the Jewish teachers of the Law that He was "I AM", He was God? **"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.** (John 8: 58-59 NIV) Now don't be fooled into thinking Jesus acted cowardly by slipping away from the Jews trying to kill Him. He was not afraid of death. It just wasn't yet Jesus' time to die and He got away from them so He could die in the right way as spelled out in Scripture.

When we consider the courage of God, we have to take note of this often forgotten detail. Jesus became born of a virgin knowing full well the fate awaiting Him. The prophets were made aware of what was coming. **I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.** (Isaiah 50: 6 NIV) **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** (Isaiah 53: 5 NIV) **Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.** (Psalm 22: 16-18 NIV) Knowing in advance how painfully He would be beaten and crucified, God made the call to die for our sins. Notice the prophecy of Zechariah, some four hundred years before Jesus was born. **"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son...On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."** (Zechariah 12: 10-11, 13: 1 NIV) Let us never forget the courage of our Lord as He made His way to Jerusalem, well aware of what awaited Him. Lashings that tore His back and legs and chest apart. Being spit upon and cursed by those He came to save from their sins. His beard pulled from His face, the beatings, the ridicule of being hung naked upon the cross, the crown of thorns tearing apart His scalp, the spikes driven through His wrists and feet. Our God, the One true Lord is a God of courage. Because He is, He is the God of Salvation.