

PHONE CALLS

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from the FRONT

by Gaylan D. Grant

Any pastor who has a number of men and women serving in the current Iraq or Afghanistan theaters of war knows what it is like to get a phone call from the front lines. With 18 to 20 men and women from our church currently serving in Iraq I get those calls somewhat frequently. Sometimes it is the need for a reassuring friend. Sometimes it is the need for advice. Sometimes it is the need for comfort.

I received one such call from a young soldier. He's a squad leader in a very "hot" part of Iraq. Daily patrols looking for insurgents and seeking out Al-Qaeda strongholds take their toll. Fear is not an issue for Mike, nor is courage. He trusts God for his safety and his daily study of the Word of God keeps his courage strong.

But Mike called with a different tone in his voice. One of his soldiers, a member of his squad, was killed in battle. The soldier was a preacher's kid who had been in rebellion, running from God.

I had met the young man once when he came to church with Mike. Mike and I had prayed for him on several occasions. I prayed Mike would have the opportunity to live his life in such a way that the young man would be able to come back to Christ. Now he was dead.

Mike's voice seemed far away as he spoke about his friend. "Did he come to Christ? What more could I have done? Pastor, I had to talk to his parents."

My words came slowly as I responded to Mike. "Mike, you have to trust God on this one. God alone knows the condition

of his heart. You did what you knew was right. Now, leave it in God's hands as a matter of faith."

The conversation ended with a discussion of grief and loss and how God equips us to handle these moments of tragedy and horror.

A few days later, Mike called again. There was almost a lilt in his voice. He had some news. He had gotten an opportunity to talk to the flight surgeon on the helicopter that evacuated the young soldier. They had performed a tracheotomy to assist the man's breathing in the helicopter.

The surgeon said, "Above the noise of the helicopter and above the difficulty in breathing that

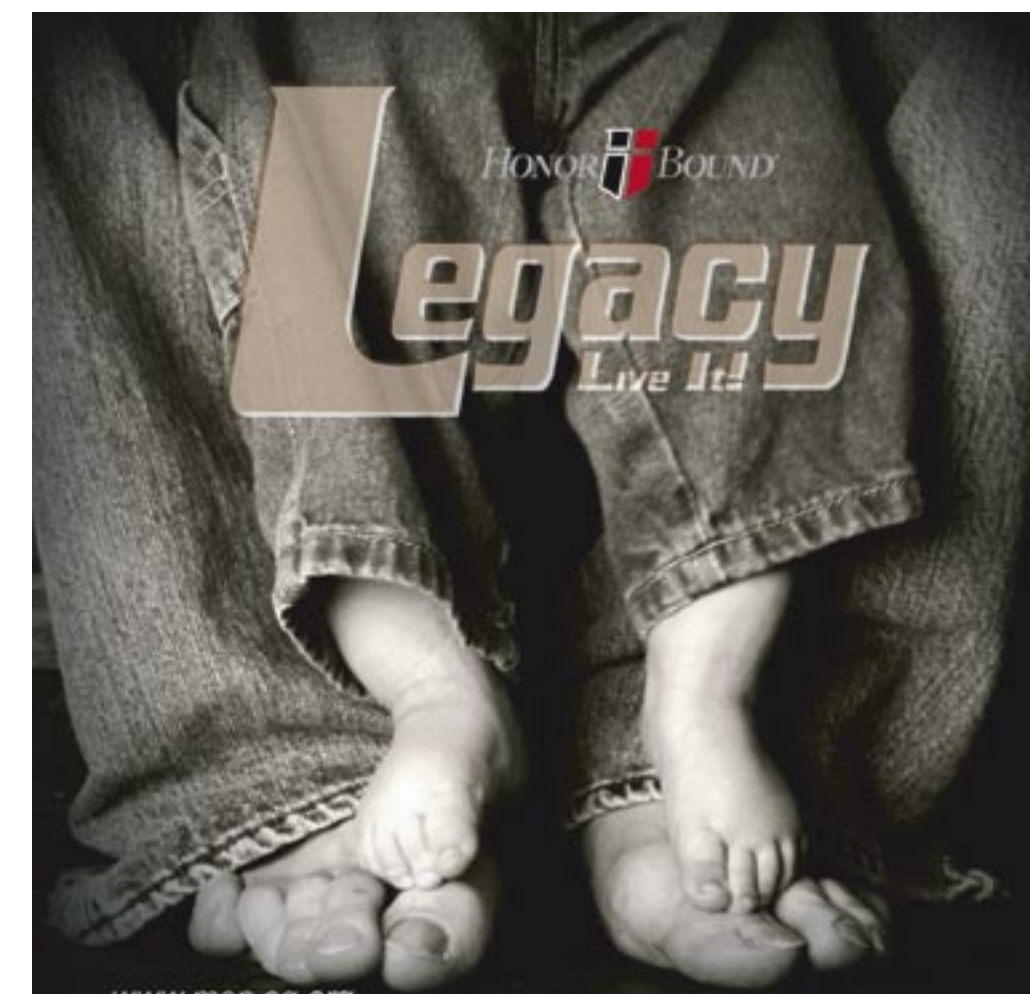
soldier said, 'Tell Mike I'm right with God!'"

Sometime after that the soldier died.

I could hear the tears and the joy as Mike shared this with me. I wept with joy for the parents who had "trained up their child in the way he should go" for in the end, "he did not depart from it."

For parents, spouses and friends of those in harm's way: When it comes to praying for your loved one, in the words of Churchill, "Never, never, never give up!" God is faithful. **tpe**

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