

## Noble Subjects

# A Scarce Commodity

As a hard core road warrior, I never cease to be amazed at travelers who cannot plan ahead for the realities of what a trip will involve. I watch people arrive at the security checkpoint with a remarkable amount of metal jewelry which all needs to be taken off, slowing down the flow.

Did they think of that when they got dressed?

Individuals stand in line waiting to board, but when they arrived at the kiosk, they act quite put out that they have to juggle their three bags, McDonald's lunch and cold drink while they dig into their wallet to find their boarding pass, which isn't there after all.

I watch people bring oversized suitcases on board and act totally mystified that the overhead compartment is not made of elastic.

These are areas of gross irresponsibility in travellers who are so absorbed in themselves and in the emotions of the moment that they cannot envision how their inaction at this moment is going to negatively impact them (or others) later.

In the Body of Christ, however, there is a more subtle problem of lack of planning which has far deeper consequences. This is the issue of preparing our spirit, soul and body for what is coming down the road.

How do we know what is coming toward us in six weeks or six years? Well . . . sometimes it is almost obvious. The things some believers are surprised by mystifies me. Everyone around them saw it coming!

However, there are a lot of things which we cannot reasonably be expected to anticipate and prepare for. But God certainly can anticipate every little thing that is coming our way, and He is deeply committed to preparing us for it, if we would just quit fighting Him.

Here is a simple story.

There was a man who prepared himself to be an aviation mechanic on the mission field. For those of you who know that field, it represents a formidable amount of fierce intentionality to allocate the money, time and effort to learn the trade and get the necessary certifications.



He did. And he raised support, applied for a visa for himself and his family, sold their house, shipped their key resources ahead, then he ran into a road block with the visa which was mysteriously held up for months.

He was frustrated and waged holy war against the devil who was blocking the work of God. Eventually the delay got so long he had to get a temporary job. A friend of his had a shop that repaired small appliances and gave him a boring job.

There was a particular stainless steel ring on one model of blenders that kept breaking. The friend taught the missionary how to weld stainless steel, and he sat at the work bench, doing boring work, waiting for life to begin on the mission field.

Eventually he got the visa, bought the tickets and arrived joyously on the field. The mission air station was at a remote location, so after clearing customs in the big city, they boarded a small mission plane for the last lap.

The station director met him excitedly, and as they walked from the plane to the hanger, the director asked him anxiously, "Is there any chance in the world you know how to weld stainless steel? We have three plane engines down because no one here knows how to do one particular repair."

Suddenly, all of that time spent raging at the devil took on a very different color.

God knew the future.

I experienced the same thing in a different key of music during my plumbing years. I lost money time and again through myriad scams and schemes. Since back then I had a very crude reconciliation model, I spent endless hours after every raw deal studying every aspect of the scam so that I would never get burned that way again. (Translation: I made a lot of inner vows those days).

Unfortunately, my nursing and rehearsing the pain and shame was pretty pointless back then because the devil had a seemingly endless series of scams to run on me.

However, this was God's school for getting the green off me. While it was painful, and while I handled it very badly, in the end, it was a carefully choreographed season where God prepared me for the business work and religious politics of today.

Time and again I will get a seemingly innocuous phone call or e-mail, and I will get that Holy Spirit nudge. I will stall on the conversation while I hurriedly spin through the mental Rolodex to the plumbing job that seems to have some similarity to the current conversation. There God highlights the scam and allows me to ask the right questions about this situation, defusing many time wasting propositions.



In the case of the missionary mechanic, God delayed him to teach him a technical skill. In my case, God cherry picked the most crooked customers my bosses had in order to teach me some fraud detection skills.

In both cases, we did not see God's purposes and therefore we fought and complained and blamed the enemy without seeing what God was doing for our good.

Now here is the area that most believers don't have a shred of theology for. Do you realize that at times God allows you to endure great pain in order to prepare you for a future where you have to endure more pain - successfully?

Let's take Elijah. This man was a blazing firebrand. He had a passion to take down Baal and had a laser focus. God used him for about five minutes to start the ball rolling on the restoration of righteous worship in Israel.

Then he got sent to isolation by the Brook Cherith.

Now Scripture does not say what God's motives were, nor whether Elijah leaned into the situation. What follows is utterly my extrapolation of the situation. You weigh it for yourself and determine whether there is any merit in it.

I think God's purpose in the time of isolation, where he could not even see another human being long enough to buy some food, was to teach him to meet all of his emotional needs from God.

Now most of us do a half way decent job of getting our spiritual needs met by God, but not too many people are skilled in filling their soul tank from their relationship with God. After a while, there just weren't any more prayers in Elijah, and he couldn't talk to the rocks and the ravens anymore, so he was really invited by God to learn to have fun, to be a friend and to be deeply emotionally grounded in God through that experience.

And then, God graduated him to the next grade. He went as a foreign man to Zarephath and moved in with the local widow. Don't you think that created a world of gossip? AND THEN the town became aware that every since 'that Hebrew' had moved in with Widow Jones, she had not been shopping at all, which invited the conclusion that he was a thief and was systematically pilfering the town.

I doubt that the hot tempered, crusty Hebrew man was at all loved in Zarephath.

Were there no hungry couples in town that he could have lived with and done a miracle for? Of course there were. So why the widow? Why ruin Elijah's reputation when he was a man of God?

Is it possible that God wanted to teach him how to remain emotionally grounded in the midst of a firestorm of accusation, shunning and hostility?



So here is the punch line.

My opinion is that Elijah was so focused on the spiritual fire burning in his inner man, that he did as little as he could to master the two lessons God was trying to teach him.

When the big day came, his spirit was gloriously in form, ready to create THE power encounter of the ages - the reference point for all future power encounters!

His soul was ill prepared for the situation. When Jezebel fired off her salvo, he crumbled, dumped his servant and went into suicidal depression.

God met him at Mt. Horeb and said, in effect, "Well, I tried to prepare you, but you were so busy being spiritual you refused to go to class for soul stuff. And now things are moving so fast, I cannot afford to take another three years to get you grounded in me. So, I am sending you a life giving, big spirited helper, Elisha, to provide enough emotional support to get you through the rest of your assignments."

What would the story have looked like if Elijah had been willing to learn the soul lessons along with the spirit lessons?

We, unfortunately, are a lot like him.

Anytime there is soul stress which interferes with our spiritual calling, we are absolutely sure that this is wrong, and it must be fixed or removed immediately. Soul stress cannot possibly be of God.

Or can it?

Lance Wallnau makes the point that most Christians are not effective in executing their dreams of establishing Christ in the marketplace simply because they are pansies. They can't take the heat of the battle with people who are unfair, harsh and determined not to yield ground to the King.

So often I sit down with someone who has hit the wall, and I listen to their life story. Time and again, the story is the same. There has been a long series of small problems leading up to the big one, and they saw each of the problems as something to be solved circumstantially. (Translation: run away so it doesn't hurt any more).

Since they had no theology of growing in toughness, they were not able to recognize God's training experiences, and when the big time came, they choked.

At the end of the day, one of the scarcest commodities in the church today is emotional toughness.



Anointing is readily available. There are a distressing amount of highly anointed pansies.

Vision is abundant. Everyone has a big dream these days.

Skill sets are even easy to find. Boutique technologies in the spiritual realm are blossoming on every side.

But if God needed some people who could just stay with the stuff for a long time and out last the enemy with emotional toughness, not a spiritual nuclear arsenal - well, that just thinned the crowd rather staggeringly.

However, even in the Century of the Pansy, our Great King, master strategists that He is, is able to take the Kingdom forward. There are some people out there who have immense emotional fortitude.

Most of them came by it involuntarily, but, willing or not, they graduated from the school of prolonged pain, and they have something strategic to bring to the King.

There are four major classes of people like this. First are those who grew up unloved and rather thoroughly emotionally rejected. Now, our religious culture teaches them that they are much to be pitied, they are poor wounded people, they need to go through long periods of inner healing to get fixed up so they can live a happy life.

And I am not arguing with the fact that those who do not know love could use some outside help to grow into it. But do you realize that when someone has never known love, they can live without it? Oh, I know, their life will not be as full and as joyous as the person who does know love, but someone who has lived with criticism and rejection is often called upon by the King to do the really ugly, thankless jobs that the Anointed Pansies can't handle.

So these people are the King's army. They can get out there, take the heat, endure rejection and isolation and keep on task. Did they volunteer for a loveless life? Nope. Many of them did not respond well, but a great many have found a way to forge through life, getting tasks done, without the fuel that most people consider essential to life.

Regardless of their wounds, or their social limitations, or their potentially minimalistic relationship with God (all things that the HR department picks up on and spurns them for), these people can be and often are used by the King for the simple reason that they are tough and can take rejection.

There is a second group that I call the Rangers. They are the ones who have had debilitating illness for decades and decided to keep going with life.



Whether it is the atrial fibrillation, or the rheumatoid arthritis, or the spinal column deformity that causes chronic pain, or the decades of insomnia, they have learned to live with a body that is their enemy, and to do life anyway.

These are the people who have emotional toughness AND physical toughness. They can carry both levels of pain simultaneously and STILL execute the daily routine of meals, dishes, school and athletic runs, a church committee and then doing family in the evening.

These Army Rangers have what it takes to answer the call when the King needs someone who can pay the price, instead of counting the cost. They are a valuable resource for the King.

Then there is the Marine Corp. Do you realize that Marine Corp boot camp is about twice as long as Army boot camp? And it isn't because the Marine Corp recruits are a slow study. Rather, they have to be pushed to a higher level of physical endurance so they carry more, farther, faster and longer than any of the other branches of the military.

Yes, the Marine Corp has some high tech tools, but at the end of the day, their power comes from being able to do so much for so long that they are formidable.

Who are the Marines in the Kingdom of God? The single moms. They are my heroes. They have to provide their own emotional support because there is no man, and they don't have time for Girls Night Out. They have to find enough emotional strength for themselves and for their kids. They have to be a full time mom and fill some of the role of the missing father too.

So many of these moms get up early to do the housework, pack the lunches, get the kids up, get them loved on, dressed and fed. Out the door with a pounding migraine, off to two schools while the kids squabble in the back seat. Then grinding through traffic to the other side of town to work a crumbly job for a boss who doesn't give a rip about the school nurse calling to say Suzie has a fever.

Off work, back across town, gather up the kids, face the humiliation of not being able to provide money for stuff "all the other kids have" for school gear. Driving home listening to the clanking car, wondering if it is a bad sound or not.

Coach the homework, settle the fights, cook dinner, turn off the TV for the ninth time, do more laundry, coach some more homework. Get the kids down to bed, then settle down in front of the computer for three more hours of online college, as she tries desperately to get an education that will allow her to get a better job.

She tumbles into bed at midnight, knowing she has to do it all over again tomorrow, for sixteen more years. On Friday evening she faced the humiliation of her ex driving up in his new Lincoln Navigator, with his new immaculate woman, who will take the kids this weekend and fill them full of hatred for her and their life.



Let me tell you something. There are some single moms out there who can multitask better than an octopus on speed and who have emotional and physical endurance that would run a Marine Corp Sergeant into the ground in three days.

And the King knows that. While He aches over the injustice done to them and the abuse the single moms suffer at the hands of the culture, He also rejoices over the deeply engrained toughness of these unsung heroes in the Kingdom, and He knows when the day comes, He has a force to be reckoned with, and they will follow Him.

Then there are the Navy Seals, widely revered and feared for their toughness. "Hell Week" is the stuff legends are made of. It doesn't matter how well the prospective Seals did in the classroom, on the range or in the team building exercises. They will get permanently dropped from the program, in spite of their excellent skills, if they do not have the emotional and physical toughness to endure a level of physical and emotional abuse that is incomprehensible.

Knowledge is very important for a Navy Seal, but endurance is their claim to fame. They are a special treasure in the hands of the Commander in Chief of the nation.

Who are these in the Body of Christ? They are the survivors of SRA. Now there is a difference in that survivors did not volunteer for the torment, but the fact remains that although it is from the pit of hell itself, and should not be the experience of even one single human being, it does produce toughness.

Those who were subjected to that kind of abuse from early childhood and who survived to adulthood, only to find Christ and embrace the long journey of healing, have a strength within them that is not found in any other sector of the Body of Christ.

What these people have endured in spiritual, mental, emotional and physical torment vastly exceeds what the Navy Seals go through, and the Seals did it in the peak of physical and emotional good health, while survivors went through it involuntarily, with a high degree of brokenness.

While I would not wish emotional isolation, physical pain, the role of a single mom or the horrors of SRA on anyone, I do recognize that our King has been making a public spectacle of the devil by using his minions to produce some stalwart warriors who have the toughness to endure hardship and accomplish the monumental tasks.

While these situations can be highly dramatic at times, the rest of us are also sent to the school of toughness from time to time.

What would happen to the Body of Christ if we didn't default to blaming the devil for every-thing? What would happen if we leaned into some of the emotional and physical challenges that come to us, believing that God wants some tough subjects, not just loyal weaklings.



God does know the future. He does know where He wants to deploy us. And anointing and vision will not enable you to walk ten miles with a 150 pound rucksack, if you are not used to walking three blocks.

What if we had a sense of righteous pride in bringing to the King some emotional toughness and some physical endurance?

I love the picture of the King being awake for over 24 hours, betrayed, beaten, mocked and yanked around through a variety of phony trials. As he is walking toward His own crucifixion, He had enough emotional stamina to stop and comfort the weeping women of Jerusalem.

Now THAT is toughness. THAT is impressive. THAT is setting the bar high! But He said that if they did these things to the Master, what should we expect?

We should expect God to start sending hardship our way to wean us from being pretty pansies and to grow us into having enough emotional toughness that we are useful in war, not just for parades down Main Street.

Arthur Burk  
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Airborne, flying westbound to California

