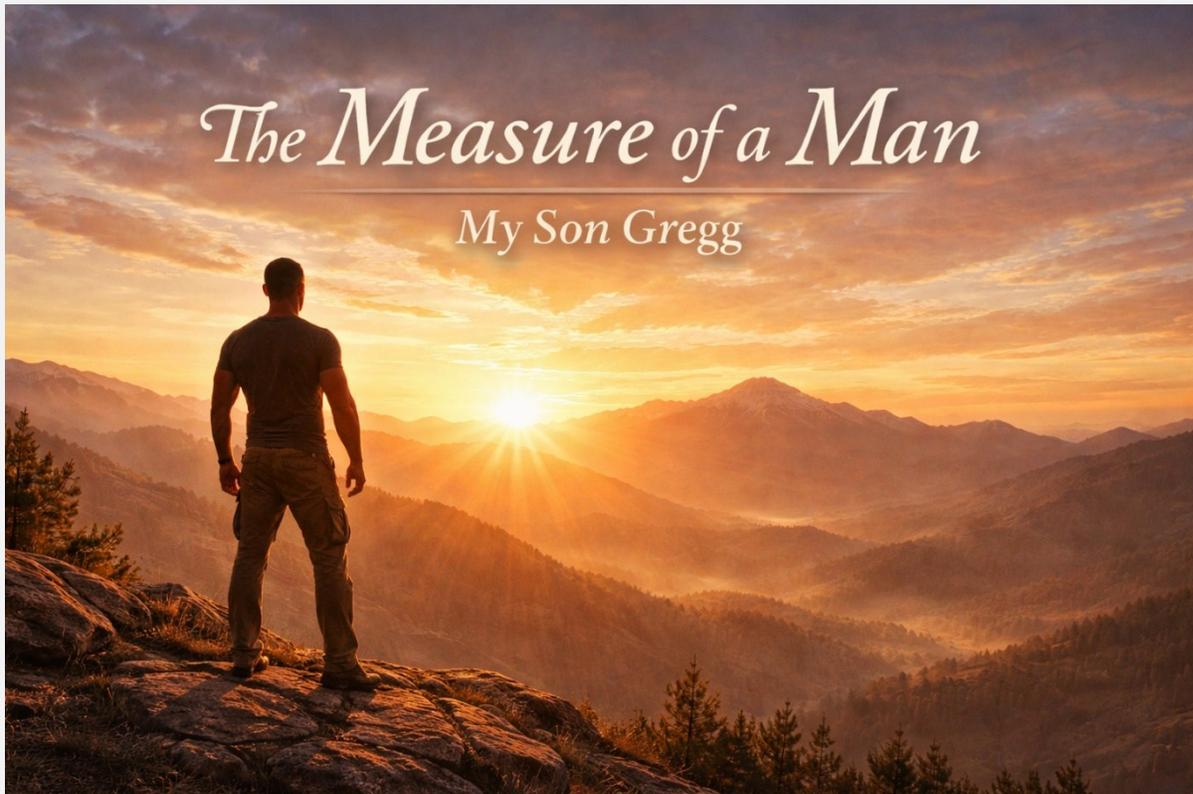


The Measure of a Man: My Son Gregg

A Father's Reflection



Early Years in Germany

There are sons, and then there are sons, if you know what I mean. I have been blessed with a son who, from the earliest days of his life, carried within him the qualities that define what it means to be a man. Not loud qualities, not boastful ones, but the deeper things that reveal themselves over time. Honor that guides a man's decisions. Courage that steadies him when life demands more than he thought he could give. Commitment that holds fast when the easier path would be to walk away. If you know the Marine Corps motto, *Honor, Courage, Commitment*, then you understand the measure of the man I am speaking of. Gregg has lived those words in a way that few people ever truly do.

You were born in Germany at Landstuhl Army Medical Center, although your arrival into the world had a bit of a story even before you were delivered. The hospital nursery was full at the time, and the plan was to have you delivered and admitted to a German hospital instead. That would have meant your mother and I would have had to wait about ten days before bringing you home.

Fortunately, because I had staff privileges at Landstuhl, Mom's doctor stepped in and made sure that did not happen. So, you were born right there at Landstuhl, arriving at about forty-two weeks, taking your time as if you were already contemplating the world before joining it.

From the very beginning you had a presence. You were a big baby and utterly adorable in the nursery crib. You also had what we came to call a very robust cry. When you cried, everyone in the ward knew it was you.

But even as a baby you had a charm about you. In some ways you were a child of few words, but when you did speak, people were drawn to you. You had a natural warmth that made people smile.

Not long after we returned to the United States for about a year and a half while I completed my postdoctoral training, we were suddenly on our way back to Germany again. By then you were about two, maybe pushing three. On that flight you had a pair of socks with little airplanes on them, and you proudly called them your airplane socks. You spent much of the flight walking up and down the aisle telling passengers about your airplane socks, charming people one by one and enjoying the adventure of the moment.

Friendship and Loyalty

It was during that second tour in Germany that you met your best friend, Skye, a blond haired South African boy. And yes Gregg, you had blond hair back then too. Blue eyes. The Germans loved that look, and people seemed to fall in love with you almost instantly.



You and Skye quickly became partners in crime in the innocent and mischievous ways that young boys often are. One day the two of you snuck into his basement and helped yourselves to all the ice cream you could find. On another occasion you were playing near a German neighbor's yard and managed to pull a stake from his fence. The gentleman came hobbling after you with a broken

foot while the two of you ran away laughing, confident he could never catch you.

What made the story even better was that he was not angry at all. In fact, he later told us about it with great amusement. It was hard for anyone to stay upset with you for long.

But what I remember even more clearly came on our final day in Germany.

We spent much of that day with Skye, knowing that the time had come for us to leave and return to the United States. I had assumed, perhaps too casually, that it would be another move in a life that already had several moves in it.

But that day I saw something in you that stayed with me. You were utterly heartbroken at the thought of leaving your friend. The sadness was deep and very real. It lingered with you long after we had returned to the States.

Looking back now, I realize that moment revealed something about you that would define the man you would become. Even as a young boy, your friendships mattered deeply to you. When you gave your loyalty to someone, you gave it completely.

That fierce loyalty, that sense of commitment and honor in your friendships, became one of the defining traits of your life and remains so to this day.

School Years and Character

Like many children who spend their early years moving from place to place, you had a few challenges when you first began school. You struggled somewhat with reading, in part because you had suffered so many ear infections as a young child. Those repeated bouts of otitis-media delayed your speech development for a time, and you needed some extra help in the early grades.

You accepted that help willingly. But what I remember most clearly is what happened a few years later. Somewhere around the fifth grade you simply stood up one day from the desk where you had been receiving that extra help, walked back to your regular seat, and from that point forward you were on your own. You had used the help you needed, and then you moved forward. And your teacher had the wisdom to accept your decision without hesitation.

That was you even then. If help was needed, you accepted it. But you never leaned on it longer than necessary.

By middle school you had discovered girls, as most boys do, but early in high school you came to Mom after experiencing some teenage drama and made a declaration I have never forgotten. You told Mom you had decided you were not going to date any girls until after you graduated from high school because, in your words, there was simply too much drama.

To be honest, I did not think you would stick to that decision.

But you did.

Instead, you poured your energy into music. You were a trumpet player, and when you played there was something in the tone that reflected the depth of your own spirit. Your trumpet carried a soulful melody that could move people. I remember more than one occasion when hearing you play brought tears to my eyes and I suspect to many others. Your band instructor begged you to pursue music in college, but you had other plans, a larger mission.

You also developed a love for tennis and eventually earned a varsity letter. You were a strong player, disciplined and competitive yet composed and respectful in all the right ways.

Choosing the Marine Corps

Then at eighteen you graduated from high school. At the time you were not entirely sure whether you wanted to go straight to college. We talked about it, and Mom and I told you something simple. Staying home and doing nothing was not an option. You would move forward in some meaningful yet undetermined direction, and that was soon to be understood.

The early part of that summer was a time of deep reflection for you. I could see that you were thinking seriously about the kind of man you wanted to become and about the path you were going to take.

Then sometime around the middle of that summer you came home with your Marine recruiter, a strack and handsome gunnery sergeant dressed in the unmistakable Marine Corps dress blues. It is one of the most striking uniforms worn by any branch of the military, and there you were standing beside him, listening carefully, taking it all in.

And then you made your decision.

With a seriousness that was unmistakable, you committed yourself to the United States Marine Corps. You signed the papers in front of us, so respectful and dignified – and yet in another way, deeply solemn.

Even in that moment, I could sense the weight of what you were choosing. As your father, I also felt it. The thoughts that no father wants to contemplate began to move quietly through my mind. The seriousness of that commitment and what it could possibly mean. The good that would come from it, but also the potential cost that Marines so often carry with dignity.

And yet I could see in you the resolve of a young man who understood that some callings require exactly that kind of courage.

Forged in Boot Camp

Boot camp transformed you.

Those thirteen weeks were a crucible that thousands of Marines before you have endured. Trial, exhaustion, pain, and moments of doubt that any reasonable man would feel under the sheer physical and mental demands of that training.

But through that crucible you were forged. You went in a young man. You came out something remarkably different. I remember looking at you at graduation with tears in my eyes. You were no longer just my son who had left home a few months earlier. You stood before me a United States Marine. There was a bearing in you that had changed. Something deeper. Something steady.

You had become a warrior. Noble, fierce, proud, unmovable, unbendable, unbreakable. I have had many proud moments in my life, but all were eclipsed by that moment.

After graduation we had a wonderful time together as a family. Your grandfather was there that day, the last time you would see him before his life was tragically taken in a terrible accident not long afterward. Before you left for Marine Combat Training he wrote you a letter. I remember the words very clearly.

"Wear your responsibility well." Grandpa was so proud of you, as were the rest of the family. And you did just that in no small measure.

War and Moral Courage

You went on to Marine Combat Training and then on to artillery school. When we picked you up after Marine Combat Training, I remember noticing something immediately. You could barely carry your sea bags. One of your buddies carried them out for you, and as you walked toward the car, Mom and I could see that you had a slight limp. It was subtle, but it was there. When you finally climbed into the car and sat down, we asked what had happened. You looked at me calmly and simply said, "Don't ask."

But mothers know things. Your mother certainly did.

It didn't take long before we learned what had really happened. Somewhere during Marine Combat Training, you broke your foot. Most people would have reported it immediately, because a broken foot would have meant medical attention and recovery time. But you knew something else too. You knew that if you reported it they would recycle you through the training and you would have to start the entire process over again. That was not something you were willing to do. So instead, you did what Marines sometimes do. You kept going. You pushed through the pain, finished Marine Combat Training, and completed it with a broken foot.

God knows how you managed to do that.

During the short break before artillery school, you spent your time hopping around in a cast, helping out with the recruiting while you recovered as best you could. Eventually you reported to artillery school at Fort Sill. As Marines often do, the instructors noticed immediately that you were still dealing with a broken foot. They did not baby you. If anything, they were harder on you, almost as if a Marine had no permission to be injured. You didn't particularly like that treatment, but you accepted it the same way you had accepted everything else. You pushed through it.

And then came the orders that would change everything.

Fallujah, Iraq.

A full combat deployment.

Some of your buddies did not make it home.

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You told me stories about those months later on, usually in pieces, never all at once. Combat has a way of doing that to men. The stories tend to surface slowly, often years later, sometimes in the quiet moments when we were riding our motorcycles together as we often did or sitting somewhere without distractions. You spoke about daily patrols outside the wire, about the constant



danger that surrounded you, and about the reality that too many Marines were struck by land mines and improvised explosive devices. It was the kind of environment where every day carried a level of risk that most people can scarcely imagine.

There was one story you told me that I have never forgotten.

You had been scheduled to give a briefing one day, but you were suddenly called out on a mission and could not do

it. Another young Marine stepped in and gave the briefing in your place. Later that same day, that Marine was killed by a suicide bomber.

You didn't talk about it much. In fact, you rarely spoke about moments like that at all.

But on one of our motorcycle rides years later, you finally shared a small piece of what those experiences had been like. We were riding together, the road stretching out ahead of us, when you spoke quietly and said, "Dad, the smell of death is bad."

That was all you said.

There was nothing dramatic about the way you said it. No long explanation. Just those few words, spoken with the calm honesty that has always been part of who you are. Yet those words carried a weight that only someone who has stood in those places could fully understand.

On another ride I asked you how you managed to get through those deployments without falling apart. Your answer was simple, but it revealed something important about the way your mind works. You told me that at some point you had accepted the likelihood that you would die there. Once you came to terms with accepting your possible death, the anxiety that had been pressing in on you began to lose its grip. When you stopped fighting that possibility and simply acknowledged it, something shifted inside you. From that point forward you were able to focus on the job in front of you and keep moving forward.

But even in the middle of war, you carried something else with you besides courage. You carried wisdom.

You once told me about traveling in a Humvee along a convoy road when you spotted an Iraqi man pulled over nearby. Under your rules of engagement, you could have taken him out. In a combat zone those decisions often have to be made quickly, and hesitation can be dangerous. You raised your weapon and prepared to pull the trigger.

And then something in you paused. You studied him for a moment. You read the cues. Your instincts were telling you something important about the situation unfolding in front of you. In the last moment before you acted, you lowered your weapon.

Later I asked you why you had made that decision. Your answer was simple. "I read the cues, Dad. He was terrified. I could see he wasn't evil." Thank God you trusted that instinct.

War places young men in situations that no human being should ever have to face. Decisions must sometimes be made in seconds, and those decisions can carry consequences that last for the rest of a lifetime. Some of those moments demand action. Others demand restraint. What has always stayed with me is the quiet wisdom you showed in that moment. You understood that your responsibility was not simply to pull a trigger whenever the opportunity presented itself. Your responsibility was to do what was right in a complicated and dangerous world, even when the pressure of war made those decisions unimaginably difficult.

Life After War

When you returned from Iraq and eventually left the Marine Corps, you entered another difficult chapter of life. You were also carrying the pain of a relationship that had ended in betrayal. You cared deeply for that young woman and remained loyal far longer than most people would have. Even when the relationship collapsed, you did not lash out or try to diminish her. You simply mourned the loss quietly.

I remember flying down to San Diego during that time. At one point I looked at you and said, "Son, I think we need to get you the hell out of here." And so that is what we did. You stepped away from that chapter with dignity and began building the next one.

Not long after that you met Clare.

She became the love of your life. Clare is a remarkable woman, beautiful in every sense of the word but even more remarkable for the depth of her character and inner beauty with a depth of soul that matches yours. She carries so many of the qualities I have come to admire in Filipino culture. Generosity, kindness, warmth, and a deep devotion to family.

Together the two of you built something real.

You bravely moved to Arizona and began pursuing aviation, earning your private pilot and instrument licenses even though the helicopter path you hoped for did not work out because of bureaucratic complications in the VA. You continued pressing forward anyway. You earned your

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CDL. You obtained your drone pilot certification. Through it all you worked hard while Clare pursued her education in radiology.

None of it was easy, but the two of you kept moving forward together.

Now you are in your first home together, building a life rooted in stability, love, and shared purpose. What stands out most to me is the devotion you show to Clare. Over the years I have never heard



you speak a single unkind or disrespectful word about her. Only respect, loyalty, and admiration.

Those same qualities that defined you as a young boy and were forged in the Marine Corps continue to define the man you are today. And as your father, I could not be more proud. It has been an extraordinary privilege to watch your life unfold. I look forward to the chapters that still lie ahead.

Thank you, my son, for the pride you have brought to my life. Not only through what you have accomplished, but through the heart you carry and the man you have chosen to be.

A man grounded in faith, devoted to family, loyal to country, and guided by a deep sense of soul.