



"Remember, you can't reach what's in front of you until you let go of what's behind you."

—Anonymous

29-May-20

Soldier On! (Part One)

As sunset neared during the Persian Gulf War on February 16, 1991, American forces, engaged in a skirmish with Iraqi forces, shot a single TOW anti-tank missile at one of the enemy's tanks, damaging but not destroying it. The conflict continued, and a call for air support was sent. At 0100 the next morning, two gunships from a nearby helicopter brigade arrived to assist.

The lead helicopter pilot was 42-year-old Ralph Hayles, a lieutenant colonel in charge of the brigade. Hayles' superior had ordered him to stay behind to command his forces more efficiently. Regrettably, he disobeyed the order and went on the mission himself with another helicopter pilot as his wingman.

Flying conditions were wretched. Visibility was near zero, there was no moon, and the wind speed was 25 knots, or almost 30 mph. As they neared the battle, the pilots saw two armored vehicles that seemed to be a mile north of their lines. The automated systems on board both helicopters alerted them that the vehicles' location did not line up with the coordinates the ground forces had given them for the enemy tanks. The pilots moved their helicopters in for a closer look, closing to within two miles of the vehicles.

Hayles contacted a senior officer on the ground, who assured him that the vehicles must be the enemy's, basing his decision on the location that the pilots had relayed to him. Following the senior officer's lead and ignoring the helicopter's alerts, Hayles relied on his own instincts and decided to "take them out."

On his first attempt, his guns jammed, offering him an opportunity to reexamine and reevaluate the situation. In Hayles' mind, that one vehicle was partially crippled lined up with the report that American forces had damaged an enemy tank. So, he felt confident they were indeed the enemy scouts.

As he lined up his sights on the intact vehicle, Hayles could not establish a laser-lock on the second vehicle. This was another chance to abort the mission, but he persisted. This time, his shot was on-target and successful. He then destroyed the damaged vehicle too.

Surveying the damage, he spied two survivors walking away, and since his machine guns were still jammed, he asked his wingman to shoot the enemy soldiers. Just as his partner was lining up his sights to finish the job, a ground controller sent the chilling message that the vehicles were American, not Iraqi. The adverse weather and multiple human errors led to a horrible miscalculation of the vehicles' location in relation to the American forces.

Shaken and trying to grasp what had just occurred, Hayles asked to break from the mission and return home. His superior denied him permission, telling him to remain on station. "These things are going to happen," he was told. Tragically, friendly fire incidents, also known as fratricide, consistently account for somewhere between 2 and 20% of fatalities in our nation's wars. Two American soldiers died in this attack, and six more suffered injuries. According to the *San Antonio Express News*, "In the aftermath, Hayles was stripped of his command, vilified in the media and drummed out of the Army."

People often give up when tragedy or adversity strikes. Lieutenant Colonel Hayles had every reason to quit. But [God](#) does not want His people to think

that failure is the end of the road. He says in [Jeremiah 29:11](#), "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare [or [peace](#)] and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (*English Standard Version*).

We have all made mistakes in this life. [Romans 3:23](#), affirming this statement, tells us that everyone has missed the mark and fallen short of God's glory. Although we should not [sin](#), as human beings, "these things are going to happen." While some of our mistakes may just have resulted from human weakness, something we are all inclined to, other mistakes are the outright deliberate breaking of God's laws.

In this regard, Paul expresses his own attitude and determination in [Philippians 3:12-14](#):

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ [Jesus](#) has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We can be thankful that the Bible contains many examples of people who have made such slip-ups, colossal mistakes, and sometimes gross sins, but because God is [merciful](#), they were allowed to return to His good graces. [Moses](#), Samson, [King David](#), and the apostles Peter and Paul, come to mind, not to mention the Corinthian Christian who had an affair with his father's wife! We know well the details of their [repentance](#) and forgiveness, providing us guidance when we miss the mark—and we invariably do so now and then.

Yet, notice Paul's advice: "I press on . . . reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal." When he sinned, he did not wallow long in self-reproach and guilt—he was confident about God's mercy upon his confession of sin and repentance—but picked himself up and continued his walk toward God's Kingdom. And he did not continue timidly or hesitantly. No, he pressed on and reached forward, dynamic actions full of resolve to learn his lessons and do better so that he would not repeat his

mistakes but instead increase his chances of reaching the goal of the [Kingdom of God](#).

We should feel crushed when we sin. The guilt of breaking God's law should bring us to a proper sorrow that leads to repentance ([II Corinthians 7:10](#)). But we are not to stay in such a down, static state. The apostle Paul tells us what this "godly sorrow" should produce: "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!" ([II Corinthians 7:11](#)).

Our attitude must be like Paul's: "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not defeated" ([II Corinthians 4:8-9](#)). Solomon says it a little differently: "For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity" ([Proverbs 24:16](#)). Like a faithful warrior in Christ's army, we must soldier on, rising each time after a fall, to reach the objective God has called us to achieve. We can do it!

In Part Two, we will look into a few biblical examples of this attitude.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Looking Forward \(Part 1\)](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The church has a tendency to fear that the Lord is delaying His coming, and scoffers are making the seeming delay worse. However, God has exercised patience in order to give people ample opportunity for repentance. Peter reminds us that God was compelled to destroy the world by water; in the future God will destroy the contents by fire. We have been mercifully given time to overcome ungodliness and become like Christ, including developing the much needed quality of patience. We have been counseled to number our days. Peter cautions us not to be self-absorbed or lackadaisical, but wisely

use the time to overcome, exercising diligence and watchfulness, prayer, Bible Study, and meditation in order to grow spiritually, and bearing godly fruit worthy of repentance. Peter assures the called-out ones that though the Day of the Lord will be a terror for the scoffers, our faith and hope should be anchored in the new creation to come, motivating us to live God's holy way of life empowered by His Holy Spirit.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part One\): Fear](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Even though a Christian's potential in God's Kingdom is so wonderful, it is still necessary for God to motivate His children to reach it. John Ritenbaugh begins his series on Christian motivation by expounding the fear of God.

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