

Safe in the Shadow of the Rock

The escape and evasion night exercise was the culminating event for my Officer Candidate (OCS) schooling at Ft. Sill, OK in the Fall of 1968. This was the height of the Vietnam War, and I had volunteered for Army duty in lieu of being drafted. I had been assigned for training as an artillery forward observer (FO), a position noted for having one of the shortest life expectancies of all officers in Vietnam. Deployment of the FO's were typically far out in front of friendly lines calling in artillery fire on enemy targets with only a radio operator for protection.

In this final exercise, my OCS class was broken into small groups and given maps. We were challenged to make our way during the night to a collection point over several mountainous regions. Not only was this a challenging assignment to keep from getting lost but also there were many post soldiers tasked as "aggressors" who were roaming the hills on the lookout to capture us and take us to a "prison camp" for interrogation. From previous classes we had heard numerous

stories about the harsh treatment at the interrogation site, and we had all determined we would avoid capture at all costs. Military thinking at that time considered it important to see if a captured officer candidate would "break" under pressure. Those soldiers who had difficulty in this environment were usually recycled or reassigned.

Later that night, my group was making its way along a barren hillside when we were detected by aggressors and pursued. We immediately looked for whatever cover or protection we could find. There were no trees in this area, only small bushes and many rocks of various sizes. In the split second I had to make a move, I decided to drop down below the face of a rock outcropping and wrap the backside of my body along the rock face. Because there was a full moon that night, this rock cast a deep shadow, and it was in that shadow that I waited to see what would happen next. From the conversations I heard from the aggressors all around me, I could tell they were finding my teammates quickly. I heard their cries of frustration and alarm as they were being tied up, and I wondered how long it would be before I, too, would join them. Then in a heart stopping moment, one of the aggressors stepped out to the edge of the rock outcropping above me and stated: "I could

have sworn there was another." Actually, I was no more than a few feet directly below him, but in the shadow of the rock he did not detect me.

After they had taken my group away, I stayed in this immobile position without moving for almost an hour until my body was numb. I then relaxed, and when I felt it was safe to continue my trek, I continued alone over the mountains. Later the next morning I was one of the first to arrive at the targeted destination with much relief...safe and sound.

Who would have imagined that the safest and best place in this situation of danger was not in a secure room or in a hidden hole....but out in the open covered only by a shadow! Many times since as I have journeyed thru life and experienced other difficult situations I have never forgotten the experience of that night.

The imagery of Psalm 91 is very special to me, and I will forever live in agreement with the Psalmist as he declares: "Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the *shadow of the Almighty*. This I declare of the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I am trusting Him" (vv. 1-2).

In addition to the imagery of the protective shadow cast by a rock, God has also conveyed to us other examples that reveal in an even more intimate way how much He cares for His children. When King David was fleeing from his enemies, He cried out to God: "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the *shadow of your wings...*" (Ps. 57:1). And in Psalm 121:5, the Psalmist reminds us: "The Lord Himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your *protective shade*."

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah also faced opposition because he held people accountable for their sins and told of upcoming judgment. But he, too, found comfort in God's shadow, this time in the "*shadow of His hand*" (Isaiah 49:2b). And not only does God's hand provide security for those that know Him as Lord, He further assured Isaiah as He does us today: "...I will not forget you! See, I have written your name on my hand" (Is. 49:15b-16). Just think of that...your name written on God's hand!

These wonderful promises are made by God to those who have a relationship with Him. King Solomon, one of the wisest men of all time, acknowledged to God: "You keep your promises and show unfailing love to

all who obey You and are eager to do Your will" (1 Kings 8:23). God's first relationship with mankind was through obedience to His Mosaic law but moved on to an expression of His love and grace with the coming to earth of His Son Jesus Christ:

John 1:12: "But to all who believed Him (Jesus Christ) and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God."

John 3:16 : " For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

As a child of God, we not only have forgiveness of sins and the promise of living for eternity in Heaven, but also we are blessed with His presence and protection each day. The Psalmist reminds us: "The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand....For the Lord loves justice, and He will never abandon the godly. He will keep them safe forever..." (Ps. 37: 23-24, 28).

If you have not acknowledged Jesus Christ as your Savior I invite you to do that now before you lay down this small pamphlet. On

the other hand, if you are a true believer but are experiencing fears and insecurities about various events occurring in your life, I invite you to fully grasp the reality that God knows everything about your circumstances and will work every detail for good (Romans 8: 28). Until the time God reveals His purposes, you can find comfort in declaring with the Psalmist: "The Lord is my rock, and my Savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, for He saves me from my enemies" (Ps. 18:2-3).

I invite you to repeat this prayer:

"O Lord God, I am burdened by fear and have many problems that seem to overwhelm me. I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I pray that You will allow me to experience His presence. May He be my Rock of safety as well as my salvation, and may I now find rest and peace knowing I am protected in His shadow. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen."

Remember this truth always:

"Don't worry about *anything*; instead, pray about *everything*. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's *peace*, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).



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