

Shields

“The coursework is finally done!” Now that the 45 credit coursework is complete for part one of Covenant Bible Seminary’s Doctor of Ministry program, I can finally breathe a sigh of relief. With the Covid crisis causing multiple delays in mail delivery, quarantines, lack of communication via phone or email, I thought I’d never even get this far! My poor instructor, Rev. Dr. Danny Holcomb was hospitalized for a time due to the virus. Even if one was not a religious person, the miracles to complete the Doctor of Ministry program could convince many of such phenomena.

Trying to keep up with my three grown children who are also in college, I tried to over extend myself. I’m not sure if I was cognizant of what I was doing, but I ended up also enrolling into a Doctor of Theology program with International Christian College and Seminary and a paralegal program with Blackstone Career Institute. If that were not enough, I was taking a class here and there with Walla Walla Community College! Just last week, I turned in the last assignment for the paralegal diploma, and have only two more courses for the Doctor of Theology program, then onto the dissertation. To be clear, I’m not bragging; my point is that I was so busy that literally a year blinked by.

Why am I killing myself with schooling? Well, one reason is that I failed. I failed my family, my employer, my community. Having been a psychology instructor working at a local community college and completely losing it one day is very difficult to recover professionally. Had I practiced what I preached, maybe the outcome would be different.

Another reason perhaps is the children, my children. Having a father go to prison is a death sentence to the children’s social life and untold psychological trauma. How, as a father, do I make amends? How many ways can I say “I’m sorry?” They cannot understand my trauma dealing with infidelity. I cannot understand their life after their father gets shot, arrested, and imprisoned. There is, to my knowledge, no cookie-cutter template for reconciliation in this path. Shame on both sides is an incredible gulf not easily traversed in mental health waters.

A possible third option is that I may be hiding. Hiding? Yes, I think that is it: hiding. Hiding behind the grades, degrees, the coursework; like a veritable shield not unlike a Roman soldier of old, I hide behind my education. A form of displacement or a defense mechanism, I’m sure. Maybe with my perfect GPA, Certificates of Achievement and Proficiency, paralegal diploma, and Master of Divinity degree, I can add that to the other shields I owned: military diplomas and awards, psychology and philosophy degrees, martial degrees and trophies. Do I use education like one uses a Red Herring fallacy, hoping (maybe praying) citizens will focus on those instead of my crime? Maybe so. Maybe so.

Ego and pride are sometimes difficult to face and deal with in order to avoid shame or loss of face. Not properly dealing with ego and pride, fueled with anger, the situation can explode like a fireball; this fireball hurts oneself, the family, the community, the country. My first-degree assault with domestic violence is my mark of Cain. It never goes away, can never be expunged. As a man of God, I often wonder what future challenges this will present for me, and for my children.

When citizens commit felonies and go to prison, it is called "falling." Falling from grace? Falling from citizenship? I don't know. It was over nine years ago since I "fell." When I fell, I was confused, depressed, disillusioned, and quite frankly, dizzy. As I near the end of my sentence, I am confused, depressed, disillusioned, and still dizzy. Why dizzy? Trying to anchor myself to what I know. But, if what I knew actually worked, I wouldn't be dizzy. My project for my seminary is helping men enter into college. Maybe it's helping me somehow. The fall hurt; symbolically, my hands and face are broken from the fall. Each day, I put one foot in front of the other; millions more to go.

I remember, the day I fell, the doctor told me I was alive only by the Grace of God. God? I didn't know God then. On the way from the hospital to the jail for booking, the deputy remarked, "God has a plan for you!" God has a plan? What? Making me angry?

From what I've read of the Bible, God gives his characters in His story great challenges. Apparently, some good comes from it. I'm still skeptical. I'm not a big character like in the Bible, far from it. But I can now see I have a shield, and that I hide behind it. I'm not ready to drop it, but I know it's part of the cause of my fall.

Sometimes I ignore my inadequacies, and pretend they are not there. Without my shield, especially as a Soldier and warrior, I feel vulnerable. Will you, the reader, hold my shield? Thank you. Will you also hold my fears? Thank you. If you think you can do all that, plus let go of your fears of this particular felon, I would appreciate it. I will carry your fears, your shield, and promise to walk straight. Please take good care of my shield, will you?

God Bless.