

The Path To Magnificence

The Father Will Never Leave or Forsake

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Last month Nancy and I watched an old movie called *The Rack*. It was the compelling story of a decorated war hero, Captain Ed Hall, played by Paul Newman, who was returning to the United States in 1953 after two years in a Korean prisoner of war camp.

His plane landed at Travis Air force base in California, where his father, Colonel Ed Hall, Sr. and his sister-in-law, the widow of his younger brother Pete, an officer who been killed in the War, were waiting to greet him. Unfortunately, he was carried off the plane on a stretcher, and even though he saw them, he did not acknowledge them and was immediately taken away by ambulance to a Military hospital.

After a military psychiatrist interviews him, we see that he is very trepid in his responses from suffering at the hands of his Chinese captors and he can only admit a fear of going home.

There then follows a very awkward reunion at the hospital, as his dead brother's wife attempts to show him some kindly affection, while his father, a distinguished career officer, seems very uncomfortable and unable to express any warm feelings toward his son. Although at one point Paul Newman perks up a bit in his wheel chair, thinking that his father wanted to embrace him, as his father tells him, "I'm so proud of you! Do you know what I feel like doing if it was not for all these people around us?" only to be followed by the words, "I would salute you!" Paul Newman then sinks back in his wheelchair and back into his downcast disposition.

The next scene shows him timidly wheeling himself into a semi-darkened room where a number of other soldiers in hospital gowns and robes have assembled to watch a comedy movie. As he is sitting there and finally laughs a little at the film, someone sneaks in behind him and throws a faux noose over his neck with a sign on it that reads, "TRAITOR"!

We find out later that the government has decided to prosecute him for conspiring with the enemy while in the prison camp because of testimony from an overwhelming number of eye witnesses, even though he had been a heroic and much decorated soldier in combat, receiving promotions and even the silver star for his valor!

He is presented with the charges against him by a major who has been assigned the

duty to reluctantly prosecute him. He tells the major he understands the charges, will not fight them and is going to tell his father about them as soon as he gets home from the hospital that evening. The major advises him of his rights and then tells him he needs to fight it, to tell his side of the story and that a fine military attorney had been appointed to defend him.

Racked with guilt, Captain Hall goes home to tell his father of the shame that he was bringing on himself and by extension his distinguished father and his younger dead brother. The problem is when he arrives at home there is a surprise celebration waiting for him, which his father had arranged because of his heroism in combat. He has no time to tell his father the truth and after enduring the party and the backslapping accolades from all those in attendance, he asks to be excused and go to bed.

After the party is over, a long time friend of his father, Colonel Dudley, shows up at the house with the intention of consoling his long time comrade in arms over the shame of his son's charges, not realizing that Colonel Hall does not know about the "collaborating with the enemy" charges.

In a rage the father rushes up the stairs to his son's bedroom, wakes him and demands to know if it is true. As Captain Hall tries to defend his actions, his father screams at him, "Why did not you die and Pete come home!"

At this he leaves the house and checks into a hotel, and by the following morning he had decided he is just going to plead guilty and get it over. At this point a Lt. Colonel shows up at his door and introduces himself as the man who had been appointed to defend him. He asks him to explain what happened and upon listening to his side of the case, he tells him he needed to plead not guilty and get his story out there.

When the trial starts his father refuses to be there or even look at his son, but his sister-in-law is there to support him. The first day's testimony is damning! First an enlisted man testifies that Captain hall had threatened and slapped a soldier in the camp and that he gave the other prisoners a speech in which he stated it gave him "most honorable happiness and joy" to lecture the other soldiers on "being nice to the Chinese." Another non-commissioned officer testified that Captain Hall tried to get the other prisoners to sign surrender papers that he had already signed.

This same officer, though, under cross examination admitted that Captain Hall had disappeared from the camp for 4 months after his lecture, only to return in such an altered state that he could only compare it to what he had personally seen liberated from the death camp at Dachau at the end of WW II!

The next testimony was probably the worst, as a fellow prisoner, Captain Miller explained that Captain Hall had informed the Chinese about an escape attempt that he and some others were going to make and in the attempt some were killed and Captain Miller was taken and tortured, strung up by his arms and questioned as the guards put out there cigarettes on his stomach and chest. He opened his shirt and revealed the horrible scarring from the brutal interrogation, at which point everyone gasped in horror by the sight, including Captain Hall.

Again torn with guilt Captain Hall wanted to just plead guilty and quit but his sister-in-law knew he could not have done those things without extraordinarily awful circumstances and she convinced him to keep going. She also convinced her father-in-law to attend the trial.

The next day, with Colonel Hall in attendance, the defense attorney put Captain Hall on the stand to tell his story.

Upon establishing the fact of his character in battle, accomplishing heroic feats in face of almost insurmountable odds, his attorney asked him to explain the conditions of his captivity.

Captain Hall explained on the march to the camp the Chinese ordered prisoners to bury anyone who slowed their progress, dead or wounded, and when the American soldiers resisted they were shot. He personally carried a wounded soldier four days, in spite of his own injuries, so the soldier would not be killed.

He then explained the incident with slapping the enlisted man occurred because, after they had separated, the officers and enlisted men were put into different barracks, he heard that the enlisted men, although they had the same food and conditions, were dying from despair. In an effort to save his men, he snuck over to their barracks and he threatened the soldiers to rally them from their apathy.

He explained that he agreed to the lecture as a way of returning to his men and make fun of their captors with his tongue in cheek comments like, "most honorable happiness and joy" and that his insincerity would give the men hope! For this the Chinese took him away and put him in solitary confinement for 4 months in a dark wet cellar, living in his own excrement while they tried to get him to sign surrender leaflets.

During this time his captors made him write daily autobiographies and sign them. At first he wrote just lies but as the time went by and he became more worn down he started mixing the truth of his life in with the fiction that he had been writing and more of the

truth came out each day. The Chinese began to recognize the truth as he wrote of how lonely he had been as a child after his mother had died and his father was off on assignments for the military. When he wrote that, because of this, most of the time he and his younger brother Pete felt all they had was each other, the Chinese produced a letter that his father had written to him telling him of his brother's death!

They then told him unless he signed surrender leaflets he would be permanently kept in that cell, never to see anybody again. After a time the painful agony of loneliness, which had plagued him from childhood, was more than he thought he could bear and he signed their leaflets.

One of the papers he signed was also the details of Captain Miller's escape attempt, even though that escape and its planning all took place when he was in the 4 months of solitary confinement.

The prosecuting attorney on cross examination asked Captain Hall if he thought he had truly reached his breaking point of endurable anguish or if he merely feared it. To which he replied he probably had not reached his breaking point but just that he feared it.

The court found him guilty of collaboration the following day because he ignored the simple rule of repeating, "Name, rank, and serial number," and he gave them an opening!

The court then asked Captain Hall if he would like to say anything on his behalf, as to mitigating circumstances. He took the stand and proceeded to tell them that upon reading of his testimony in the newspaper, Captain Miller, (the one who had been tortured) realized the extent of Captain Hall's own hell, which he had been through, and had come to see him the night before and encourage him. As they talked, Captain Miller said each man comes to the point in his life where you must make a choice; each path leads in a different direction but its at those times that the right path leads to magnificence!

Brethren I gave you this rather lengthy summary of a fictional account of real life human anxiety, suffering, and guilt, because I wanted to give you a different perspective on what all of us are going through at different points in our lives.

There are a number of things within this story from which we can draw clear analogies to our own life and circumstances.

1. The times when we have been proven heroic in our battles and succeeded.

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2. The times when we started out valiantly overcoming but ended up allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by the adversity, sometimes not even the actual event but just by fear of what could happen.
3. The times when the guilt associated with our failure to live up to expectation made us want to quit and run away and hide.
4. The times when we failed to stick to the most basic rules of engagement from our commander and allowed the enemy to insidiously work his way into a better position to overcome us.

Each one of these lessons could be the subject of this sermon today, but the one I would like to concentrate on is allowing the enemy to convince you that you stand alone in your trials and you have no hope!

Please turn with me to the book of Job. I want to begin by reading what a heroic figure Job was, according to the most important evaluation that could ever be made by someone.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.

In this very first verse we see the heroic credentials of a man who had valiantly fought the battle of human life under God's authority. God, Himself, reaffirms the evidences of Job's stalwart life in verse 8, by adding, "there is none like him in the earth."

Job 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

He was perfect and upright, he was one that feared God and eschewed evil! He was only human, just as we are, so his perfection referenced here, was not the same as the completeness, which is only attained in the resurrection, but being perfect here, means he was undefiled, or free from the corruption and blemish of this world's way of doing things.

Next we are told he was upright, and probably the best way to define that word is by showing you how it is used in a couple of other places. In Exodus 15 God told Israel, and by extension, all who would do likewise,

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Exodus 15:26 "If you diligently heed the voice of the LOORD your God and do what is right [or upright] in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LOORD who heals you."

Again this same word, upright, is used in I Kings 15 when recounting God's promise explaining why a descendant of David would continue to reign in Judah.

I Kings 15:5 Because David did what was right [upright] in the eyes of the LOORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

Job, as with David, was not absolutely perfect, or upright in doing things as God, Himself would, but he did everything right, as far as God had given him the understanding to do!

Now concerning Job's fear of God, Proverbs 8:13 tells us that, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil," and this evil includes pride, arrogance, and a rebellious way (all the most significant traits of Satan and his demons). And not only did Job hate evil but he actively made certain it was removed from his presence both in mind and body!

Because of all these attributes, God holds Job up for an examination, in a class all his own, "Consider my servant Job, there is none like him in the earth!" We also need to consider this tower of human strength and learn the lessons from him. It is for this purpose that God put Job's life on display in His holy word! This is not merely some Silver Star winner whose daring exploits are rewarded by medals and promotion, as Captain Hall, but someone, of whom God says, none are like him! Then, as we all know, even in the depths of all the trials that God allowed Satan to press on him, the destruction of his family, his wealth, and his reputation, he would not waiver.

Following the horrible destruction of those he loved, we read,

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LOORD gave, and the LOORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LOORD." In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Through these trials God has seen what He expected to see.

Job 2:3 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

Or as the *Moffat Version* translated a portion of that last sentence, "He still holds to his loyalty. It was idle of you to entice me to undo him."

You all know what happened to Job from here, as God allowed Satan to do everything to him but kill him. Reading then in verses 9 and 10,

Job 2:9-10 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

From verse 7 on through the rest of the book Satan is no longer seen. But brethren, even though Satan is not overtly a central figure in the rest of the book (remember God told him he could do whatever he wanted to Job, short of killing him), you see his pernicious spirit stirring up the thoughts of all the active players throughout. Always remember that Satan is the accuser of the brethren.

This wonderful book of Job, in fact the whole Bible, is God's living, breathing instruction manual to us regarding the tactics of the enemy, what he will do and what our responses must be!

With this in mind I want you to notice something in chapter 19, a major tactic of the enemy to destroy us as we go through our own trials—thinking we are standing alone.

Please turn to chapter 19 and I will be reading this from *The Good News Translation* because I think it more clearly speaks in our language of today some things we may have thought ourselves when embedded in a severe trial, and under interrogation from the enemy!

Job 19:2-21 Why do you keep tormenting me with words? Time after time you insult me and show no shame for the way you abuse me. Even if I have

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done wrong, how does that hurt you? You think you are better than I am, and regard my troubles as proof of my guilt. Can't you see it is God who has done this? He has set a trap to catch me. I protest his violence, but no one is listening; no one hears my cry for justice. God has blocked the way, and I can't get through; he has hidden my path in darkness. He has taken away all my wealth and destroyed my reputation. He batters me from every side. He uproots my hope and leaves me to wither and die. God is angry and rages against me; he treats me like his worst enemy. He sends his army to attack me; they dig trenches and lay siege to my tent. God has made my own family forsake me; I am a stranger to those who knew me; my relatives and friends are gone. Those who were guests in my house have forgotten me; my servant women treat me like a stranger and a foreigner. When I call a servant, he doesn't answer—even when I beg him to help me. My wife can't stand the smell of my breath, and my own brothers won't come near me. Children despise me and laugh when they see me. My closest friends look at me with disgust; those I loved most have turned against me. My skin hangs loose on my bones; I have barely escaped with my life. You are my friends! Take pity on me! The hand of God has struck me down.

There are many things to be learned from this book regarding our thoughts and actions within our own trials and the trials of others, but the one in particular I would like for you to see, here, is that Satan will make you feel isolated and alone, even to the point of thinking that God has abandoned you! This is his M O [modus operandi] and he will use it!

As you read the last chapters of the book, we, and Job, come to see that God was never far away from him during his trial. God, in His reproof to Job gives evidence that He knew everything that was going on; and in spite of what Job and his friends had to say, the bottom line is that He knows better than even an upright man, perfect and without human peer, what is going to make everything work for the good of His plans and purpose, broadly and individually. Even someone as innocent and upright as Job has no right to question the One who knows exactly what is right in each situation.

Through Job's life and trials, God was blessing all men with a working model to understand the attacks of the enemy and what kind of responses, right and wrong, they will elicit. He also blessed upright Job with the opportunity to develop a more binding relationship with God, not merely submitting to His sovereignty but knowing why it could be no other way.

Let us look at just a few scriptures that verify the promises God has made to us about always being there and why we should never feel that He has left us alone! These are scriptures you all know, but it is important to keep God's promises in the front of our minds. We will be looking at God's promise not to forsake his people within the bounds of the responsibilities He lays out for those He has summoned into His presence!

We will start with Deuteronomy 31.

Deuteronomy 31:1-6 Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

The word translated "forsake" is azab (ah-zahb'), and it means forsake, abandon, leave behind or leave alone. God promises never to forsake, abandon, leave behind or leave alone! But there are conditions like, "Do all the commandments I have commanded you," (walking upright as we saw Job and David doing), and, "Be strong and of good courage."

"Be strong" is "chazaq" (khaw-zahk'), and it means be strong, be constant, be fastened upon, and prevail!

"Be of good courage" is "amats" (ah-mahts), and it means steadfastly minded, make oneself alert, strengthen ones' self, and harden one's mind! So God's promise is to never leave us alone as long as we are constant and steadfastly minded, with the commandments He has commanded us to do, hardened into our minds.

Now, go over a few pages to Joshua 1. Here again, God gives the same assurance, with the same qualifications.

Joshua 1:5-7 "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your

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life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

Here again, God gives the same assurance with the same qualifications. This promise from God will not be broken. He means exactly what He says.

Please turn with me to I Samuel 12 where we will see that for His very name's sake God will not abandon His people, even though they may stumble, just so long as they turn back to Him.

I Samuel 12:22-24 [Samuel is speaking] "For the LOORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LOORD to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LOORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the LOORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.

Here the people had foolishly demanded a king, as the other nations, and even in this, God tells them through Samuel that He will not forsake those whom He has chosen for His name's sake. However, they must still fear Him and serve him in truth with all their hearts. They must be steadfastly minded in the truth of God's word.

Now I want to use this next scripture as a segue for us regarding the awesome guarantees God has given to us in our trials today. Please turn with me to I Kings 6. This is the description of the incredible physical temple that God had Solomon build for Him. However, as we read a couple of verses here in chapter 6, I would like you to remember what God tells us through Isaiah,

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the LOORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LOORD. But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Now reading I Kings 6.

I Kings 6:11-13 Then the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying: "Concerning this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel."

By all accounts here was one of the most incredible awesome structure that has ever been built. It was to be the place for God to dwell with His people and yet here in the middle of the description God list His real prerequisites for the building that will insure His people will never walk alone!

With these things hardened in your mind and your calling within the life of Jesus Christ, you need never fear the threat of being alone like Satan uses in trials to make you stumble and fall!

Please turn with me to Hebrews 13.

Hebrews 13:1-6 Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also. Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Now I would like to read that passage again from the Amplified Bible because it gives a better sense of what the original Greek intended.

Hebrews 13:1-5 (Amplified Version) Let love for your fellow believers continue and be a fixed practice with you—never let it fail. Do not forget, nor neglect, nor refuse to extend hospitality to strangers in the brotherhood—being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously, for through it some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as

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if you were their fellow prisoner, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are liable to bodily sufferings. Let marriage be held in honor—esteemed worthy, precious, of great price, and especially dear—in all things. And thus let the marriage bed be undefiled—kept honored—for God will judge and punish the unchaste—all guilty of sexual vice—and adulterous. Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money, including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions, and be satisfied with your present circumstances, and with what you have; for He [God] Himself has said, "I will not in any way fail you, nor give you up, nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake, nor let you down, nor relax My hold on you! Assuredly not!

God has extended His promise of never leaving and forsaking those in the midst of a trial to the responsibility of the entire body of Christ. As God tells us in these verses, we are now part of the One who will never leave or forsake, as verse 4 indicates, and it is the loving duty of all within the body of Christ to stand with those within the prison of trials as if we were their fellow prisoner. Even though separated by distance and circumstances we now stand together within the Body before the throne of the Father!

I Corinthians 12:25-27 That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

At the end of Captain Hall's court martial, his defense attorney gave the closing arguments on his client's behalf. In argument statement he gave evidence that showed that the Communists believed the prisoners underestimated their ability to survive because they underestimated themselves. He went on to say that Captain Hall was broken on the "rack" of his own loneliness because the leadership in the United States left their men uninspired about democracy, uniformed about the Communist tactics, and unprepared for the limits of mental anguish.

Brethren, God has not left us uninspired about the family of God and our places within it. He has not left us floundering around, underestimating our ability to survive and be broken on the "rack" of loneliness, or any other tactic Satan may use to break us. He has not left us uninformed about the M O of our enemy and unprepared for the limits of mental anguish.

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Even now, brethren, as things get worse, God continues to make His truth clearer to us; as he has inspired the ministry over the last few months to show us more clearly that the house which He is building is a living thing that moves together as the body of His Son, and we are now fully functioning members of that house; not yet totally complete but functioning with clear cut choices to make. It is our responsibility to make those choices now that will continue to lead to magnificence.

Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ! (Philippians 1:6) God will never, never, never, leave nor forsake us! (Hebrews 13:5)

Nor should we one another! This is our road to magnificence!