

THINKSDAY

Beautiful Souls

May 28, 2026

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?” —
Martin Luther King Jr.*

“You get what you reward.” — Stephen Covey

I’ll try hard here not to give a book report; that’s not my aim. Imagine a decorated soldier of an elite unit of the IDF who refuses to participate in the forced removals of Palestinians from occupied territory. His motive was not in opposition to his beloved Israel but in his deeper belief and commitment to the claim that the IDF was the “most moral military force on Earth.” He paid a price for his conviction. Or how about a senior US military officer whose job it was to prosecute detained terrorists at Guantanamo? He was on a mission to avenge the lives of comrades killed or maimed in the war. Confronted by a particular injustice, he risked (and lost) his standing and career by truthfully testifying that the charges against one detainee were wrong, the prisoner abused, and the rule of law ignored. He didn’t switch sides or become a sympathizer to al-Qaeda but he was willing to defend higher principles of justice and humanity that his country espoused. It cost him. But it also led to the judicial establishment of Habeas Corpus and other rights for detainees.

Then there is the story of the Swiss officer of the German forces who helped hundreds of Jews escape to and get visas into his native Switzerland—not because he opposed or wanted to undermine the Nazi efforts, but because he had absorbed and believed in the Swiss national ethic of accepting refugees and welcoming others. If caught, he would have paid the ultimate price. The book’s examples explore the character, circumstances and motives of five different individuals who broke ranks, and took action against their own interests, safety, community, and allegiances to stand up more faithfully for the collective conscience and principles of those same communities and values.

It seems too many of our current elected leaders perceive retaining their positions, parties, and power as too important to lose. They seem to have lost sight of the deeper causes and

principles that their position and power were established to protect. Those causes and aspirations are too important to sacrifice—even if they have high cost. Have they confused the clothes for the man (or woman)? Have we? I've booed a Little League umpire. I'm not proud of that, but it gives me understanding of how easily we can lose sight of what matters.

Are we getting what we reward? Do we blind candidates with threats and promises to be carried out in the voting instead of raising their sights to higher, nobler, more lasting, and more American ideals? Do we encourage them to think election victory is both the end and the justification, and then regret that we get what we reward? Have we also, in our current desperation and fear, settled for smaller and lesser victory goals? How do we change how they—and we—align the compass to true north? How can we all lift our eyes to the hills together?

Happy Thinksday