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A new New Year's Resolution: Listen to your conscience and take the High Road

When I was stationed at a northern tier base, still wearing my banana bars, my wing chaplain called me into the office. "Someone submitted your name to be a candidate for company grade officer".

You know the drill – read up on current events, study military regulations and battles, send your uniform to the dry cleaners, get a high and tight and spit shine those shoes.

At the base level, I was in a room with eight other individuals who seemed far ahead of me. Some were graduates from SOS and the military Academy. They had already accomplished great things for the AF.

I felt like the sacrificial lamb to represent our unit, but I learned a lot. One by one we were called in, came to attention and answered a variety of questions from the board of field grade officers.

I must admit I was nervous with each question they asked. I gave a closing statement. I emphasized the role of chaplains and their impact on individuals, moral values, spiritual relationships with God, as well as our outreach on the flightline and in the local community with other churches. We were more than ceremonial totem poles you bring out for public events. We were bridge builders concerned for one's earthly and eternal life.

I was totally shocked that I was selected for that quarter and to move to the next level. The following week I was to meet the best of the best.

The morning of the big day there was a heavy snowstorm. There were squalls adding to the snow on the ground. The wind chill said 17 degrees. I left home early and I put the chains on my rear tires of my Dodge Volare.

As I was coming down the back road, I saw a car spin out and go over the shoulder. On a regular workday, I would have stopped. I had to decide. Should I help this individual or should I press on towards the competition?

My better angels spoke through my conscience. I pulled over and backed up. I ran to the car and standing next to it was a tall individual also wearing his great coat, mukluks and the heavy-duty gloves.

I tried to push his car out, but to no avail. Sleet and salt soaked my pants. I looked at my watch and knew I was going to be late. I opened my trunk, hooked the towrope to his car and pulled him out. I had chains on my tires, as he did not. He waved a thanks and got back on the salt road. I put everything back and headed towards the base gate.

I went to the office and took off my coat and ran into the restroom to wash all the dirt and slush off my clothes. My clothes were covered in salt, and my pants were soaking wet. My boss said, "They may not let you in, it's late, but go ahead anyway".

I arrived at HQ and the secretary looked at me and dressed me down. The commander's executive officer had a few words about timelines, and the last candidate grinned at me as if I was out of my league. I was not a zipper suited sun god.

I followed my conscience and helped an unknown fellow airman. The Exec opened the door and announced me.

I saluted, stated my name and rank, and apologized for my tardiness. I looked over the board members, eyes high.

Unbeknown to me a voice said, "You know chaplain you are quite late; we expect timeliness; your uniform is messed up, and you are here to meet an important board to see if you will be the company grade officer of the year!

"Well, I must say we are most grateful that you chose to pull your car over and assist my colleague here so that he could be with us to interview the nine previous officers. You are your brother's keeper and I believe in war you will still be your brother's keeper. Thank you, Chaplain. You taught us all an important lesson. Anyone can put together the externals, but we need officers who have an internal commitment. We say we leave no man

behind and you took the time. Thank you”.

Well, I wasn't selected, but I learned another faith-life lesson. It continues to guide me through my career and after retirement. I thank Jesus for teaching me the importance of being a Good Samaritan.

In the end, I will stand before the Trinity's heavenly board: They will look at my heart. Did I “Love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, and did I love my neighbor as myself”.

Achievements, credentials, medals, etc., are the meaningful ‘fruit cocktail’ many wear, but it's the cross right next to it that motivates and measures the true value of a human being. Self-less deeds will not be forgotten.

So, make this New Year more meaningful! Seek the Lord first, follow the Good Shepherd. He has never let you down. You can take that to the bank and the board.