

The Dark Side of Greatness

“There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen ... (and) now he belongs to the ages.”

Of whom was this said?

One of the Caesars? No. Napoleon? No. Alexander the Great? No. Eisenhower? Patton? MacArthur ... or some earlier military strategist like Grant or Lee or Pershing? No, none of the above.

Well, it was no doubt said of a great leader, a powerful and persuasive personality, was it not? Certainly one admired for his success. That depends.

When he was 7 years old, his family was forced out of their home because of a legal technicality. He had to work to help support them. At age 9, while still a backward, shy little boy, his mother died.

At 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education was not good enough. At 23, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. Three years later, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay.

At 28, after developing a romantic relationship with a young lady for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. An earlier youthful love he shared with a lovely girl ended in heartache at her death.

At 37, on his third try, he was finally elected to Congress. Two years later, he ran again and failed to be reelected. It was about that time he had what some today would call a nervous breakdown.

At 41, adding more heartache to an already unhappy marriage, his 4-year-old son died. The next year, he was rejected for Land Officer.

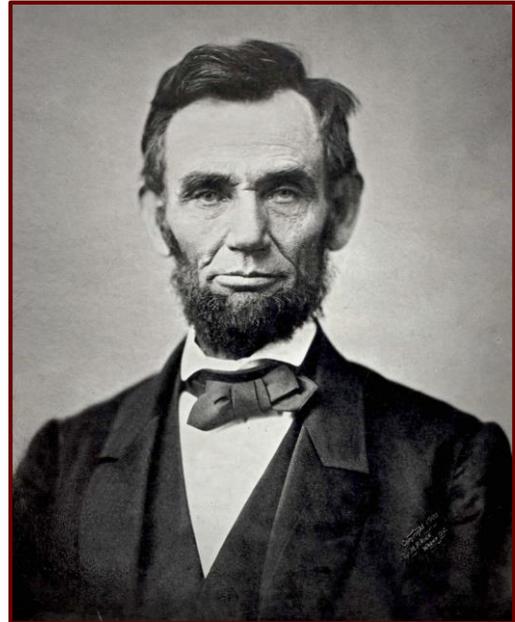
At 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. Two years later, he was defeated for nomination for Vice President. At 49, he ran for the Senate again ... and lost again.

With an endless barrage of criticism, misunderstandings, ugly and false rumors, and deep periods of depression, it's no wonder he was snubbed by his peers and despised by multitudes.

(more)

At 51, however, he was elected President of the United States, but his second term in office was cut short by assassination. As he lay dying in a little rooming house across from the place where he was shot, a former detractor (U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton) gave the fitting tribute at the top of this column. By now you know it was spoken of the most inspirational and highly regarded president in American history, Abraham Lincoln.

Speaking about Lincoln – his failures, tragedies and eventual triumph – Charles R. Swindoll, senior pastor at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas – wrote in his book, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*: “Instead of accepting the fact that no one deserves the right to lead without first persevering through pain and heartache and failure, we resent those intruders. We treat them as enemies, not friends. We forget that the marks of greatness are not delivered in a paper sack by capricious gods. No, those who are really worth following have paid their dues. They have come through the furnace melted, beaten, reshaped and tempered ... Or, as one paraphrases it, they carry the scars of the whippings and wounds which link them to all mankind.”



Small wonder when such people move from time to eternity they “belong to the ages.”

What about your life? We all have struggles of one kind or another, trials and tribulations that test our mettle.

When adversity comes, we are forced to face problems and pressures that are too big for us to resolve. In this way, God gets our attention. We can't continue to pursue our goals, tasks and relationships in the same manner. We have to stop and evaluate our situation, ask God for wisdom, obey His Word and trust Him to bring the help we need.

Troubles point out our weaknesses and prompt us to rely on God in ways that we wouldn't unless we had significant needs. Christ's invitation to those who are weary becomes very attractive in the midst of trials:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

– Beecher Hunter