

Holding the Fort

For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.

-1 Samuel 30:24-

In October of 1864, General Sherman (of the Union Army) was camped with forces in Atlanta. General Hood (of the Confederate Army) came up behind Sherman and began destroying the railroad and capturing garrisons, cutting off Sherman's supply line. Sherman turned his army north in pursuit of Hood to save the supplies and outposts. One very important outpost was at Altoona Pass, in northern Georgia. General Corse of the Union Army was stationed there with about 1500 men. They had about 1.5 million rations stored there for the Union Army. General Hood dispatched 6,000 troops to take the outpost. The Confederate troops surrounded the city and called for the surrender of the Union soldiers. But General Corse refused to surrender, and the Union soldiers were driven back to a small fort on top of a hill. It looked like the Confederates were going to win. Then a Union officer spotted a signal flag across the valley a few miles away...on top of Kennesaw Mountain. It was Sherman's army. They signaled for help and relayed their position. Sherman signaled back: "Hold the fort; I am coming." The Union soldiers cheered, their courage was renewed, and they held the fort for 3 hours until Sherman arrived and won the day.

War requires two kinds of service: those who go out to fight battles and those who guard the fort. If there is no one to guard the fort, there may be nothing left to come home to once the battles elsewhere are won. We sometimes forget those who guard the fort in the relatively peaceful and safe confines of America. But one song reminds me that the deployed military man often has someone back home to guard the fort. Ronnie Milsap sang, "She keeps the home fires burning – While I'm out earning a living in a world – That's known for its pouring rain...and it's her warm love that keeps me returning again."

While I was deployed in Afghanistan and previously in the desert of Qatar, my wife heroically held the fort at home. She fought a different kind of battle that is just as important as any taking place in the Middle East. She defended our family and our home in my absence. She battled against evil influences that would taint our children, she contended with sibling rivalries that would fracture the family bonds, she worked with school teachers to provide an education for our children, and she faced hostilities from other parents who did not agree with her parenting actions. She sacrificed and suffered more during my deployment than I did. She lost more sleep and shed more tears than I did. She bore a greater burden than I did.

In doing so, she freed me from the worries of the home so that I could concentrate on a war on the other side of the world. She held the fort while I took the battle to the enemy. She did double-duty as a parent so I could do my duty as a warrior. She gave me something to defend. And most importantly, she gave me something to come home to: she kept the home fires burning.

Do not applaud me for my military service unless you applaud her first. Behind every successful man stands an excellent woman, and I could not possibly have done my duty if she had not done hers. She personified the excellent wife of Proverbs 31. She deserves the awards the military pins on my chest more than I.

Furthermore, there were others who stepped up to take care of my family in my absence, and I am thankful to God for them as well. Brethren of the church supported them. Some treated the family to meals, some performed house repairs, and some babysat the children so she could have a bit of time off. In supporting her, they supported me, and in supporting me, they supported the war effort. Each of them is every bit the patriot that any military service member is. You know who you are, and I thank you from the depths of my heart.

This principle of supporting the war by supporting the warrior is true for the Soldier of Christ as well. We are all in this war against sin together, and we need each other's support. In the local church, no man can succeed as an elder, deacon, or evangelist without his wife's support. Our Bible class teachers (men and women) need support from their family members in order to prepare themselves to teach. And let us not forget the preachers who go overseas to share the Gospel, leaving behind the comforts of home, and often their family members, to endure hardships and risks for the sake of the Lord. Their family members, who stay behind to guard the fort that is the home, make it possible for them to go.

In one way or another, you are serving as a Soldier of Christ. You may not be leading from the front of the auditorium, but that doesn't mean you can't lead behind the scenes. You may think your role is small, but God notices the intent of your heart and every effort you exert for the Gospel and the Church. Paul told the Corinthians that we are all members of the same body, members of one another, and equally important and vital to the overall health of the whole body (1 Corinthians 12). We are all on the same team fighting in the same war. When I was a child, one of the songs I learned in Sunday school was, "I may never march in the infantry, ride with the cavalry, shoot the artillery; I may never fly o'er the enemy, but I'm in the Lord's Army." You too are in the Lord's Army if you are a Christian. If you are standing courageously on the front lines, staring down false doctrines or rebuking sinners or imparting the Gospel to the lost, well done and carry on! If you are the wife of such a man, do your part to keep the home fires burning so he can do his! His success depends on you!

If you are going to thank the preacher, thank his wife as well. When he is out of the house late doing a Bible study, his wife is up late waiting for him, keeping the home fires burning. If you are going to thank the elders, thank their wives as well, for being the kind of wife that supports him, his work, and his qualifications to be an elder...he did not get there without her support! If you are going to thank a song leader, thank his family members for critiquing him to help him improve. If you are going to thank a woman who cleans the building, or who prepares the communion table before service, or who makes meals for the sick, or who teaches the children in Bible class, thank the man supporting her as well.

In 1 Samuel 30, we read of David leading his men to recover their family members who had been taken captive by the Amalekites. David's men were so distressed that their family members had been taken, and that their city had been destroyed, that they wept until they were exhausted. He had 600 soldiers, but only 400 had the strength left to pursue the Amalekites. David and his small army defeated them and retook what was lost, as well as the spoils of war from the Amalekites. When they returned to their camp where the 200 men stayed behind, some of the 400 fighting men did not want to share the spoils of war with them. But David defended those who held the fort. Their service in guarding the camp was just as important as combat against the enemy. Someone had to stay behind...someone had to watch the baggage...someone had to keep the home fires burning. And David declared that

they should receive an equal share in the spoils of war. “For as his share who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage” (vs. 24).

Jesus taught this principle as well. “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:40-42). Jesus was speaking to those who fulfill the support role, those who do the little things. He was speaking to wives who enable their husbands to preach. He was speaking to husbands who enable their wives to teach the children in Bible class. He was speaking to young men and women who visit the elderly. He was speaking to the elderly who impart words of wisdom and kindness and hope to the young. He was speaking to every person who shares, to every person who helps someone in need. But don’t overlook the reward there! If you support the warrior, you are supporting the war, and therefore you will receive the same reward! In serving one another, you serve God as a Soldier of Christ. P.P. Bliss wrote the following song after he learned about that Civil War battle in northern Georgia:

Hold The Fort
By P.P. Bliss, 1870

Ho, my comrades! See the signal waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh.

See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;
Mighty ones around us falling, courage almost gone!

See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow!
In our Leader’s Name we triumph over every foe.

Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near;
Onward comes our great Commander, cheer, my comrades, cheer!

(refrain) “Hold the fort, for I am coming,” Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, “By Thy grace we will.”

**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good
stewards of the manifold grace of God.**

-1 Peter 4:10-