

In Vergil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, the main character, Aeneas is repeatedly characterized as pious – faithful and loyal to the gods. In the story, Aeneas is chosen by the gods to lead the Trojan people away from burning Troy, which is facing its end by Greek hands near the conclusion of the Trojan War, and take them to Italy to establish a new nation. We are constantly reminded by Vergil of Aeneas's piety throughout his voyage, yet throughout the epic, Aeneas attempts to dedicate himself to other causes outside of the gods' will, namely his determination to bring his wife Creusa with him into exile, and his love of and marriage to Dido, Queen of Carthage. In both these cases, where Aeneas tries to be loyal to both a family and to the gods' wills, he fails, pointing to the idea that it is impossible for one to dedicate themselves fully to two causes. However, Aeneas's failures stem not from a lack of ability, but rather from his priority for one cause over the other.

Aeneas is first faced with this choice between family and piety as he flees burning Troy. As Aeneas fights against the Greeks, he finds himself lost and returns to his household to ensure the wellbeing of his father, his son, and his wife Creusa. Initially, they plan to continue the fight for Troy, but after Aeneas's son has his hair randomly burst into flame, they pray to Jupiter and ask for him to confirm this act as an omen. Jupiter responds by sending a bright beam of light into the forest. The family takes this as a message to leave and begin gathering their belongings. They plan to travel on separate paths and reunite further from the fighting, fleeing the burning city together. Clearly, Aeneas is dedicated to his family. As they run from the ongoing battle, Aeneas loses track of his wife, who was supposed to stay by his side. He frantically searches for Creusa, until her ghost (likely a god in disguise) appears to him and states:

"Dear husband, don't give into this mad grief.

None of this takes place without the gods' consent.

It's not right for you to take Creusa with you

as your wife."

(Vergil, 2.776-779)

Aeneas reluctantly continues without her. He prioritizes piety above all else, making him unable to remain faithful to two causes. Since his dedication to the gods makes him believe he can only do what they allow, Aeneas doesn't try to fight his perceived fate, making him appear to be

unable to remain faithful to both his family and his piety when all he is truly loyal to is what he believes is fate: the desires of the gods.

As the Trojans are led by Aeneas across the Mediterranean, they are decimated by horrid sea conditions and decide to dock at Carthage to recover before resuming their journey. Here, Aeneas again appears faithful to his family as he gets engaged to the Carthaginian queen, Dido. The two are married through the efforts of Juno, the God of marriage and patron of Carthage, and Venus, Aeneas's mother. Soon into their engagement, though, Aeneas is visited by Mercury, who questions, "So, you lay foundation for high Carthage? / ... / You forget your kingdom and your fate!" (Vergil, 4.265-267). Aeneas is deeply struck by Mercury's words and begins to think of how he should proceed with his fated departure. He does not wish to hurt Dido, and he does not desire to leave her, since why else would he prolong his rested fleet from their departure to Italy? This is further revealed as he finally speaks with Dido about how he must leave. She is enraged and upset, and Aeneas is ashamed. Vergil narrates that:

"[Aeneas] wanted to console her pain and soothe her grief with words.

Yet – though his great love

shook him to his soul

he groaned and followed

the gods' orders."

(Vergil, 4.393-396)

Again, Aeneas wants to remain faithful to the gods and his family, but he is denied by his belief that the gods' words and fate are all-important. He cannot stay true to his family and his gods, not because of a lack of ability, but because of a lack of will. Aeneas could have easily explained the situation to Dido and continued their relationship from afar, perhaps even bringing her with him to Italy. Instead, he drops even the thought of their marriage because he believes it is outside the gods' orders, when in reality all Mercury desired of Aeneas was for him to continue his journey. Aeneas fails as a husband, not directly because of the gods' desires, but because he cares little for anything besides what the gods want from him.

Through Aeneas's story, it is revealed that a lack of will prevents someone from dedicating themselves to two paths. But what about when there is will for both causes? What is revealed to us about faithfulness then? Similarly to Aeneas, Charlie, the main character of *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* attempts to dedicate himself to two causes: satisfying those around

him completely while still fulfilling his own needs. A freshman in high school, he finds himself befriendng a group of seniors, and he quickly develops a crush on Sam, a girl in the group. This idea of social and self-fulfillment shows most clearly in Charlie's relationships; his dating of another girl in his friend group named Mary Elizabeth, and later his crush Sam. Throughout the story, Charlie clearly wants to keep himself and his romantic partner happy, yet he is unable to focus on both at the same time, which ultimately leads to the failure of both his relationships.

When discussing the relationship between Charlie and Mary Elizabeth, it is crucial to note that Charlie never wanted to date Mary Elizabeth in the first place. He agrees to be taken by her their school's Sadie Hawkins dance and merely accepts their relationship afterward as an effect of their time at the dance together. Such is the first instance of Charlie being unable to keep his wants and the wants of others in mind; he believes that it is always the right thing to make others happy, and lets himself be walked over rather than advocating for himself and his desire not to date Mary Elizabeth. When he finally does speak up for himself, he chooses to advocate for his desires by being too honest. At a party with Sam and Mary Elizabeth in attendance, Charlie is dared to kiss the prettiest girl in the room. Instead of conforming to the wants of others, in this case being that of Mary Elizabeth and their friends supporting the relationship, he chooses to kiss Sam, whom he is actually in love with. He is immediately shamed away from the friend group and is left friendless. Charlie fails in the relationship and speaking up for himself by being unable to balance his desire to keep others and himself happy. By sticking with Mary Elizabeth, he is not true to his own needs, but by executing a breakup poorly, he completely abandons his wish to please others. A lack of balance between his desires, rather than something intrinsic to being faithful to himself and others, is what caused his failure of a relationship with Mary Elizabeth.

Charlie's lack of balance in his relationships is explored further as he engages with Sam romantically. The night before Sam plans to leave for college, she decides to confront Charlie and his overwhelming priority for others. She tells him, "You can't just sit here and put everybody's lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can't. You have to do things... like on the dance floor, did you want to kiss me?" When Charlie says yes, she asks "Then, why didn't you?" and Charlie responds, "Because I didn't think you wanted me to" (Chbosky, 201). Even to those around him, he seems to be putting too much emphasis on improving the lives of others rather than investing in his happiness. Noticing this, Sam follows this excerpt with a lecture to Charlie about how he has to show her what he wants, and he responds by kissing her. However, at this moment, Charlie isn't making a move on her just

because he wants to. He's doing this because he's received permission from Sam. He still cares much more about ensuring her needs are fulfilled than pursuing a romantic relationship, something he's desired essentially since they met. Charlie's emphasis on Sam's wants at this moment continues until the two elect to take the moment further, during which Charlie ends up stopping her, feeling like something is deeply wrong. Although he's just taking care of his needs, he feels terrible, and beats himself up for "Being such a baby [when he] loved Sam... and... ruining it. Just ruining it" (Chbosky, 203). He cares so much more about her being happy than himself being okay in that moment. This is another moment where Charlie ends up being honest too late. He is unable to balance the needs of Sam and himself, and again this lack of priority ends up putting him in a bad situation.

Following this moment with Sam, Charlie breaks down mentally, since it ends up bringing up bottled-up memories from when he was sexually abused as a child. However, the fact that he ended up stopping her and remembering his traumatic past was the only way for him to get better. By standing up for his own needs, he was able to eventually heal from this past trauma. Charlie ends up going to a mental hospital following his night with Sam, and during his stay there, his honesty and his desire to heal help him to recover from the incident, while he still has his friends visit and cares genuinely about how they're doing as well. Charlie realizes from his therapy that "Even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we choose where we go from there" (Chbosky, 211). Charlie finds balance in his life by getting help; he realizes that he has the power to choose where to go in his life and the balance that he needs to be successful. The book ends with Charlie stating, "Tomorrow, I start my sophomore year of high school. And believe it or not, I'm really not that afraid of going" (Chbosky, 213). He has come to terms with himself and his relationship with the world, and his balance in life has made him a much more confident person.

The importance of priority to being faithful to two subjects is revealed through *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*. Charlie's lack of balance in his relationships continuously puts him in situations where he must choose between making himself or his partner happy. Until the end of the book, Charlie's delayed self-advocacy makes balance impossible, even though he genuinely wants to balance both. Opposite of Aeneas, the desire for balance is there whereas the ability is not. Aeneas has ample opportunities to sustain his romantic relationships while continuing his voyage and doesn't, whereas Charlie desires to sustain himself and his relationships yet does not figure out how to until the end of the book. So far, it seems that a conflict of two interests ultimately leads to the demise of one, either because of a lack of desire or a lack of focus

towards balance. We have explored the two factors that lead to the failure of having two devotions, but not yet how a character excels when neither of these factors is present. Corporal Desmond Doss, unlike Charlie and Aeneas, was the epitome of both desire and balance. A combat medic during World War 2, Doss believed that murder (even of the enemy) was a cardinal sin, and thus rushed into battles to save the lives of his brothers-in-arms without a rifle to defend himself with. His actions are explored in the 2016 movie *Hacksaw Ridge*, which details his time in the US Army. Doss's neverending desire to do right by his God and his country is what allows him to succeed in a medical role, even without the means to defend himself.

Throughout the beginning of *Hacksaw Ridge*, Doss's fierce defense of his religion and his duty to his country shows his undying dedication to both. After he arrives at Basic Training, Doss is soon singled out by his superiors when he refuses to shoot or hold a rifle. Quickly challenged for his beliefs, he emphasizes that he has no duty to operate a weapon as he will serve as a combat medic. When Doss is questioned, "You're a conscientious objector, and you decided to join the Army?" he replies with, "Well, no, sir, I'm a conscientious cooperator... I ain't got no problem with wearing my uniform, saluting the flag, and doing my duty. It's just the carrying of a weapon and the taking of human life" (*Hacksaw Ridge*, 37:20-37:43). From the start, Doss wants nothing more than to serve both his God and his country. He is determined to actuate both of his duties and actively searches for compromises in his situation to allow him to fulfill both. Unsurprisingly, Doss's beliefs are not popular, and he faces harassment from both his chain of command and his fellow privates. Harassment turns to violence one day in the barracks when a group of his comrades beat Doss in his sleep. The following morning, when his sergeant discovers his wounds, he remarks to Doss, "It's time to quit this. Finish getting dressed and I'll walk you down [to be released]. It's okay Doss, there's no shame in this." Doss, still determined in both his duties, states, "I got extra guard duty, and I'm on KP this morning, so [I] can't" (*Hacksaw Ridge* 46:42-47:28). Doss even refuses to admit that he was beaten, to avoid the people who hurt him getting in trouble. He is devout to his nation, his creator, and the people around him, even when he feels in danger or betrayed.

Doss's persistent faith channels him to excel as a Christian and a medic as his unit is sent into the Pacific Theater. They're stationed at Okinawa, and face the daunting task of climbing hundreds of feet up Hacksaw Ridge and fighting to control its top. The first time they attempt the assault, they see brief success but are eventually pushed back to the point where they're forced to retreat down the ridge, leaving hundreds of wounded soldiers behind. When

Doss's friend, Smitty, is killed in the retreat, he asks his God, "What is it you want from me? I don't understand. I can't hear you." He hears a man scream for a medic in the distance and takes this as an omen. A look of determination comes over his face and he exclaims, "All right" (Hacksaw Ridge 1:38:12-1:38:45). Doss begins retrieving men from the battlefield, again, with no weapon to defend himself and no soldiers around him to give him cover. He spends an entire afternoon taking men from the battlefield and bringing them down Hacksaw Ridge by rope. When he gets tired, he finds himself repeating, "Please Lord, help me get one more" (1:50:32). Asking God to help him rescue another after each save, Doss lowers men into safety overnight. When morning comes, and the cover of night leaves, Doss does not falter and continues to save men until he is chased down the ridge by a large group of enemy soldiers. It is estimated that Private Doss saved 75 men that day. Because he wants nothing more than to do right by God and his country, Doss's motivation during the rescue is undying. He is outstanding in this role because he has balance in his devotion as well as the desire to fulfill both his ideals completely. Balance and undying devotion, as we see in Doss, create the conditions for him to excel in both his faiths.

With how Aeneas is depicted inside the Aeneid, readers are led to believe that he can't maintain a family and his loyalty to the gods, but this is nowhere near true. All of Aeneas's shortcomings stem not from undying faith, but rather from undying apathy for his surroundings. We see Charlie and Corporal Doss face similar situations of being stuck between two desires, yet both can succeed eventually through balance, compromise, and a true desire to fulfill what they believe to be their two duties. Aeneas is not a shining beacon of piety; he is a fraud, someone shackled to the god's rule, with no desires except to do right by them. Aeneas only falters from their orders by picking in between the margins, just to return to 'piety' the moment he is challenged by them, completely disregarding his companions in the process. If he had truly cared for his family, he would have taken Creusa into his fated exile. He would have been honest with Dido as Charlie was with Sam, and perhaps their love would have continued rather than ending with Dido's tragic suicide. If he truly cared for the people of Troy, he would have at least done something to remain in the good graces of Carthage so that Trojans unwilling to risk continuing the so-far treacherous journey to Italy would have a safe home. Whereas we see Doss risk his life for his brothers-in-arms, Aeneas risks his Trojan brothers for his fate. Ultimately, what *Hacksaw Ridge* and *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* teach us about Aeneas is that he fails at anything but his loyalty to fate because he has no care for anything else. He may claim to be a pious man, but Aeneas is no more than a puppet for the gods' desires.