

Hercules: From Laborer to Legend

How would you like being chased by two poisonous snakes? How would you like having your dad's wife the one who sent them to kill you? How would you like killing them with your bare hands? And how would you like doing that when you were still a baby? Well, that was the dilemma that Hercules was faced with when he was born. Of course, since he was so strong, smart, and patient, he had no problem strangling both snakes and showing them to Queen Hera (Zeus's wife, the one who sent them). Later in his life, Hercules killed his family in a fit of rage that Hera had forced upon him. For his wrong doings, Hercules was sent to perform twelve seemingly impossible labors by his cousin Eurystheus in order to be forgiven (Pontikis Hercules). Before these labors, Hercules was a normal guy (a very strong normal guy)! But Hercules reached his Hero status after completing the labors. So what did Hercules show in these labors to propel him to legend status? Hercules's labors demonstrated his Brute strength, clever wisdom, and willful perseverance.

Hercules strength was his most famous attribute, and it aided him greatly on his way to completing all of his labors. When someone or something is strong or big, it's "Herculean." Hercules demonstrated strength in almost all of his labors. One in particular, was the labor of the Nemean lion. Since no weapons could penetrate its skin, Hercules had to strangle it with his bare hands (Tufts Lion). A Lion, with his bare hands! The seventh labor involved Hercules seizing a bull from King Minos. Hercules caught the bull, once again with his bare hands, and carried it all the way back to his ship. Then he sailed back to show Eurystheus (Tufts Bull). The labor that showed Hercules's brawn the most though, was the twelfth labor. In his final task, Hercules was required to bring back Cerberus, the three headed dog, from the underworld. And the hardest part was that he could not use any weapons. Hercules eventually showcased his incredible strength and carried an enraged monster up to the surface (Tufts Cerberus). While strength did help Hercules complete his labors, it was sometimes not enough. That's when Hercules had to resort to his overlooked wisdom.

When Hercules was out of options, he could always turn to his clever smarts. In some cases, his wisdom saved his life. When Hercules was forced to kill a creature with nine heads, it seemed a rather simple task compared to some of his others. Hercules chopped off each head, and to his utter dismay, they all grew back. He had to come up with a way to keep the heads from reappearing. So, he and Iolaus (Hercules's cousin) would hold a torch to the neck of the hydra, sear the wound shut, and the heads were unable to grow back (Cotterell 176). He used his brain in many other labors too, including "King Augeas's stables". When Hercules told King Augeas he could clear out his stables in one day, the king offered him a tenth of all his cattle. Hercules, excited for his reward, and to be able to complete another labor, cut holes in each end of the stable. He then dug a canal leading to the stable from the river. When the water came down the trench, it swept through the stables, clearing out everything in its path (Cotterell 176). The stables were left spotless thanks to a clever idea. Perhaps the toughest labor Hercules faced was "Hesperides Apples." Hercules was ordered to fetch the golden apples of Hesperides from a

secret location. He was told that Atlas would have to find them and bring them back to him, because only he knew where they were. So Hercules volunteered to hold up the sky for Atlas while he went to retrieve the apples. When Atlas returned, he decided he didn't want to take the sky back from Hercules, because he liked not having the burden. Hercules was of course outraged, but maintained his composure. He asked Atlas if he would take the sky back just for a second because he had an itch on his back. When Atlas took the sky back, Hercules stole the apples and ran off, once again demonstrating his smart trickery (Tufts Apples). Sometimes though, when Hercules's wisdom couldn't complete a labor, it just took pure patience and perseverance.

Hercules's perseverance is one of Hercules most important attributes, but also much forgotten. He was a very patient and determined hero. While hunting the Erymanthian bore, for his fourth labor, Hercules chased it around for thirty days! Until he finally trapped, killed, and brought it back to Eurystheus (Jimmy Hercules). Thirty days is nothing compared to how long it took Hercules to catch "The Hind of Ceryneia". This was by far his longest hunt. He was not allowed to kill the deer because it was Diana's (queen of hunting) pet. Hercules chased it around trying to capture it for over a year! He finally saw it escaping and had no choice but to shoot it. Diana was furious, and took the deer back from Hercules. Later, when she found out about Hercules's labors, she forgave him, healed the deer's wounds, and let him take it to show Eurystheus (Cotterell 177). After completing all of his labors, Hercules was very relieved. When he traveled to Eurystheus to tell him that he had finished, Eurystheus ordered him to do two additional labors. His reasoning was that labors two and five (the Hydra and clearing the stables) did not count, since Hercules had received help and a reward. Hercules could've told Eurystheus no, but he persevered through two more terrible labors, and was forgiven for killing his family (Tufts Labors).

Hercules wouldn't have been able to complete all of the "impossible" labors had it not been for his three key attributes. His strength was obvious, but Hercules's wisdom and patience were just as important. Strangling a mouse would be easy, but strangling a lion with bare hands would be impossible. Cleaning your room is a simple task, but clearing cow manure out of tons of cow stables is unthinkable. Going out to find your runaway dog is relatively easy, but chasing a deer around for a year in the mountains would just plain suck. From Hercules's birth, he has been doing unthinkable things that by today's standard would almost seem unethical. As a baby, strangling poisonous snakes that came to kill him was the start of a hard, strenuous life. And is it really that hard comprehend that this guy pulled through? After all, it is Hercules, the myth of all myths, the hero of all heroes, and the legend of all legends.

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