

Running Head: THE LAST DAYS OF MY JOURNEY

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Mike Hoback

Southern Adventist University

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Religious Perspectives

Preparing for death can be terrifying if you have no idea what to expect both physically and emotionally. There is in all of us a curiosity about dying. I never really gave much thought about what would happen if I died tomorrow until I had a child. Being of the Southern Baptist faith I believe that when you die you go to be with the lord immediately at death. The non-believer goes to that place of waiting until the Great White Book is opened.

Paul states that as long as he is in his body he is absent from the Lord. Yet, we know from Paul's other writing that the Lord's Spirit is within us and that the Lord is never absent from us in our soul and spirits. His Holy Spirit is always with us. Paul was not talking about being with Christ in a spiritual presence; he already has this present Christ, as we all do. He was speaking about going to be with the LORD where the Lord is. The Lord is not in a grave or in a state of unconsciousness. We are separated or absent from our bodies in death. When the return of Christ happens, the first thing He will do is raise up our bodies from wherever they are in the graves, the sea or from the dust, and transform those same bodies into an eternal marvelous body just like He, our Lord, has now. The Lord is living, awake, active and present today in Heaven at the Father's right hand. I'm sure others have different beliefs but this is how I was raised and is still currently taught in my church.

Past Experiences

The first time I ever experienced the death of a close relative was when I was around nine years old and my grandmother died. I don't believe it had that much of an impact on me as I only saw her a few times within my life because she lived in America and my family lived in

Wiesbaden, Germany. I can still remember my mother telling me about it and me feeling sad but other than that I can't recall too much.

The second time in my life I dealt with the death of a loved one or close friend was when I joined the United States Army and was deployed to Balad, Iraq. Living the military life was an experience that I will always treasure because it gave me an insight into a whole different society that I otherwise would have never known. Living the military life was different in that you are never alone and always have someone with you no matter what you are doing. If you were eating, sleeping, showering, or using the bathroom you had to have your "Battle Buddy" with you at all times.

I was deployed to Balad, Iraq in 2004. I still remember the first day we crossed over the border in helicopters. As I was sitting there we began to take fire from below and then I saw a round red ball fly past us. The door gunner told us it was a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). It was at this time I thought to myself, "my first day here and already getting shot at". I wondered if something happened would my daughter even remember who I was ten years from now as she was only two when I left. Well as time went on I settled into a grove and soon forgot about my first day.

A few days before Christmas in 2005 we were on routine patrol of the town Balad Ruz. We were going down a dark street in this rundown town when we again were engaged by enemy fire. This time was worse than any we had been involved in and the firefight continued on for almost two hours. We were being pushed back and took cover inside a small hut that only had one door so it was easy to protect once inside. Well one door in means one door out and we soon found ourselves outnumbered and out gunned. We had already called for reinforcements but were told it would take two hours for them to arrive as we were in the middle of nowhere. I can still

hear the thud of the grenade that hit the floor right by our feet. A grenade has five seconds before it explodes and I remember thinking about my family and all the things I had missed. It was odd, it seemed like I thought about a million different things in that five seconds. About the same time one of my soldiers threw his body on the grenade and taking the blast which saved several more of us that were inside.

I'm not sure but somehow we made it out and made it back to our base and as I laid there that night I thought about this young soldier who was no more than twenty-five and married with several kids. I wondered how his wife was going to be told he had died and how she would respond. I thought to myself that if and when I return home I would try and be the type of husband and father I should have been all along. Upon waking the next day we again headed out on a routine patrol and once again were engaged by enemy fire. I don't remember too much of that day except getting out of my vehicle and seeing a bright red light. I woke up several hours later and learned that we had hit an improvised explosive device (IED), which are buried in the road. I spent the next several weeks in a hospital unable to see but was thankful that I was alive. I guess for the first time I realized my mortality as I had always believed nothing would happen to me. Although I had suffered several injuries to my entire body I had made it out alive and was now headed back home.

Once back home nothing was as how I remembered it. My marriage was gone, my friends were no longer there, and I was having trouble fitting back into normal life. I found myself hanging out with some of the same guys I had once served with who were also going through the same problems. Well about four months ago while me and several other of my military friends were out eating and waiting on others to arrive we received a phone call saying that one of our guys had just shot himself in the head. We were all stunned and went to his

house immediately. I remember talking to his wife and telling her how good of a friend and soldier he was while serving with him in Iraq. I have often asked myself what people would say about me if I were to die tomorrow.

Reflection

Prior to being deployed to Iraq I had a will made out and then after returning I had it redone. I have an excellent life insurance policy on myself that would ensure that my daughter would be taken care of for the rest of her life. The one thing that concerns me is who would raise her if I were not here to do so. She has her mother but she is not in the picture at this time and my parents live in a totally different country so that does weigh heavily on my mind and I do think about that every day.

When I die I want to be cremated. I'm not too concerned about what happens to my ashes and figure that my daughter can do with them as she wishes. I would like to not have any type of funeral but if so I would prefer a small one as I'm sure there are not too many people that would be attending. I do not want any obituary to be written as I am still unsure why someone would want to be put in the newspaper after they die. I guess my thinking is that if I knew you good enough then you would know I died, I don't need strangers reading about my life. The only thing I care to be remembered for was that I was a good soldier who served my country and an even better dad. Nothing means more to me in this world than my daughter and as long as she has good memories about me then I would leave this life happy.

The only family I have here is my daughter and I'm sure my death would have an enormous impact on my daughter as I am a single father. Within the last few months I have begun to ask myself what would happen to her if I died tomorrow. I'm not really too sure how I would even start to prepare her for this as she is only eight years old now and if I were to bring

something like this up I think it would cause her to start asking questions and become stressed out thinking something was wrong with me. Other than her I really only have four or five close friends but I'm pretty sure they would get over it pretty quickly as they have families of their own.

I think I have lived a pretty good life and I have seen my share of death in the last few years. I know my time is quickly approaching but I'm hoping that I can hold out long enough so that I will be able to see my daughter graduate from high school and possibly see her get married. As I sit here and write this I am once again asking myself what else I can do to be a better father and make sure that I leave a lasting impression on her. As long as she can look back and tell her friends and family that she loved her dad and he was a good father, I can ask for nothing more.