

For the Sake of Your Goodness, O Lord!

I didn't know much about Ranger School before my son Simeon joined the Army. But because he is now on his second attempt to complete the program, I understand much more now. As of today, he will be nearly two weeks into the first of three, three-week phases of Army Ranger School. This "Darby Phase" is brimming with significant physical and mental challenges. By now he will have completed multiple muscle-straining obstacle courses and finished a 12-mile timed, endurance-testing ruck march (ruck = a 70lb backpack). He will have been forced to navigate through unknown territory to find specific targets on a map while under tight time constraints and to make leadership decisions under heavy psychological stress, all with minimal sleep. I could go on, but I think you get the picture. Ranger School is hard...extremely hard. And if he fails in any number of ways - if he doesn't complete the physical requirements, the land navigation course, at least one of his leadership challenges, or if he fails to gain the confidence of his peers - he can be dropped from the program.

So why does the Army encourage soldiers to submit themselves to such intense testing and strive for such lofty goals? At the heart of it, they want these men and women to be the best soldiers in the world, and Ranger School is one of the means necessary to make them just that. This is why the Army invests immense resources into the program. But the Army has limits. Many will be given multiple opportunities to complete the program, but eventually, each must make the cut or be dropped. Only a fraction of the soldiers who begin each program will complete it. Many will fall short and never earn the coveted Ranger tab.

As Christians, we are called to an even loftier goal - to be conformed into the image of God's son (Rom 8:29)! As a result, God too will fill our paths with trial and testing. But unlike the soldiers mentioned above, we will all fall short. If given 70 x 7 opportunities to meet God's standard on our own merit, we would still fail. That's right, a 100% failure rate. Our merits do not measure up. If the Army were running this program we would all be dropped. But amazingly, though we would expect God to drop us as well, he does not.

Because God is good, and only good to his children, he himself conforms us into the image of his Son *despite our failures*. Listen to how David recognizes this as he appeals to God in Psalm 25:4-10:

**4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.**

**5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.**

**6 Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**

**7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!**

**8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.**

9 He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

**10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

Because God is good and upright, he instructs *sinners* in the way. His requirement: humble yourselves before a good God, confessing that you fall short and need him. Because David knew his sin well, he didn't appeal to his own uprightness or ability to "make the cut". Rather, in humility, he appealed to God's goodness, mercy, and steadfast love for his salvation. And from his overflowing goodness, Psalm 25 tells us that God himself will lead the humble in what is right and teach them his way.

God, out of his abundant goodness, mercy, and love sees all of our human shortcomings and responds by sending his own son, in human flesh, to succeed for us. Jesus willingly came and perfectly faced every challenge of the flesh, overcame every obstacle, ran the race flawlessly. He gave sacrificially each step along the way, ultimately giving up his life on the cross. In rising from the dead, he became our perfect champion, the conqueror of sin and death, so that he might give us everlasting life.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

God is not flippant toward sin. The cost for the reconciliation and restoration of sinful people is infinitely greater than what the Army spends on Ranger school. God poured out heavenly perfection through the blood of his own Son to pay for our transgressions. It is not that God doesn't care about our sin...he just can't be thwarted by it!

As a result, each step he calls his children to take, no matter how humanly grueling, is a path of steadfast love and faithfulness, both humbling us and conforming us into his image. And though we will sin along the way, because of Jesus, he will nonetheless successfully work out his good plan in us! So rejoice today in the goodness of God!

Remember us, oh Lord, according to your goodness!

Pastor Brad

(Thank you for your prayers for Simeon!!!)