

Doubt in Faith

Reflections by Paul Montgomery

On the morning of January 9, 2005, Brian (my older son) and Eric (my younger son) reported to Marine Reserve Post Weapons Company 3/25 (3rd Battalion/25th Regiment) for deployment to Iraq. Both of my sons tried to assure me that they would just be guarding a dam, Haditha Dam, which supplied much of the electrical power to northern Iraq. As we talked outside on that cold January morning, I could joke and laugh with Eric, but when I tried to talk to Brian, all I could do was cry; I did not know why.

I now know that God was speaking to me. I was not listening! God was telling me that Eric would return unharmed, but that I would never see Brian alive again.

Eric served on a "Mounted Patrol" team, either driving the Humvee, navigating, or manning the 50-caliber machine gun. Although there were many casualties from roadside bombs, when the entire front end of Eric's Humvee was blown off, there were no casualties inside the vehicle.

Brian served on a 3-man sniper team. Most of their missions were nighttime exercises. On the night of August 1st, 2005, at least 4 sniper teams had been deployed to various locations. Brian's team was certain that their location had been discovered, and they were ordered to co-locate with a second 3-man sniper team. The 6 men were on the top a mesa; they felt safe because they had the high ground. However, they were unable to see the insurgents that approached the mesa unseen in a dried-up river bed. Five were killed instantly without ever firing a return shot. The sixth evaded the assault for several minutes, but was unable to repel the insurgents, and was killed.

Over the course of the next several weeks, I attended many funerals, including the funeral for my son. At the calling hours for each of those heroes, I talked to many grieving parents. We all had the same question: "How could God let this happen to us?". These young men all loved life, and all felt a sense of duty to their country after the horrors of 9-11. We all struggled with the question of why they were taken from us. Some through their pain and anguish turned away from God, or even denounced God. My faith in a loving God was shaken, but I still asked God "why... was I to blame for some sin in my past?"

I do not remember the specifics of Brian's funeral service at MUMC, but through Reverend Mike I heard God say to me "It's OK. He is home now. ". At that service, I realized two things. I realized that on January 9th God WAS talking to me, and I was not hearing HIS message, which I now understood. And, I realized that God has a plan and I may never know what that plan is, but it is God's plan and I trust HE has a good reason for HIS plan. The day after Brian's funeral I met with Reverend Mike to let him know that through his words, I heard God speak to me, and that MUMC is where I belong. Loren and I have been members now since Brian's funeral.

For several years I continued to believe that Brian's death could have been the result of some sin that I had committed. When I started singing with the Chancel Choir, we sang a song based upon Micah 6:6-8. Several lines from that passage felt like a personal message to me:

...

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

...

And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

Those lines strengthened my faith and confirmed to me, it was not some transgression of mine, but that God has a plan for each and every one of us. We may not know what the plan is. We might not be able to understand the plan even if we did know it. But it is HIS plan and I will trust in HIM. And I will do my best to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly^[a] with" my God.