

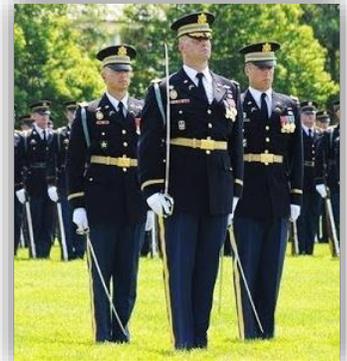


One of the time-honored traditions of the military is called “Pass in Review,” commonly known as “PIR.” More ceremony than anything else, PIR provides senior officers the opportunity to examine some of the troops under their command, demonstrating proper wearing of uniforms, proper handling of weapons, and skill at moving in formation.

I had my first experience of PIR forty-four years ago this summer, as I went through the first half of Naval OCS in Newport, Rhode Island. When

I managed to slam the bolt of my drill rifle shut on my thumb, my rifle was taken away and they gave me a sword instead (I'm not sure that was less dangerous, but the sword wasn't very sharp!).

In the twenty-four years since I left the Navy, I haven't done PIR in the military fashion, but neither have I been a stranger to the basic concept. Doing funerals, which is a fairly frequent part of pastoral ministry, is fundamentally a form of “pass in review,” and I've been reminded about this in two ways recently.



The first was reading a two-paragraph obituary of Dr. Eldred Taylor, one of my friends and mentors, in the Georgetown College alumni magazine. Eldred was an elder statesman of the first rank among Kentucky Baptists, and to try to summarize his contributions to God's kingdom in so short a scope seemed grossly inadequate at best. At the same time, even his pastor had only a few minutes during Eldred's funeral service to try to accomplish the same thing. Such pastoral efforts at “pass in review” are always inadequate, but they must be attempted nonetheless.

It has been my task and privilege to write a great many obituaries over the years, and, beyond the grief of saying farewell to friends, I don't really mind doing funerals. Funeral services gather up as one the foundational anchors of our faith, and it's fascinating to discover the unique ways God has moved in each redeemed life to draw that person toward Eternal Day.

The second reminder came as I finished reading through 2 Kings on my annual journey through the Bible. I'm actually struck by the same thing every year. Here's what I'm talking about:

1. ¹ Ahab's son Joram began to rule over Israel in the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twelve years. ² He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, but not to the same extent as his father and mother. He at least tore down the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had set up. ³ Nevertheless, he continued in the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had committed and led the people of Israel to commit (2 Kings 3:1-3).
2. ¹ Joash began to rule over Judah in the seventh year of King Jehu's reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother was Zibiah from Beersheba. ² All his life Joash did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight because Jehoiada the priest

instructed him. ³ Yet even so, he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 12:1-3).

3. *¹⁰ Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to rule over Israel in the thirty-seventh year of King Joash's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria sixteen years. ¹¹ But he did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to commit. ¹² The rest of the events in Jehoash's reign and everything he did, including the extent of his power and his war with King Amaziah of Judah, are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel. ¹³ When Jehoash died, he was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Then his son Jeroboam II became the next king (2 Kings 13:10-13).*
4. *¹ Amaziah son of Joash began to rule over Judah in the second year of the reign of King Jehoash of Israel. ² Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Jehoaddin from Jerusalem. ³ Amaziah did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, but not like his ancestor David. Instead, he followed the example of his father, Joash. ⁴ Amaziah did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 14:1-4).*
5. *¹ Uzziah son of Amaziah began to rule over Judah in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel. ² He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. ³ He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his father, Amaziah, had done. ⁴ But he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there. ⁵ The Lord struck the king with leprosy, which lasted until the day he died. He lived in isolation in a separate house. The king's son Jotham was put in charge of the royal palace, and he governed the people of the land (2 Kings 15:1-4).*
6. *³² Jotham son of Uzziah began to rule over Judah in the second year of King Pekah's reign in Israel. ³³ He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. ³⁴ Jotham did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight. He did everything his father, Uzziah, had done. ³⁵ But he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 15:32-35).*
7. *⁵ Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. ⁶ He remained faithful to the Lord in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the Lord had given Moses. ⁷ So the Lord was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did (2 Kings 18:5-7).*

Each of these vignettes summarizes the life of a king of Israel or Judah in about five sentences. Did you feel the power of that repeated pattern? It hits me every year.

The truth of the matter is that the odds are extremely high that someday some pastor somewhere is going to try to summarize your life. If that pastor had only five sentences in which to summarize *your* life, I wonder what would be said. In fact, if you were to summarize your own life this evening in five absolutely honest sentences, I wonder what you'd write down. (Or perhaps for a more unbiased and less self-serving perspective, what might your spouse, your best friend, or one of your children write down?)

After you've thought about this for a while, perhaps that effort will help you consider *what you'd like to have said at your funeral?* And perhaps more importantly, *are your choices today such that will allow such commentary later?*

News commentators are starting to talk more frequently about "President Obama's legacy." You and I will have legacies, too; and the reality is that we're writing them ourselves—right now. Steve Green put it this way:

We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road,
And those who've gone before us line the way;
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary,
Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace.

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
Let us run the race not only for the prize;
But as those who've gone before us, let us leave to those behind us
The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives.

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful!
May the fire of our devotion light their way.
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,
And the lives we live inspire them to obey.
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful!*

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone
And our children sift through all we've left behind,
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find.

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful!

The psalmist wrote, "*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12).

"Just one life, twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Live well, my friends. Live well.

Dave

