



Onward
CHRISTIAN
Soldiers

DEVOTIONAL

2 Timothy 2:3

*Thou therefore endure hardness,
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction

In 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul admonishes Timothy to “endure hardness as a good *Soldier* of Jesus Christ.” The Lord allowed me to serve 21 years in the United States Army, and along the way brought to light many similarities serving my country and serving Him. There are many service members that have bravely served their nation and are now serving the Lord. Some of them may not even realize the character traits and principles instilled by the military that they continue to utilize as they serve in God’s Army.

As the Lord’s return draws nigh it seems that many of God’s people are choosing not to engage the enemy and hope that the “special forces” (preachers, pastors, missionaries, evangelists and church staff) will continue to fight in their place. With those thoughts in mind, I have endeavored to provoke you to thought, to love and good works by utilizing military principles, illustrations and stories as we commit to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. My sincere prayer is that someone will be encouraged, emboldened, strengthened and/or helped in some way to stay in the fight. We know the end, because we have a book (AV 1611) that tells us God wins the war. However, there are many battles along the way that can be won if God’s people will serve the way He intends for them to serve.

While I am thankful for all that have served in every branch of the U.S. military, my approach and perspective is one of a Soldier; a combat veteran, military policeman, truck driver, drill sergeant and recruiter. Please do not feel slighted if you served in a different branch, but being a Soldier is what I relate to.

Thank you to all that have served our country, and thank you to all that continue to serve in God’s Army.

Because He Lives,

Brother Michael Doney

“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” ~Dwight D Eisenhower

~Enlistment

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

There are many people that would like to be a Soldier in the U.S. Army, but they are not. The reason they cannot claim the title of a Soldier, is because they have never enlisted. Some people will dress (it's not that hard to get Army uniforms), talk and act like a Soldier, but they are not a Soldier. In order to be called a Soldier, they must first enlist. Enlistment is a memorable event in a Soldier's life when they raised their right hand and took the oath of enlistment.

When someone claims to be a Soldier but they haven't really enlisted, they will be missing out. Claiming the Soldier title with no real enlistment results in zero benefits. They cannot go on base and shop at the PX and Commissary, they won't receive a pay check, they won't be covered by the Army's medical insurance or be able to retire with benefits. They might fool others but they won't fool the Department of the Army.

Unfortunately, there are many folks that call themselves a Christian but they have never "enlisted" in God's Army. Just like when someone enlists into the U.S. Army, there has to be a moment in time when someone turns to God and trusts Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Have you ever heard someone say that they were born a Christian? The truth is that no one is born a Christian. We are all born as sinners and our sin separates us from God. You need to be "born again" (John chapter 3) spiritually to become a Christian.

There is a modern movement that gets many people to pray or "come to Jesus" for a better life. They promote accepting Him if you're tired of your life and looking for something better, or bringing all of your problems to Him. While this approach may yield lots of people praying, these are empty prayers that won't result in a spiritual birth. The gospel as outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, is not that Christ died for you to have a better life or for you to bring your problems to Him, but states that "Christ died for our **sins.**"

People spend eternity in hell because of their sin, not because they are unhappy or have lots of difficulties in their lives. Their problem is a sin problem. They need to repent (admit they are a sinner) and accept Christ's payment for their sin. Salvation can only come after they are willing to admit that they are a sinner in need of a Saviour. Those that would preach salvation without dealing with the sin problem are preaching another gospel (Galatians 1), not the gospel that converts sinners to Christ.

Going onto an Army base doesn't make you a Soldier and going to church doesn't make you a Christian. Memorizing the Soldier's Creed doesn't make you a Soldier and memorizing a prayer doesn't make you a Christian. There has to be a "moment" of enlistment to become a Christian. There are many different terms we use for this: salvation, born again, redeemed, etc, but without this "enlistment" you are not a Christian.

The same way the fake Soldier misses out on the benefits that come with enlisting; the fake Christian will miss out on the benefits of salvation. Not having a moment of salvation means that you are not God's child and that you will spend eternity in hell instead of heaven. You may not remember the exact day and time that you got saved, but you should remember some details about that life changing moment. You might fool some people, but you will not fool God.

There are people that would like to enlist into the U.S. Army, but they are disqualified. In order to enlist as a Soldier, they must meet all the prescribed legal, medical

and intelligence standards. The reality is that many people do not meet these standards. Praise the Lord that God only has one standard for salvation: you must be a “whosoever”! Everyone is qualified to become a Christian; you just have to choose God’s way instead of your own.

Upon enlisting, the new Soldiers quickly realize that their personal feelings and opinions are very irrelevant to the DA (Department of the Army). They have surrendered many of their so called “rights” and will go where the Army tells them to go, when they tell them to go, regardless if they want to. Complaining will accomplish nothing but anguish, and refusal will result in some harsh consequences. The best thing a Soldier can do is what the Army tells him to do.

Christianity should be a lifestyle, not something you put on for Sunday morning and take off the rest of the week. God will not force you to do anything; He gives you the choice of following His will for your life. Like the American Soldier, the best thing you can do is what He wants you to! His way is always the best for you. Once you have enlisted in God’s Army, you should be listening for your next set of orders.

~A Common Bond

Acts 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

When applicants enlist into the U.S. Army, whether they realize it or not, their life is about to change. What they wear will change, how they speak will change, where they go will change, what they do will change, what they read will change, and they will be expected to live their life by the Army's values and guidelines. It's similar to starting a new life.

When a person gets born again, or saved, their life too should change. Second Corinthians 5:17 states:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

There is something terribly wrong with someone that supposedly has gotten saved and the Holy Spirit now lives inside of them, but there is not a desire to change and please God. It is completely normal (and I believe biblical) to question whether or not they truly got saved if there is no change. After all, in Matthew 7, Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

There are three different components of the Army: The RA (Regular Army), the USAR (U.S. Army Reserve) and the ARNG (the Army National Guard). The RA and USAR are federal components and the ARNG is a state component. The Regular Army is serving 365 days a year, until your contract expires. The USAR and ARNG are serving one weekend a month, 15 days a year (usually in the summer): 39 days a year. The training is the same; Soldiers from all three components go to the same BCT (Basic Combat Training) and AIT (Advanced Individual Training) but the commitment and benefits are different.

While sometimes the preaching is about giving it all for Jesus and going into full-time Christian service, the reality is that the church needs different people serving with different commitment levels. The importance of the faithful church members that work a fulltime job, attend every service, are committed to the outreach activities of the church and faithfully tithe and give to missions is no less than that of the fulltime workers. In 1 Corinthians 12, it is explained that the body of Christ is made up of many different members that are compared to body parts. We are told that no member is better than the other, and that all are needed. Just like the Army needs all three components, the church needs everyone that can and will get involved. Whether it's for 60 hours a week or four hours a week, it takes all involved to accomplish the mission.

Regardless of what component Soldiers serve in, they are Soldiers. Duty assignment and location doesn't change the fact that they are Soldiers. In combat or serving a peace time mission, they are Soldiers. Whether you support the military or not, the reality is that service members are an elite group of society: only about 2% of the U.S. population serves or has served in the military. Soldiers share common bonds, common words and common lifestyles. They have to meet the same standards and follow the same regulations. Soldiers can meet for the first time and talk for hours, telling stories of their military experiences. They have their own associations and clubs; Soldiers enjoy being around Soldiers.

If Soldiers can bond over their common experiences and having been through things that only another Soldier can identify with, shouldn't Christians share a similar bond? Many Christians don't identify with this bond with other Christians, because they have limited experiences as a Christian. They have a testimony of salvation and go to church occasionally but they have no stories or experiences for God. They still identify with the things of the world and would rather be around those they can identify with.

I enjoy spending time with fellow Soldiers and I also enjoy fellowship with fellow Christians. I enjoy hearing the experiences of other missionaries, youth pastors, those involved in public outreach and those that work with Soldiers, because I can relate to their experiences. The more you serve the Lord, the more you will want to be around God's Soldiers; you will share a common bond.

There are some Soldiers that like to exaggerate their experiences in the military; they are good story tellers. They will typically spin these stories to non-military personnel. A real Soldier would see through these stories and call their bluff. Their stories only work when they are talking with those that don't know any better. The result is that the hearers are left with a false impression about their service and the U.S. Army.

Christians need to be careful not to exaggerate their experiences when talking with others. We should make sure to give God the glory, not ourselves, and not make things sound worse or better than they really are. We do not want to give a false impression of the Christian life. There are good times and hard times when you serve the Lord; you can't go wrong by being honest about your experiences!

~Mission Accomplishment

2 Timothy 2:1-2 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

To make it short and simple, the U.S. Army's mission statement is "to fight and win our nation's wars." The total Army strength is somewhere in the neighborhood of two million Soldiers. Each Soldier is different: different jobs, different goals, different ideas, different colors, different skills and abilities. But they are expected to work together to help their unit accomplish its mission, so the Army can "fight and win our nation's wars."

So, what is the Christian's mission? The simple answer is "to fulfill the great commission¹", but there are many Christians that don't understand what that means. My understanding of the great commission is this: get the Gospel to everyone we possibly can (preaching, visitation, handing out tracts, etc.), so that when the Holy Spirit convicts them, they can get saved. Once they're saved, they should submit to believer's baptism and be disciplined to be obedient to God's word, so that they can repeat the process that others can get saved and disciplined (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, 2 Timothy 2:2).

Ask any NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) in the Army what their primary responsibility is, and regardless of their job, in some form the answer will be the same: accomplishing the mission. Mission accomplishment comes first, followed by family, friends, safety, personal goals and anything and everything else.

If the mission of the Christian is to fulfill the great commission, it seems like many churches have lost their way. They are full of people that sit through a message, leave the service and never share the Gospel with anyone. A far cry from accomplishing the mission as a Christian Soldier. We need to understand that going to heaven is a benefit of salvation, not the end goal of our Christianity. God has something for every one of his children to do until they get to heaven!

I wonder what answers we would get if we were to ask Christians what their life is all about. How many would say, "to fulfill the great commission?" Or, would it be answers like this: "support my pastor", "be the best Christian I can be", "be kind to others", "give to the church", "have a good relationship with Jesus Christ", "read my Bible and pray" or a variety of other ideas. While I would consider the previous list to be "good" things, they fall short of being a witness and reproducing disciples that reproduce disciples. I submit to you that God created man for fellowship, and if our fellowship with Him is right, we will want to bring others into fellowship with Him! What if God had some churches full of Soldiers that their top priority was doing their part in the great commission? The moral landscape of the world would look a lot different.

Just like the U.S. Army, God's Army needs different people doing different things to fulfill the great commission. It takes both Special Forces (pastors, evangelists, missionaries, etc.) and those not on the front lines (secretaries, bus drivers, visitation partners, members in

¹ The term "great commission" is not found in the Bible. However, it is a term used to identify the Christian's responsibility to strive to reproduce disciples of Jesus Christ.

their prayer closets, cheerful givers, etc.) for the church to accomplish its mission. Not everyone can preach, not everyone can teach, not everyone can be a missionary, not everyone can give large amounts of money, not everyone can spend hours in their prayer closet, and not everyone can give multiple hours a week to help their church in some capacity. God's plan was never for one or two people in your church to do it all. His plan is for every church member to do their part to fulfill the great commission (1 Corinthians 12).

Amnesty

Revelation 3:19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

Amnesty is a general pardon of offenses that is sometimes offered to Soldiers on various occasions. I distinctly remember a time in BCT that amnesty was offered. We had been at the rifle bayonet range when a thunderstorm moved in. The result was us riding buses back to the barracks and a change of the training schedule for the day. Upon arrival at the barracks, we were given a ridiculously short amount of time to put our gear in our wall lockers and return to formation. This was around week four of BCT and we had learned how to move fast and the consequences of not getting a task done in time.

We were fairly happy with ourselves to be standing in formation with some seconds to spare, until we heard the next command; “Get upstairs and toe the line² for inspection.” This posed an immediate problem as your wall locker had to be set up the way the Drill Sergeant had showed you and ready for inspection at all times. I think everyone in our platoon knew that it wasn’t going to go well since we had just thrown our rucksacks, helmets, ponchos, protective masks and LCE’s (Load Carrying Equipment) into our wall lockers to meet the aforementioned ridiculously short timeline. We thought that since we were in 2nd Platoon we might have a chance to organize our wall lockers, because surely the CO (Commanding Officer) would go to 1st Platoon to inspect them first. No such luck. Within a minute of our arrival to our barracks the CO walked in. We all knew this was not going to be good. We also knew that there were certain soldiers that had contraband (items that are not allowed) in their wall lockers and it was bound to be found out.

Then an amazing thing happened; the CO said that she was pronouncing amnesty and if we had any contraband to turn it in and there would be no punishment. Several Soldiers turned in tobacco products and unauthorized reading materials, but there were other soldiers that thought they could hide their violations. The end result was the Soldiers that turned in the items under amnesty suffered the physical punishment felt by all, because of messed up wall lockers, but that was it. The Soldiers that got caught trying to hide their prohibited items received the physical punishment, and later on, administrative punishment. Some valuable lessons were learned that day: the Drill Sergeant knows what’s going on with his Soldiers (you will get caught if you are doing wrong) and amnesty does not last forever!

I can’t help but think of King David and the sin he committed with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). By the way, I would have loved to serve alongside Uriah. You talk about the picture of loyalty. Even under the influence of alcohol he would not go and spend the night with his wife, because his fellow Soldiers were at war and he thought it would be wrong to be with his wife during this time. David’s attempts to cover his adultery with Bathsheba failed because of Uriah’s loyalty. David, in turn set up Uriah to be killed in combat so he could attempt to cover his wicked act. It took a brave, godly man named Nathan to point out David’s sin to his face. Amazingly, instead of having Nathan killed for calling him out, he realized his sin, repented and restored his relationship with the Lord (Psalm 51). There were

² To “toe the line” is to stand on the designated line on the floor at the end of your bunk at attention awaiting the next command.

still consequences for his sin and the child he conceived with Bathsheba died. I wonder how the rest of David's life would have played out had he not repented when he did?

There are Christians that do not understand or choose to ignore the omniscience (all knowing) of God. They sit through a message and the Holy Ghost puts His finger on the sin in their life. Instead of confessing their sin to God and getting their heart right, they try to ignore the conviction and think it will be "ok". God is longsuffering, but how long is that longsuffering? The Bible clearly tells us in the 12th chapter of Hebrews that God chastens those whom He loves, and if we can do wrong without receiving chastening, then we are not one His children. Nobody knows when "amnesty" is going to end and the chastening will begin. Why not get things right now and receive the benefits of God's mercy and grace, before you reap the harvest of your sin (Galatians 6:7 & 8)?

~I'll Throw the Buffer Out of the Window

1 Chronicles 28:9 And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

To say the least, BCT (Basic Combat Training) was an eye-opening experience for me. I can remember being sore from standing at the position of parade rest in muscles that I didn't even know I had prior to BCT. I can remember thinking, "What have I gotten into here, five years is a long time (that was the term of my initial enlistment) and I can't believe grown men are crying." If I am not mistaken, we ended up with 15-20 guys not making it through our BCT cycle. Some dropped out due to injuries, but many of them just couldn't take it.

There was a guy in our platoon (I still remember his name) that we all thought was kind of crazy, and he would play it up by doing things like putting on his cold weather hat and act like he was drooling from the mouth. All and all he was a good guy, just a little "off" at times. I can't remember the specific details of the day's activities but it must have been a pretty bad day. Several of us were sitting around talking before lights out about some of the guys that had left and possible ways of getting out of the Army. This guy had put some serious thought into his plan. Every night we had to buff the floors on fire guard³. The buffer had a very long cord. He said that he was going to tie the buffer cord around his neck and throw it out of the window of our barracks, which was on the 2nd floor. He said that the way he had it figured was the cord was long enough that the buffer would hit the ground and cause no or very little damage to himself. This would look like a failed suicide attempt from a dumb Private and he would get to go home after some mental counseling.

I am happy to report that a buffer never went out of the window and he ended up graduating from BCT. I did see some mattresses and various other items get thrown out of the windows by some of our Drill Sergeants during an inspection, but no buffers. This Soldier had come up with what he and several others thought was the perfect excuse to go home. Later we learned that the Drill Sergeants liked to listen to our conversations through the intercom. They probably heard this conversation and many others like it. So, if he would have followed through, they probably would have just laughed at him and he would have been charged for damaging government property for breaking the buffer!

I have never thought about trying to throw a buffer out of the window to get out of serving God, but to my shame I have come up with some "good" excuses to not do what God wanted me to do. I have also heard many of these excuses when a fellow Christian has been asked to get involved in a ministry, or was questioned about their sporadic church attendance. Christians are very good at making excuses and convincing themselves and others that they can't do something that they should be doing, but remember, God is listening through the

³ Fire guard consists of two Soldiers on hourly shifts from lights out to wake-up. Each shift has to count the Soldiers in their bay and perform an assigned task.

intercom. You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool God!

~Get Out of My Office

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

I did 10 cycles as a Drill Sergeant, and without fail, each cycle a similar occurrence took place. It always happened within the first week of BCT. A Soldier would bring their Battle Buddy to my office to speak with me. I would allow them to come in and listen to them tell me (usually through tears) that they didn't want to be here, the Army wasn't for them and they wanted to go home. My response was always the same, "Private, get out of my office." You might be thinking that was a cruel act on my part, but I had an understanding of what they were going through. I too wanted to walk into my Drill Sergeant's office and try to quit, but there was something inside of me that wouldn't let me do it.

A Private in BCT has no idea what the Army is really like, let alone in the first week of training. The Soldiers that walked into my office were homesick, scared and tired. The fatigue and shock of their new lifestyle was wreaking havoc on their emotional state and they were only focusing on the negative. When I told them to "get out of my office", my hope was that they would think, "Ok, maybe I can't quit." The reality is that Soldiers can quit during BCT, but I didn't want them to know that at this point. I would normally find a squared away⁴ Private and tell them that "Private such and such" is struggling and to keep an eye on them and try to encourage them. I would revisit the issue with the Private that wanted to quit within 48 hours. I would guess that seven out of those ten Soldiers had changed their minds and wanted to stay. All of them that stayed ended up graduating from BCT and moving on. When the Soldiers that wanted to quit saw that quitting might not be as easy as they thought, and they received some encouragement from a peer, it completely changed their thinking and attitude.

There are some times that serving the Lord can be very difficult. There have been times, if I am honest with myself, I have focused on the negative and wanted to quit. I think to myself that I could just go enjoy my retirement and my family and drown some worms (I enjoy hunting and fishing) and shoot at some deer. After all, the only people I would really have to deal with then is an employee at Walmart to get my hunting and fishing license. I could hand them a Gospel tract and then spend some time with my family and have some fun. When I start thinking like this, without fail, God will use my wife or a brother in Christ to encourage me and get me thinking right again.

I wonder how many Soldiers in the Lord's Army took an "early retirement", because the going got tough and they focused on the negative? I wonder if any of them would still be in the fight, if someone would have been there to encourage them? Do you know someone that is discouraged and wants to quit? Maybe some words of encouragement and prayers would help them to stay in the fight. God wants some "men" that won't quit when things don't go their way!

I believe many people want to please God and want to be engaged in serving Him but they have a heart problem. They have not put their flesh under subjection, so the result in

⁴ "Squared away" is a term used to identify a quality Soldier that is doing well.

their life is wanting to serve God, but they are serving their flesh instead. God needs some Soldiers like the men found in 1 Chronicles 12:33:

*Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, **which could keep rank**: they were not of double heart.*

They could “keep rank” and were “not of double heart”; enlisted and committed to the cause of their king! If you want to be a warrior for God, then you need to make the Christian life a priority, not just a possibility. Choose to put God first; He is worthy!

~ Why Are You Here?

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

A good Recruiter will do his best to find a benefit that the Army offers to fulfill a need that a potential recruit has. He then will make that the selling point and focus his efforts on getting the person to see how the Army can be a help to them. The Recruiter will usually spend very little time talking about the difficulties of Army life and the rigors of combat. Most new Soldiers are focused on what the Army can do for them, not the sacrifices and hardship of being a Soldier.

Around the third day of Basic Training, the Drill Sergeants would have each Soldier stand up, introduce themselves and tell why they joined the Army. Over 90% of the Soldiers would say that they had joined because of a benefit they would receive: student loan repayment, money for college, job skills, bonus money, etc. There would occasionally be a few that said that they joined for service to their country, but that wasn't the norm.

I would take that opportunity to explain to the Soldiers, regardless of their motivation for enlisting, they were now government property. As a Soldier their purpose was to learn to fight and win in combat. It was obvious by their reactions, that up until that point, some of them had never really considered what it meant to be a Soldier. They had only focused on the benefits, not what their responsibility was as a Soldier and the possibility of giving their life for their country.

There are far too many Christians that have the same mentality as these Soldiers. They overlook their responsibilities and focus on what's in it for them. Eternity in heaven is the benefit of salvation, but there's more to Christianity than heaven. God has given the responsibility to all men to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ; not just the preachers and pastors. We are saved to serve, not just sit and wait until we get to heaven.

I got saved for the same reason most people do, because I wanted to go to Heaven. Eternity in heaven is the best benefit that we could ever have, but what a privilege that God would have something for us to do for Him until we get to heaven! Verses 8 and 9 in Ephesians chapter 2 are wonderful verses: salvation is a gift that just needs to be received, but don't stop there. Verse 10 tells us that we have a purpose once we are saved; God has "works" that we can do for Him.

The good news is that many Soldiers grasp their responsibility by the time they complete BCT. They will make the best Soldiers, because they understand that their service isn't all about what they are getting. Their service is part of something much bigger than themselves. The same is true about being a Christian. A Christian's life is supposed to be about letting Christ live through them (Galatians 2:20) to accomplish His will, not just receiving the benefits that come with being saved. The good news is any sacrifices you make for Christ in your physical life will be worth it all in eternity!

~Cookies and Showers

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

I was a Drill Sergeant for two years and after my first six months I thought I had it all figured out and had seen most everything, but I was wrong. After Red Phase (the first two weeks of BCT, also known as “total control”) is complete the Soldiers enter into White Phase.

In White Phase peer leadership is assigned (and usually fired shortly after) and the Drill Sergeant will begin to take it a little easier on the Soldiers, so they can focus on BRM (Basic Rifle Marksmanship). One of the more fun and relaxing times with the Soldiers was during mail call in the evenings. Mail was distributed to the Soldiers, an AAR (After Action Review) was conducted, the next day’s activities were discussed and maybe even a joke or two was told. This was also a good time to discuss and correct any issues in the platoon. We averaged 55-65 Soldiers in our platoon in BCT; there were plenty of issues.

On one such occasion, it had been brought to my attention that one Soldier had been eating cookies in the shower. Food was not allowed in the barracks, let alone the showers, and I strongly discouraged the Soldiers from partaking in sweets. I took the opportunity after mail call was finished to call attention to this situation. I called out the Soldier’s name and he promptly jumped up, went to the position of parade rest, and responded, “Yes, Drill Sergeant.” I told the Soldier that it had been brought to my attention that he had been eating cookies in the shower. He continued to stare straight ahead. I can’t tell you what he was thinking at that time, but I am pretty sure it had something to do with the realization that he had been caught doing something that he was about to be punished for. I asked him if this information was correct. The response; “Yes, Drill Sergeant.” I then asked him if food was allowed in the barracks. His response this time, “No, Drill Sergeant”. I said, “Private, you know that you are not allowed food in the barracks. Why in the world would you be eating cookies in the shower?” His response is one that I’ll never forget; “Drill Sergeant, I like cookies and I like showers.” I tried to keep a straight face, but my fellow Drill Sergeant and I almost fell on the floor laughing; at least he was honest.

I can safely say that I never thought I would have to deal with a Soldier eating cookies in the shower. Sometimes things happen that completely take us by surprise. Unfortunately, there are many Christians that think just like that Soldier did. They know certain things are wrong but they do them anyway. Their reason: they like it. How many stories have you heard of ministries lost, lives destroyed and families ruined because someone wanted to do something that they “liked”, instead of what is right?

The Soldier that ate the cookies in the shower immediately received corrective training in the form of physical exertion. He was reminded that it’s not okay to do something just because he liked it, and there are consequences for breaking the rules. To my knowledge, at that point he decided eating cookies in the shower wasn’t any longer a good idea. I never heard of him or any other Soldiers eating cookies in the shower.

The Christian that would eat cookies in the shower (figuratively speaking) seems to forget that God is a holy God and expects us to do right. Modern Christianity likes to bring to light that we have a “loving” God, but they fail to mention that in addition to being loving,

He has many other attributes. One of these attributes is righteousness. Because God is righteous, He will not tolerate sin. If God could tolerate sin, Jesus would not have had to die. The truth is that there are consequences for doing what we like when it goes against God's standards. We might get away with our sin for an undetermined amount of time, but I assure you He doesn't laugh about it and expects us to repent and get things right.

~Proper Sight Alignment

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

There are four fundamentals to BRM (Basic Rifle Marksmanship): Breath control, steady position, trigger squeeze and sight alignment. All four need to be properly applied in order to consistently hit the targets you are aiming at. The hardest one to observe is sight alignment. You can watch someone shoot and see if they are breathing or not, if they are steady or not, and if they are squeezing or jerking the trigger. What you can't see is the sight alignment that is being used. Bad sight alignment will normally result in completely missing what you are shooting at.

One of the first things that needs to be determined to get good sight alignment is eye dominance. Every Soldier that I have ever trained has a dominant eye. This is the stronger eye that "centers" an object. Eye dominance is very easy to determine. With both eyes open, you can hold your thumb up and center it on an object (picture, light switch, etc.) 12-20 feet away. Your thumb will appear blurry or maybe even doubled with both eyes open. Without moving your thumb, close one eye, reopen that eye, then close the other eye. What you will notice is that when you closed each eye, your thumb either stayed fairly centered, or was way off. The eye that was open when your thumb stayed centered is your dominant eye. This is ideally the eye that you should have focusing when you are shooting. The other eye will be closed when you are focusing on, and about to shoot at your target.

Once Soldiers know which eye is dominant, they have to understand how to properly align the sights toward their target. They are taught to shoot with the same hand as their eye dominance. This can cause some issues if they are right eye dominant, but left-handed, or vice versa. There are three elements dealing with getting a proper sight picture when you are dealing with iron sights. The rear sight aperture (often called a peep sight), the front sight post and the target. It is only possible for the human eye to focus on one object at a time. You have to choose what to focus on. What you focus on will be clear and everything else will be a little blurry. In shooting, the front sight post is the object that is in focus. Proper sight alignment is looking through the peep sight, focusing on the front sight and placing it in the middle of the peep sight and on your target where you want the bullet to hit the target. Proper sight alignment will result in the front sight post being clear and the target being a little bit blurry.

As a Christian, Jesus should be our front sight post, everything else should be a little blurry. Remember, you can only focus on one thing at a time. Problems arise when we take our focus off of Jesus and place it on something else. Our focus may turn to our job, a person, pleasure, finances, education, family or a multitude of other things. The result is that Jesus will be blurry in our lives.

When you have blurred vision, it can be very difficult to deal with. I would like to draw a comparison to the physical and the spiritual effects of blurred vision. When your vision is blurred:

-Things don't appear as they really are. (The world's philosophies and ways seem to make sense, even though they are contrary to the word of God.)

-Your steps are unclear; confusion. (I'm just really struggling to find and follow God's will for my life.)

-You are in danger of being hurt. (It's not that big of a deal, it's just a little sin. It feels good so it must be ok.)

Proper sight alignment for a Christian is being focused on Jesus Christ. This will help you to not end up wandering around aimlessly in this life. There is a hymn entitled "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." In the chorus it states, "and the things of earth will grow strangely dim." If we are focused on Jesus, the temporary things in this world will not distract us and pull us away from our purpose in serving the Lord.

~Setting and Achieving Goals

*Habakkuk 2:2 And the LORD answered me, and said,
Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.*

The Army practices “backwards planning” when it comes to achieving goals (the military would call them objectives). A unit will often begin looking at objectives to be accomplished about one to two years out. The leaders will identify the desired tasks to be accomplished and work their way backward figuring out what needs to happen in order to accomplish the goal. The goals are discussed and it is determined who bears certain responsibilities, what can be done now and what needs to happen as the event draws nearer. There are regular planning meetings to ensure that responsibilities are being fulfilled and to check progress as the events get closer.

There are many variables: unit personnel strength, equipment status, logistical support, etc.- but the leadership focuses on being successful in the areas that they can control. This process has been proven to be effective as long as those involved fulfill their responsibilities. The goal is for the unit to never fail to meet its objectives because of circumstances they can control. The result will be a unit achieving its goals and accomplishing its mission.

In our Christian life we often fail to set goals for God, let alone start planning a strategy to obtain them. We have goals in almost every area of our lives but when it comes to service to the Lord, most Christians settle for showing up when it fits into their schedules. As I think about this it sheds light on a much larger problem; many Christians tend to segment their lives: the things they do as a Christian and everything else. In turn, the Christian part is usually neglected and many people never end up accomplishing anything for the Lord.

In order to be most effective for the Lord you need to stop segmenting. You need to purpose for your Christianity to be lived out in all areas of your life. One of the ways to get our Christianity to mix in like it should is to set goals. Not vague generalities; “I want to do better for God”, or “I want to be a better Christian”, but specific goals. Maybe goals like:

- Spending a certain amount of time per day in prayer and reading the Bible.
- Set an amount of gospel tracts that you want to hand out per week, month or year.
- Set a goal of an amount of people you want to share your testimony with in a given time period.
- Set a goal of attending every service and outreach opportunity.
- Set a goal to increase your giving by a certain amount or percentage.
- Set a goal to get involved in a ministry that you are not currently involved in.

If you are willing to think and pray about this, I’m sure the Holy Spirit will give you some direction on the goals. Then, like the Army, do some backwards planning to help you stay on course and actually meet those goals. Hopefully, this will result in your Christianity spilling into all the other areas of your life. This will help you live the Christian life and not a segmented life split in to the Christian part and everything else. There are way too many

Christians that never accomplish anything for God. The reason often is that they never plan to accomplish anything for Him. Plan to do something that will count for eternity!

~Battle Buddies

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

I remember standing in my Drill Sergeants' office when I was in BCT; two Drill Sergeants and me. I can't remember the reason I was there but I remember being very intimidated. I had several interactions with a Drill Sergeant without anyone else present. Nothing bad ever happened but there were no witnesses if something bad would have happened.

By the time I was a Drill Sergeant the battle buddy policy was in force. The battle buddy policy was that a Soldier in BCT must always have another Soldier of the same gender with them. A Soldier is not allowed to talk to a Drill Sergeant or the opposite gender without a battle buddy. A battle buddy is not just to avoid any problems and making bad choices; it is to keep the Soldiers thinking right and to have someone to help them with difficult tasks. The idea is to work together as a team. If one Soldier fails the battle buddy fails too.

I did not assign Soldiers a battle buddy, but rather, let them choose their own. I recall one particular Soldier that was the funny guy (good spirited and always cracking jokes) in the platoon. He was a good Soldier but had problems staying with a battle buddy. After several warnings I assigned him a battle buddy. It was about a golf ball size rock that he had to keep in his cargo pocket. I randomly but frequently checked that he had his battle buddy with him. Surprise! One day he forgot his rock and I assigned him a team (three) of battle buddies. It wasn't very long and he forgot the three rocks. I then assigned him a squad (10) of battle buddies. By the 8th week of BCT this Soldier was assigned a company (250) of battle buddies. The rocks were much smaller than his original battle buddy and he carried them in a freezer bag to keep them together. He finally got the point and realized that he needed to be with a battle buddy at all times.

Regardless of who we are or how tough we are, there are times when we need a battle buddy. There are times that we need somebody to say, "don't do that." There are times when we need someone to share our heart with and to pray with. Anyone that has faced difficult times understands the importance of having someone there to talk to and confide in. King David fell into sin when there were no battle buddies around.

I am very thankful for some Christian "battle buddies" that have been there when I needed them most. Many times, "being there" means willing to talk on the phone or through text or email. These battle buddies have kept me from doing some things I probably would have regretted and they have helped me to get my thinking right when dealing with the things of the ministry.

From day one of BCT the Drill Sergeant emphasizes the importance of having and being a good battle buddy. A Soldier often fails or succeeds because of their battle buddy. It is no different as a Christian; we need a good battle buddy. Maybe not right now but the time may come when having a battle buddy may determine our success or failure for God. I have heard all the arguments and preaching about being accountable to God for myself and the Holy Spirit should guide and help me. I understand all of those things but sometimes I just need to talk with somebody that is willing to listen and will spend some time

in prayer with me, or tell me that I am not seeing things as I should. Who do you know that you could be a battle buddy to?

~TTP'S

*2 Corinthians 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us:
for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

In combat, the better a unit understands the enemy and how he fights, the better the chance of victory. The Army understands their enemy by identifying the enemy's TTPs (Tactics, Techniques and Procedures). By understanding how, when and where the enemy attacks, the Army can change their own tactics to increase their effectiveness in the battle.

When I was in Iraq a common enemy tactic was to utilize roadside bombs. The enemy would place explosive devices in various places in a variety of ways. They preferred places where traffic had to slow down, like on and off ramps, traffic circles and/or intersections. They might place the explosives in a sand bag, under rocks/debris, or inside a dead animal, etc. When the convoy was slowed down and next to the explosives the enemy would detonate the device. Understanding the enemy's use of these devices allowed the U.S. Army to develop equipment and procedures to thwart some of these attacks preventing injuries, deaths and damage to equipment.

It is important to understand that a smart enemy will change their TTPs as their efforts become less effective. As the convoys avoided the potential attack areas and increased their speed (a fast-moving target is hard to hit), the enemy adjusted. They would create a traffic jam by placing objects or a broken-down vehicle in the roadway along the route, causing the convoy to slow down or stop. The enemy had previously placed explosive devices in anticipation of the convoy's location when it would have to slow down. You should be able to figure out what happened next.

Units would have to continuously adjust their routes and how they performed their mission as the enemy changed their TTPs. It was like a continuous game of cat and mouse and a failure to adapt could result in the injuries and deaths of Soldiers.

The Christian has enemies that include the flesh and the devil. In Ephesians 6:11, we are told that we can stand against the "wiles" of the devil if we put on the armour of God. The devil has TTPs that he uses against God's people. These TTPs are designed to tempt our flesh, resulting in sin that can make us ineffective for God. We need to understand that the devil is a foe that we can't take on by ourselves. If Michael, the Archangel, would not rebuke the devil (Jude 9) then we ought to be careful how we combat him.

An understanding Christian realizes that the world system and the culture follows "the god of this world", Satan. This world is designed to get us away from God. How much time is wasted on social media or in front of a television? Time that may not be sin in and of itself, but time that draws the flesh away from God.

How much debt is wrapped up in "things" that are not "needs" but "wants"? Debt that takes away from supporting the local church and missionaries around the world? Debt that hinders a Christian's thoughts about doing more for the Lord?

How many slogans and public opinions feed the pride of life? People that promote being the best, that do what is right in their own eyes, and are their own god?

Satan is indeed a formidable foe and he doesn't fight fair. He doesn't show up as the "devil" that we can quickly identify as the enemy. He hides behind "good" people, he may use the brethren against you and will use good "causes" to gain ground against the church.

A Christian that will take time to study and pray can begin to identify the TTP of our enemy but this is only the first step. Knowing how the enemy attacks is of no value unless you are willing to change how you live your life in light of this information. A unit that will not change how they fight after identifying their enemy's TTPs is destined to lose the war. A Christian that will not adjust their lifestyle after identifying the devil's TTPs is destined to be ineffective for God and will continually lose the battle against their flesh.

The promise from God's word is that when we are tempted He will provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). Maybe a better approach would be to avoid the temptation? Don't take a route that you know the enemy is waiting for you on. How many Christians live their life by taking the route that they know the enemy occupies? The result is unnecessary injuries and damage to their lives. Too many trips down the wrong route can result in combat ineffectiveness.

We have an enemy that more than likely knows your weaknesses and will exploit them every chance he gets. Christians do well to admit their own weaknesses and identify ways that they can avoid the attack. God will provide a way of escape when the temptation comes but a better plan seems to be to avoid situations that you know will attack your weaknesses. This might include people, places, activities, gadgets (TV, phone, computer), etc. I am sure if you spend some time in thought and prayer the Lord will help you identify ways to not be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

~Fight or Flight

1 Corinthians 16:13 *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*

In the initial combat engagement, there very quickly comes a time that a Soldier has to decide to fight or retreat. This is called the “fight or flight” syndrome. As much training as Soldiers go through, bullets hitting around you and things blowing up is a whole new world the first time it is experienced. Some Soldiers freeze, some Soldiers cry, some flee and some engage the enemy. The goal is for all Soldiers to engage the enemy so the leader can make a quick assessment of the enemy’s size, location and strength to determine what the unit’s next actions should be. A Soldier freezing for 5-10 seconds in combat can allow the enemy to gain fire superiority and put the unit in a worse situation.

The more combat experience Soldiers have the more likely they are to engage the enemy immediately. The quicker the enemy is engaged the better the chance is of winning the fight. If Soldiers flee in the face of the enemy it will embolden the enemy even if they are facing overwhelming odds. I have been in a firefight where my gunner froze for the first 30 seconds; it was not a good situation. The Lord protected us from injury that day but I made sure my gunner knew he needed to immediately engage the enemy when we were under fire.

Christians face many situations where they will choose to fight or choose flight. How many times have you heard someone use the Lord’s name in vain and instead of standing up for the Lord, you act like you didn’t hear it? How many times has the Holy Spirit urged you to witness to someone but your flesh convinces you not to? How many tracts have you left in your pocket because they don’t “look” like they would want a tract? Every time a Christian chooses not to engage it emboldens our enemy. If you haven’t noticed, the enemies of Christ are not shy, they wave their rainbow flags, commit vile acts in front of children, curse God’s name, call Christians “bigots” and drag them to court for following God. God’s Army has given up valuable ground because many of His Soldiers have chosen not to engage the enemy.

America is a nation that was founded on biblical principles, but today that would be hard to prove. The downfall started with a very small group of people with loud voices. They claim to be tolerant towards all but hate Christians and want to take our rights to preach Jesus. They have successfully removed scripture and prayer in Jesus’ name from a great number of public places. They have money that has “In God we trust” on it but they hate that God. They have infiltrated the public-school systems with the lies of evolution.

Meanwhile, churches have changed from evangelizing to instituting programs to appeal to the flesh to get big crowds. They have stopped declaring truth and often propagate the “better life” gospel. In the book of Acts the followers of Christ went everywhere they could proclaiming, as Paul said in Acts 20:21, “*repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ.*” Not one time is it recorded that they enticed people to come to Jesus to “fix their problems”. The result was that many were converted and they were accused of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). It would seem that the secular humanist crowd has turned the world over again because Christians have failed to proclaim, “Thus saith the Lord!”

By the way, God's enemies do not follow the rules. The rules are usually only applied to Christians. Don't think that this is a fair fight but we have God on our side! Complaining that things aren't fair won't change someone's eternal destiny. We shouldn't expect acceptance from people when we stand our ground for the Lord, but that shouldn't stop us from declaring the truth and engaging the enemies of God!

~“At Ease!”

Revelation 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

There are few words that will snap Soldiers back into reality quicker than, “At Ease!” The Soldiers are taught in BCT that when an NCO enters the room or area that they are in, with no other NCOs present, that the first Soldier to see the NCO yells these words. When the other Soldiers hear this command, they are to immediately snap to the position of Parade Rest. Parade Rest is standing with the heels on line shoulder width apart, toes pointed out at a 45 degree angle, legs straight, hands placed in the small of the back with the back of the left hand against the back and the back of the right hand in the palm of the left hand, fingers extended and joined with the thumbs interlocked, chest lifted, back straight and head and eyes straight forward. The Soldiers are not allowed to move from this position until the NCO tells them to “Carry On” or departs the area.

In BCT these words are an immediate attention getter and alerts the Soldiers that a Drill Sergeant probably just showed up. Normally, once “At Ease” was called the Drill Sergeant would immediately stop and look to see if there was any movement. If he saw Soldiers not at Parade Rest or still moving around it was time for corrective training; “More PT (Physical Training), Drill Sergeant, more PT!”

When I was a Private in BCT some strange things happened that are a whole lot funnier now than when they happened. The first week and a half or so of BCT was almost all classroom training. We were briefed on policies, rules, regulations, procedures, and on and on and on. It was 50 minutes of sitting in a classroom, followed by a 10-minute break, followed by repeating the cycle. Sometimes we even got 15 or 20 minutes in between classes. Thankfully, the classroom we did most of the training in was right next to our barracks. On the breaks we were allowed to go to our barracks to utilize the latrine and refill our canteens with water. Once that was accomplished, we were to report back to formation by the time that had been designated.

When the breaks were longer some of the Soldiers took the opportunity to take a 5 or 10-minute nap on the empty bunks at the back of the bay. Several of us that slept on a bottom bunk would lie on our backs under the bunk and hook our fingers through the springs and fall asleep. At least it looked like we were tightening the sheets on our bunks. Occasionally, a Drill Sergeant would try to sneak in and catch us sleeping or doing other dumb things that Privates do. On one such occasion there was a Private that crawled onto a top bunk to catch some sleep. Shortly after a Drill Sergeant walked in and “At Ease” was called. The Private must have forgotten that he was on the top bunk and attempted to go straight to the position of Parade Rest. This resulted in him ending up face first lying on the floor. The Drill Sergeant had stopped when the command was given and heard the commotion of the Soldier missing the floor by about four feet. He quickly glanced to see what was going on but was unable to see the Private that had face planted lying on the floor.

After the command to “Carry On” was given and the Drill Sergeant disappeared we quickly checked on our dazed and confused battle buddy. He survived with no serious

injuries or loss of blood, just a little embarrassment and a decision not to nap on a top bunk anymore.

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4 that Jesus is coming back, and it may be soon. An event will take place that we call the rapture (that word is not in the Bible, but means a “calling out”). When the saved in Christ will escape a physical death and go to Heaven to be with God. I don’t know about you but I can get pretty excited thinking about hearing that trump sound! On the flip side of that, can you imagine Jesus coming back and you being embarrassed for what you are doing? Instead of pleasing God, the last act you did in your physical body was to fulfil the lusts of the flesh? I hope when Jesus comes back, we won’t get caught napping on the top bunk!

~Effective Weapons

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

A Soldier's primary weapon is the one that he will carry into combat. He needs to become intimately familiar with how it operates, what can cause it to malfunction and how to get it to function properly: an ineffective weapon can get you killed in combat. An example of this was when we were in Iraq. Sand inside of a weapon can render it useless in a hurry. At that time the Army guidance was to use CLP (Cleaning, Lubricant and Preservative) oil to clean and lubricate weapons. The problem was that sand sticks very well to oil. After dealing with malfunctioning weapons due to sand build up, we found a solution. One of the Soldiers had received graphite in a care package. The graphite worked well as a lubricant and the sand did not stick to it. We would clean our weapons with CLP, wipe the CLP off and apply graphite for lubrication. This yielded a much better result in the functioning of the weapons.

I have been in fire fights with ineffective weapons. One such occasion was an ambush in Karbala, Iraq. I had two gunners that had .50 caliber machine guns mounted on our HMMWV's (High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles) that day. For those of you that have never been around a .50 caliber machine gun, it is an awesome weapon that can impose serious damage. However, on this day, not one round was fired from either of those machine guns. The gunners wanted to fire, tried to fire, but each trigger pull resulted in an empty "click". We had gunners with the M249 SAWs (Squad Automatic Weapon, 5.56 MM rounds) that were used and were very effective but we could have imposed much more damage with the bigger machine guns firing.

Upon returning to base camp, I approached the gunners with the .50 cal's. They both said the same thing; that they were in a hurry in the morning and failed to properly set the head space and timing on their machine guns. The result was improper spacing and a firing pin that was not properly striking the round to fire the weapon. They very clearly saw the error of their ways and we never had that problem again.

As a witness for Jesus Christ God has given us the perfect weapon: the KJV Bible. God's word is the only way that faith comes and is the gauge as to whether I am thinking right or not. People don't come to faith by hearing our opinions and lives aren't changed by talking about politics or sports. Conviction, repentance and salvation is possible when someone is exposed to God's word (Romans 10:17 and Psalm 119:130).

The problem when we were ambushed wasn't that the .50 caliber machine gun was not an effective weapon. The problem was that the Soldiers hadn't taken the time so their weapons could be used effectively. Christians often struggle in the same way. We are in a hurry, so no time for the Book today. This results in us being ineffective for God. The Holy Spirit can help you recall scripture when you need it but you have to know it first in order to recall it!

If we are going to be effective in the battle for souls, we need to take time in God's book. We need to determine to memorize scripture. Many people say that they can't

memorize scripture, but they have memorized names, phone numbers, addresses and passwords. If you are having trouble memorizing scripture, maybe you need to change your approach. Sometimes, a different approach can make a big difference: like using graphite instead of CLP to lubricate weapons. Have you tried writing verses on 3x5 cards and placing the cards in multiple places throughout your house, work place or vehicle? If you really want to memorize scripture the Lord can help you. What most people really mean is that they are not willing to spend the time necessary and put the effort in to memorize scripture.

A Soldier is proficient with his weapon because he spends much time getting to know it and using it. He understands how important it is to him and relies on it in battle. He will make sure it is clean and functioning properly so it doesn't fail him in battle. God's word will not fail but we must be familiar with it and use it for it to be effective.

~G.O.T.W.A.

*Proverbs 24:16 For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again:
but the wicked shall fall into mischief.*

G.O.T.W.A. is an Army acronym for: Who is **Going**, **Others** I'm taking with me, **Time** we will be gone, **What** to do if we don't come back, **Actions** on enemy contact.

It is basically a five-point contingency plan used when a unit has to be split up. It is used to help identify courses of action if things don't go the way they are planned. And yeah, most of the time they don't! If something can go wrong it almost always does (the Army calls it Murphy's Law). That's life in the military but that's also just life. Things happen, stuff breaks, people get sick, the best things fail, circumstances change and discouragement waits around the corner.

The Army does its best to try to figure out all of the possibilities and plan for them, but you don't know what you don't know until you know what you didn't know. Soldiers are trained to be resilient and adapt to ever changing circumstances. Many times, especially in combat, circumstances are out of their control. Soldiers might not be able to control the circumstances but they are trained to adapt and overcome in spite of the circumstances. Their attitude has to be that I am going to succeed regardless if things go as planned or not.

When we set out to accomplish something for the Lord, many times things don't go as planned. Talk to a Christian that's been in the fight for the Lord for a while and they will confirm that things often didn't go the way they thought they would. Sometimes things will go better; sometimes things will go worse, and sometimes things happen that we could have never imagined. The Apostle Paul gave us an example to follow when things don't go our way. Look at the circumstances he suffered through in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 sometime. You know what his contingency plan was when just about everything that could go wrong went wrong? It is found in 2 Corinthians 12:10:

*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions,
in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

He learned to rely on the Lord and just kept going! Our contingency plan needs to be that we are going to persevere even when things don't go our way. Too many Christians today will serve God when things go their way but quit when unplanned circumstances arise. Remember, God is still God in the valley. When you can't figure out what to do next, that's a good time to look up and keep going!

~“Hooah”, it’s an Army Thing

James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

The Army has a vocabulary of its own. In addition to many acronyms they also have some unique words only used by Soldiers. One word that almost every Soldier has probably said more times than he can count is, “Hooah”. You might be asking, “What on God’s green earth is a hooah?” The answer is that nobody knows for sure but it’s a word used in many different ways. It can mean, “ok”, “yes”, “motivated”, “I don’t care”, “I will do what you are saying”, “I agree” or a variety of other things.

EXAMPLES

Sergeant: “Hey Soldier, did you get your duties done?”

Soldier: “Hooah, Sergeant.”

One Soldier to another: “Did you see the new vehicles? They’re pretty hooah.”

Essentially, it is a word that is used with little thought given to what you’re saying. It’s kind of an automatic response without thinking.

Christians also have some common things they say without really thinking too. Have you ever heard someone say; “Lord willing” or “I’ll pray about it”, but you knew their words were meaningless? What they really meant when they said “Lord willing” or “I’ll pray about it” was that they are not going to do that certain thing.

EXAMPLES

Preacher: “See you tonight at church.”

Christian: “Lord willing, I’ll be there.”

Friend: “You should come out on Tuesday night for visitation.”

Christian “Yeah, I’ll pray about it.”

In both instances, the Christian could be trying to veil their unwillingness to go by making the other person think that if they don’t show up, God stopped them from being there. Some things are no-brainers. God would want you to be at church or visitation. There are some things that you don’t have to pray about and some things are obviously in God’s will for you. Right is right and an excuse is an excuse.

You might be able to get by with your “Christian” excuses to people but God knows your heart. Maybe, it would be better to be honest. If someone asks you to do something for the Lord and you don’t want to, just tell them the truth.

EXAMPLES

Preacher: “See you at church tonight.”

Christian: “I won’t be there, because I am going to stay home and watch the football game.”

Friend: "You should come out on visitation on Tuesday night."

Christian: "No thanks, I am afraid of what people would think about me."

Praise the Lord that Jesus was willing to go to the cross for us and He didn't try to get out of it by making people think it wasn't God's will! Our words matter and I believe it is pleasing to God when we say what we mean and don't try to make it look like we're more spiritually minded than we really are. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no".

~Dress Right, Dress

1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

There is a right way and a wrong way to do things and we need standards and guidelines in our lives. When there are no standards, or standards are not enforced, the result is confusion. As you read through the Bible you will see that God likes order and the devil likes creating confusion.

The US Army also likes discipline and order. Soldiers are taught that there is a right way and a wrong way to do things. When Soldiers stand in formation, the formation is to look neat and orderly with each rank in line from right to left and front to back. A Soldier is supposed to get into formation directly in line with the person on their right and directly behind the Soldier in front of them. However, this doesn't always happen. The result is a formation that is not aligned.

There is a technique to get everyone lined up in formation. The command is, "Dress Right, Dress". Without going into too much detail, on the command of, "Dress Right, Dress", all Soldiers will align themselves off of the Soldier on the front right corner of the formation. All of the other Soldiers may need to take small steps forward or backward or to the left or right, but the Soldier on the front right corner will never move. He is the "baseman" and all Soldiers are to align with him.

In the Christian life the baseman is God's word. When we fail to adjust ourselves to the word of God the result is confusion and a life that is out of order. Too many Christians pick and choose what they want to align with and then try to justify themselves in the areas that they don't align with God. They may even try to find a church where they can get the baseman to move instead of aligning themselves with God's standards. Similar to looking at a formation and seeing that it is not aligned, it is fairly simple to look at someone's life and see if it is aligned with the word of God. What they are willing to watch, listen to and who they spend time with are key indicators.

There is a prevalent teaching today that overemphasizes living by grace and looks down on following any standards. This philosophy is often pushed forward by those who do not want to submit to God's word and align with the baseman. If God wasn't concerned about how we live our lives He wouldn't have given us a book full of right and wrong. Is your life aligned with God's baseman, or do you need to "Dress Right, Dress?"

~Re-up

*Joshua 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you **this day** whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

A Soldier's initial commitment to the Army is eight years. The time that they will actively serve in the Army depends on their contract. They may enlist on a three-year contract, which means they will actively serve for three years and will not actively serve during the last five, but they may be recalled to duty up to eight years of the date they initially signed their contract. If they do not re-enlist then they have no more active commitment to the Army.

Soldiers must decide if they are going to re-up (re-enlist) before their contract expires. Each Soldier will make that decision based on his own experiences, circumstances and plans. Someone may initially enlist with the intent of doing one term and getting out but they end up re-enlisting because their circumstances have changed. Likewise, someone may enlist with the intent of doing 20 years and retiring but they get out early because of unseen events in their life.

The best scenario for the Army is that the quality Soldiers re-up and continue to serve but that doesn't always happen. Soldiers may get tired of deploying or of the bureaucracy and decide to get out when their contract expires. Or they might have a better opportunity waiting in the civilian world. There are also quite a few Soldiers that make the decision not to re-up but after a few years decide to get back in (I was one of those). While life in the Army can be very difficult at times, there are few other jobs that will give you retirement pay and excellent benefits after 20 years. How much more in service to the Lord?

While I re-enlisted in the Army 5 times, I can't even begin to count how many times I have re-upped in God's Army. Joshua said to choose you "this day" whom you will serve (Joshua 24:15). The reality is that we have to make a decision every day to serve the Lord or we won't. I believe there are also times in our life we need to re-up or reaffirm our commitment to serve the Lord. I feel like I will never do enough for God but there have been times when I knew I should or could be doing more than I was. Times when the Holy Spirit dealt with me and I would go to the altar or hit my knees and re-up.

Please don't misunderstand, the moment you got saved equates to your enlistment into God's Army. Nothing can change the fact that you are saved and will spend eternity in heaven. However, enlistment in God's Army doesn't always equate to service in God's Army. When I re-up in God's Army I am not getting saved again, but rather committing to actively serve Him! (And, reminding my flesh that it needs to submit to the spirit.) When was the last time you re-upped to serve God? Choose you this day!

~Gas, Gas, Gas!

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

Soldiers are introduced to CS gas (this is an abbreviation for some long chemical name that is essentially tear gas) in Basic Combat Training. They quickly learn that the correct use of their protective masks will minimize the effects of the gas, which includes tearing eyes, blurred vision, burning sensation, difficulty breathing, excessive sinus drainage, etc.

The Soldiers' first exposure to CS is in the gas chamber. They enter a small building full of CS gas (which looks like normal smoke) with their protective masks being worn. Once they are in the chamber, they remove their masks and then put their masks back on, briefly exposing them to the burning sensation caused by the gas. If done correctly the effects of the CS gas will subside once they have put their masks back on and cleared and sealed them correctly.

The last part of the CS chamber is not so nice, Soldiers have to remove their masks and are not allowed to exit the chamber until the Drill Sergeant lets them out (this is a good day not to make the Drill Sergeants mad). What follows is quite the spectacle to see: Soldiers stumbling out of the door, waving their arms to get the CS off them, crying and gagging, sometimes with three feet of sinus discharge draining out of their mouth and nose.

You might say the aforementioned is cruel but I would say it is necessary. The Soldiers need to understand that their protective masks will protect them and they need to have confidence in them. If they never felt the effects of the CS, they would never really appreciate how their masks allow them to continue to operate in a chemical environment.

The warning that is given when a chemical substance has been employed is, "GAS!, GAS!, GAS!" When Soldiers hear those three words, they know that they need to immediately don their protective masks. If they don't, they will experience the ill effects of the gas. I have seen Soldiers laying on the ground in convulsions, running into trees trying to get away from the area and trying to hide in a port-a-john when CS is employed. The warning was given, but these Soldiers ignored it, or did not react quickly enough. The result: chaos!

How many Christian's haven't heeded a similar warning? They saw the warning in the Bible, the preacher preached about it, but they chose not to protect themselves. God loved us enough to give us a book and preachers to warn us about the consequences of our decisions and how to avoid some of the difficulties in life. Unfortunately, many Christians choose to ignore the warning and walk into the CS without their masks on. The result is chaos: unwed mothers, broken homes, addictions, etc. Maybe it would be good to heed God's warnings and protect yourself from the CS?

~S.P.O.R.T.S.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

BRM (Basic Rifle Marksmanship) is introduced around week three of Basic Training. Each Soldier must qualify with an M16 or M4 rifle in order to graduate from Basic Training. When I was a Drill Sergeant the minimum standard to qualify was to hit 23 out of 40 targets that popped up from 50 to 300 meters for varying lengths of time. This was done by firing 20 rounds from a foxhole supported position and 20 rounds from a prone unsupported position. While this may not sound that difficult, many Soldiers failed to qualify on their first attempt.

BRM began with training the Soldiers about weapons safety, how to handle the weapon and how to disassemble, clean and reassemble the weapon. It progressed from there with training on loading and unloading the weapon, shooting fundamentals and immediate action to correct a malfunction. The Soldiers would spend many hours training with the weapon before they ever shot the first live round through it. The goal was for the Soldiers to be familiar and comfortable with their weapon through repetitive training.

One of the vital tasks a Soldier must learn is to perform immediate action on their weapon if it doesn't fire. The weapon may not fire due to a failure of the round, magazine or weapon itself. Immediate action is performed to correct the malfunction without further investigation. The acronym that the Soldiers are taught to perform immediate action is S.P.O.R.T.S.: **S**lap up on the magazine, **P**ull the charging handle to the rear, **O**bserve to see if a round ejects, **R**elease the charging handle, **T**ap the forward assist and **S**queeze the trigger. If successful, the weapon will fire.

The idea is for a Soldier to be able to perform immediate action with little to no thought. Their weapon doesn't fire and immediately they perform S.P.O.R.T.S., which takes 2-3 seconds if they are comfortable with it. If the immediate action doesn't correct the problem, then they have to take remedial actions to try to figure out why the weapon won't fire. In my experience, about 80-90% of the time a weapon didn't fire it was fixed by performing S.P.O.R.T.S.

If you haven't figured it out yet, sometimes things don't go right in life. As a Christian, my immediate action should be prayer. That doesn't mean that I should stop what I'm doing and pray all the time. Sometimes that might just mean a call out that says, "Lord, please help me." Not only does this get the Lord's attention, but I think it can help our thinking process turn toward the spiritual. I have been in situations dealing with difficult people, and in my flesh, I wanted to lash out. A short pause and the request for God's help seemed to change the outcome.

Our problem is that many times prayer is our last resort instead of our immediate action. When you get a headache, you go take some pills instead of asking for God's help. When you encounter a problem, you immediately begin trying to figure a way out of it instead of asking God for wisdom and discernment. God knows every detail of our lives, small and large. Maybe sometimes He would have intervened, but we didn't ask Him. We need to work on making prayer our immediate action as we encounter life's circumstances.

~There are Casualties in Combat

2 Timothy 4:10 *For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*

The longer a unit spends in a combat environment, the higher the risk of injuries. A good leader will do everything he can to try to prevent injuries but combat is not safe. Injuries happen and Soldiers learn to deal with them. Some injuries will take the Soldier out of the fight permanently, and some injuries are able to be recovered from and the Soldier gets back in the fight.

I can't help but think of a Soldier in our unit that was injured by a car bomb in Iraq. His injury consisted of a cut on his cheek from shrapnel. After the medic cleaned the wound, a Barney (the big purple dinosaur) bandage was put on it, and he returned to duty the next day. By the way, he received a Purple Heart for being injured in combat. While some might not like the fact that he received a Purple Heart for such a minor injury, this Soldier was previously wounded and received no award for his injury. His previous injury consisted of shrapnel in his arm and it took him about a month to recover and return to duty. The problem was that he was injured by friendly fire. There is no award given for getting injured by "friendly" fire. Two injuries, one Purple Heart, and he "soldiered on."

The fact is that there are injuries as we "war a good warfare" (1 Timothy 1:18) for the Lord. Sometimes these injuries are inflicted from an enemy and sometimes these injuries are from the "brethren" (sometimes the brethren are so busy shooting at each other, they forget about the real enemy). Regardless of the source of the injury, nobody likes to be injured. But here's the reality of injuries: many injuries can be recovered from! We had multiple Soldiers in our unit that were injured, and the majority of them recovered and returned to duty.

For some reason, Christians tend to give up easily. One offense, one wrong comment, one time of hurt feelings knocks them out of the fight. How many Christians have quit on God because the pastor said something they didn't like? Most of them will never go and talk to the person that "injured" them, they just quit. How many of God's Soldiers have been knocked out the fight when all they really needed was a Barney bandage?

Men are imperfect, offenses will come; it shouldn't be a surprise. Just a thought here: how many times has a co-worker, your boss or a fellow student offended you, and you still go back to work or school? God is more important than your job and your secular education. I understand the hurt that can be imposed as we serve the Lord and I'm not trying to minimize it. Nobody likes being lied about, accused of wrong doing, belittled or conspired against, but how has God hurt you? God's Army needs to learn to deal with injuries and "soldier on".

The attitude a Soldier has towards the death or injury of a fellow Soldier will often determine the success of future missions. The best response to injury or death is a determination by the other Soldiers to fight harder so it doesn't happen again. When Demas became a casualty of war and forsook Paul (2 Timothy 4:10), he did not quit. I'm sure Paul was hurt and disappointed, but he kept serving the Lord. Don't let a cut on your cheek or someone else becoming a casualty knock you out of the fight!

~Numbers Increase Your Chance of Victory

Ecclesiastes 4:12 *And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

I was always taught that a dismounted unit that encounters a well-prepared enemy needs to quickly determine the size of the enemy force. The general rule of whether to fight through or break contact is a 3:1 ratio. If I have three times more Soldiers than the enemy, then I can proceed to take the fight to the enemy (frontal assault or flanking maneuver). If I don't outnumber the enemy 3:1, then I should break contact and live to fight another day.

There are multiple other factors- what your mission is, what weapons the enemy has, potential of immediate reinforcements, availability of air or artillery support, etc.- but the initial primary consideration is the number of enemy soldiers. While the saying, "there is safety in numbers" isn't always correct, numbers often increase the chance of victory in a battle.

Obviously, the more Soldiers you have, the more fire power you possess. Besides fire power, there is a psychological effect. It is a completely different mindset to be up against three enemies as opposed to 30. Large numbers of enemies can defeat a Soldier in his mind resulting in actual defeat. If hope of victory is destroyed, the result is normally defeat.

I have been on visitation by myself and have done public ministry by myself. I have also been on visitation when there were 20 people there, and a street meeting with just as many people. The "feeling" was completely different. I know some of the super-spiritual brethren will say, "well, when you're by yourself, you have to trust in the Lord." My response is that I have to trust in the Lord regardless of how many fellow Christians are present. It sure is nice to have a brother praying for me while I'm witnessing or preaching on a street corner, or engaging a "heckler", so I can continue my conversation.

Christians will probably never outnumber the enemy in this present dispensation. There are those that oppose Christianity everywhere, but we increase our chances of seeing some victories when our fellow Christians get involved. I understand that we are fighting a "spiritual" battle, but this spiritual combat manifests in this physical world. Have you ever been witnessing to someone (location is irrelevant) and the phone rings, the dog goes crazy, some friends show up, the baby starts crying, or a variety of other things happen that interfere with the conversation? Coincidences, or spiritual battle?

When a unit is conducting a mission in a hostile environment, the perimeter is secured (360 degrees of security) by fellow Soldiers. In Iraq, we worked with the IP (Iraqi Police). Almost daily, we would visit a police station to talk with the chief and see what was going on in their area. It was usually a Squad Leader and one other Soldier that would go inside and engage in conversation. The rest of the Soldiers would pull security⁵ so the Soldiers inside could get the information they needed. Those Soldiers pulling security rarely knew anything that happened inside the police station, but they were vital to mission success.

⁵ Pulling security is watching an area to protect against a possible enemy attack/ infiltration. Areas (sectors) are assigned in accordance with time on a face of a clock. The goal is to cover 360 degrees, from 12 o'clock to 12 o'clock, so there are no areas that someone can approach undetected.

I have personally entertained children and pets while my visitation partner sat with a lost sinner and shared the Gospel with them in their home. I have calmed down a belligerent naysayer as another man preached the Gospel to a crowd of people. Sometimes a brother just needs to “pull security” to give a chance for the Holy Spirit to work on a heart. I’m sure one more person helping in a ministry would be a blessing!

~The Smart Book

Psalms 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

When I was in BCT, and when I was a Drill Sergeant, each Soldier received a book that conveniently fit in their cargo pocket. This book was called the “Smart Book”, because it was designed to make you smart about being a Soldier. It contained an overwhelming amount of information about how to be a Soldier. It started with simple terms and information (military time, military terms, chain of command, etc.) and progressed into training for just about everything encountered in BCT. If Soldiers could understand and apply the knowledge on its pages, they had a very good chance of fulfilling their duties and performing the tasks necessary to earning the title of “Soldier”.

The Smart Book was to be carried at all times while wearing BDU’s (Battle Dress Uniform)⁶ in the right or left cargo pocket (designated by the Drill Sergeant). The Soldier’s name was placed on the cover, and a wise Soldier would place the book in a zip lock bag to protect it from the elements. If there was downtime (which there is frequently, because of the hurry up and wait philosophy applied in BCT) the Soldiers were expected to pull out their Smart Books and study.

One of the Drill Sergeant’s frequent activities was asking the Soldiers information contained within the book. If the Soldiers could not answer the questions, the Drill Sergeant would do his best to help them to study. One of my favorite tools to help the Soldiers study was the LPS (Lightning Protection Stance).

A prime question and answer time was waiting in line to enter the DFAC (Dining Facility). I would ask questions, and without fail the Soldiers would not know all the answers they should, so it was time to “encourage” better study habits. The problem encountered was that push-ups would get their hands dirty, and the Soldiers were about to eat. We found a great solution, a chance to practice some of the content in the book. It was always possible at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina that the Soldiers could get caught in a storm that produced lightning, without shelter available to take cover. The Smart Book identified the correct position to assume if this was the case: the LPS. This position was to squat as low as possible with only the balls of the feet in contact with the ground, while interlocking your fingers behind the head. No worries about getting the Soldiers hands dirty, and not very comfortable. The Soldiers were continually moving forward in line. They would have to “waddle” forward in this position until it was their turn to enter. Essentially, the LPS helped the Soldiers to be proficient if they were ever caught in a lightning storm (which I have never seen happen) and encouraged them to get in the book.

The word “success” is used one time in the Bible and is found in Joshua 1:8:

*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good **success**.*

Think about the situation here. Moses has just died and Joshua is now the leader of the Israelites. He has the responsibility of leading the Israelites across the Jordan River and

⁶ BDU’s were the uniform worn by the Army for many years after the war in Vietnam. It has a woodland camouflage pattern.

occupying the promised land. His instructions from God: learn the book and do it, and you will be successful. Not exactly rocket science. It seems like a pretty simple principle worth investing some time in to have “good success”.

God has given us “THE Smart Book”; the King James Bible. God will not force you to study His book, but He gave it to us so we know how to live our lives for Him. Far too many of His children do not make the book a priority in their lives. This is evident by how they live their lives. They enlisted in God’s Army a long time ago and have John 3:16 memorized, but that’s about all. We are without excuse when it comes to not knowing the book. Maybe some of God’s children need to be more like a Soldier by carrying the Bible everywhere they go and open it up on their “down time”, instead of connecting to the internet.

~Never Forget You are in Battle

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

I can't recall one time in a year in Iraq waking up and forgetting the reality of being in a combat environment. I never thought that today would be a good day to go for a run outside of the wire, or today would be a good day to walk across the city to get to the river to go fishing. Me and my Soldiers made decisions with the understanding that there was an enemy nearby that wanted to capture or kill us. If we began to think it was safe in our AO (Area of Operation), the enemy tended to remind us they were still there by shooting at us, blowing something up, or killing a U.S. "sympathizer".

Likewise, the Mahdi Army (that was who we primarily fought against while we were there) never showed up at a gate and tried to get into our base camp. They knew there was a strong chance that they would be identified as the enemy and captured or killed. Instead of walking in the front gate, the enemy would try to sneak in or attack from a distance.

If the devil showed up at your door, identified himself and said that he wanted to come in to teach your children about the pleasures of drugs and alcohol, if you were thinking right, you would slam the door and fall to your knees in prayer. No Christian would ever let the devil walk through their front door into their home if they knew who he was. But they will allow him into their homes on the television, computer, radio and phones.

I am not sure who is responsible for the original writing of the below story, but I hope it will make you think about allowing the enemy in your home:

The Stranger

A few months before I was born, my dad met a stranger who was new to our small Tennessee town. From the beginning, Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer, and soon invited him to live with our family. The stranger was quickly accepted and was around to welcome me into the world a few months later. As I grew up, I never questioned his place in our family. Mom taught me to love the Word of God. Dad taught me to obey it. But the stranger was our storyteller. He could weave the most fascinating tales. Adventures, mysteries and comedies were daily conversations. He could hold our whole family spellbound for hours each evening. He was like a friend to the whole family. He took Dad, Bill and me to our first major league baseball game. He was always encouraging us to see the movies and he even made arrangements to introduce us to several movie stars. The stranger was an incessant talker. Dad didn't seem to mind, but sometimes Mom would quietly get up - while the rest of us were enthralled with one of his stories of faraway places - and go to her room read her Bible and pray. I wonder now if she ever prayed that the stranger would leave. You see, my dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions. But this stranger never felt an obligation to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed in our house - not from us, from our friends, or adults. Our longtime visitor, however, used occasional four-letter words that burned my ears and made Dad squirm. To my knowledge the stranger was never confronted. My dad was a teetotaler who didn't permit alcohol in his home - not even for cooking. But the stranger felt he needed exposure and enlightened us to other ways of life. He offered us beer and other alcoholic beverages often. He made cigarettes look tasty, cigars manly, and pipes distinguished. He talked freely (too much too freely) about sex. His comments were sometimes

blatant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. I know now that my early concepts of the man/woman relationship were influenced by the stranger. As I look back, I believe it was the grace of God that the stranger did not influence us more. Time after time he opposed the values of my parents. Yet he was seldom rebuked and never asked to leave. More than thirty years have passed since the stranger moved in with the young family on Morningside Drive. But if I were to walk into my parents' den today, you would still see him sitting over in a corner, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures. His name? We always called him TV.

God has given us the Bible to help us identify right and wrong, so we can live in victory. Far too many Christians live a defeated life, because they won't put forth the time and effort to be victorious. We have no reason to not understand how our enemy's attack, other than we really don't care. God needs Soldiers that can identify when something is not of the Lord, but of our enemy, and will fight to keep the enemy out of our territory!

~Attention to Detail

Matthew 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

In the Army there is a right way to do everything. Anything but the right way is wrong. There is a right way to lace up your boots, wear your uniform, talk, stand, walk, fold your socks and underwear, hang up your clothes, display your shower shoes and boots under your bunk, and a whole lot of other things. Many of these things seem very trivial when observed from a civilian's perspective, but in the Army, these little things are called "attention to detail". The thought process is this: if I can teach Soldiers to pay enough attention on how to lace up their boots and do all these "trivial" things that don't seem to matter, when it comes time to throw a live hand grenade, they are already used to observing and doing the little things, so they will follow the correct procedures and not kill themselves or fellow Soldiers.

The process of learning to pay attention to the smallest things pays large dividends in dangerous situations. When you hand live bullets to 250 Soldiers, you need them to do the right thing. You need them to pay attention to putting their weapons on "safe", not putting their finger on the trigger until they're ready to shoot, and only pointing their weapon at something they intend to shoot (not their buddy or the Drill Sergeant).

Lack of attention to detail in a battle can get you spotted by the enemy, compromise your mission and get you killed. The goal in BCT is to get Soldiers to learn how to pay attention to details to give them the best opportunity to do their jobs well and survive in combat. It starts the first day in the Army and continues throughout their careers. There is no task that is too small not to do right.

There are many things that I cannot understand about God. One of these is that He knows how many hairs are (or used to be) on my head (Luke 12:7) and He knows the imaginations of my thoughts (1 Chronicles 28:9). It is safe to say that He knows even the smallest details of my life. Details that I never talk about or pray about, but He knows them.

Many Christians get off track in their lives, because they don't pay attention to details. They think, "it's just a little sin", or "it's just a little compromise". These "little" things left uncorrected will turn into bigger things. A "little" sin may need a "little" lie to cover it up, or a "little" compromise in the preaching may result in a "little" wrong thinking affecting how people live their lives.

God never classifies sin as a "little" sin or a "big" sin. It takes one sin, big or small, to condemn someone to hell, and one little sin to mess up the Christian's relationship with God. Little things do matter to God, they should matter to us too.

When Saul disobeyed God in 1 Samuel 15, he did most of what God told him to do. He just didn't follow a little bit; he captured, instead of killing king Agag, and he kept some of the animals instead of destroying all of them. In King Saul's eyes it was not that big of a deal, it was just a little thing. However, God said that he had "rejected the word of the Lord" and classified his actions as rebellion. The result was that king Saul lost God's favor and ultimately lost his position and life. This "little" thing to Saul was a big deal to God. I

wonder if there are some “little” things in our lives that have hindered our effectiveness for and our relationship with God?

~Dig Your Own Grave

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

The final FTX (Field Training Exercise) was supposed to be the culminating event of BCT that allowed the Soldiers to demonstrate the skills and knowledge that they had acquired in the previous eight weeks. The training event started with an eight-mile road march to the training area and ended with a 12-mile road march back to the barracks. In between was three days and nights of training exercises. Each Soldier had a shelter half, poles and stakes, which is half of a tent. Battle buddies would use both of their shelter halves to make a tent which they both slept in.

Each of the buddy teams was required to dig a two-person foxhole on the defensive perimeter of the basecamp. During “Stand To” the Soldiers would have to occupy their foxholes and fend off any enemy attacks. The enemies were Soldiers that were selected to be OPFOR (Opposing Force) and were usually the most squared away Soldiers, as OPFOR was considered an honored privilege. The OPFOR Soldiers did not dig foxholes and often missed one or both of the road marches because they helped set up and tear down equipment at the basecamp. They would turn their BDU tops inside out so they could be identified as the enemy.

Every Soldier was issued blank ammunition for the weapon they carried during the FTX. Most of the Soldiers carried an M16A2, but some of the Soldiers were issued a SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon)⁷. There was no way of determining if someone was actually shot since the Soldiers were firing blanks. The Drill Sergeants would watch the conflicts and determine if someone was shot and what the extent of their injury was.

If a Soldier in my platoon was KIA (Killed in Action) because of a “bonehead” decision or mistake, they were assigned a special detail. This normally consisted of one to three Soldiers a cycle. I wanted to make sure the Soldiers that had been KIA because of something that could have been avoided were made to realize the seriousness of bad decisions in combat. These “bonehead” mistakes ranged from not loading their weapons, falling asleep in their foxhole, to failing to follow orders or instructions.

Their special detail consisted of them digging their own grave (6 feet deep, 6 feet long and two feet wide), marking it with a gravestone, writing their own eulogy and writing a letter to their mother. I would give them a time limit to have everything completed by (usually four to five hours). I would review their eulogy and letter home and either accept them or make them rewrite them. Once I had accepted their eulogy (It was very interesting to read what people thought about themselves. Most of the Soldiers thought way too highly of their lives.), the entire platoon was summoned to the graveside and the Soldier would conduct their own funeral. This series of events seemed to spark some pretty heavy emotions and it was very common to see Soldiers crying during the “funeral service”. After the service, the “dead” Soldier filled the grave in and he was “revived” to continue the mission.

⁷ The SAW is a machine gun that can fire from a magazine or a 200-round drum. It is fully automatic, has bipods attached and uses 5.56 MM ammo (the same as the M16/M4 series rifles).

My intention of doing all of this was not to be cruel, but to get the Soldiers to understand the reality of what mistakes in war can actually mean. I believe it had the desired impact, especially when they had to write a letter to their mother and explain why she would never see them again.

Death is the one thing that is absolutely guaranteed in life (outside of the rapture happening in our lifetime) and the one topic that most people don't want to talk about. Even for the atheist crowd, science has proven that 10 out of 10 people die! Have you ever wondered why people want to avoid the topic of death? I think it may have to do with their belief about life itself. They believe that this life on earth is as good as it gets and they are unsure about what happens after death. Simply, I think most people are afraid of death. In their minds it is the "great unknown". My mock funerals forced those Soldiers to think about the reality of their own deaths and on many occasions opened the door for me to witness to them.

Christians ought not be afraid of death: we have hope (actually a promise) of eternal life! Here's what I don't want to happen: I don't want a preacher to have to lie at my funeral to make it sound like my life was actually worth something. That's what a lot of funerals are like; making people seem a whole lot better than they actually were. When I really think about it, I am not too concerned about what the preacher says or even who shows up for my funeral (I won't be there anyway). What does concern me is what God knows to be true about my life. I am worried about spending too much of my time on "me" and not enough time for Him. Maybe instead of thinking about our eulogy, we should think about what God is going to say about us after our death? If those thoughts scare you, the good news is you're still living and can do something about it! What I would like for God to say about my life is: "He hath done what he could". How about you, what do you want God to say about your life? He won't lie to make it sound better.

~Total Control

Romans 6:13 *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

BCT is divided into three phases: Red, White and Blue. Red Phase begins the first day of BCT and typically lasts 2-3 weeks. During this phase the Drill Sergeant is in “total control” of the Soldiers. They cannot, eat, sleep, talk, go to the bathroom or do almost anything without permission from the Drill Sergeant. The Soldiers are learning to submit to authority. Regardless of how they lived their lives before enlistment, their new life is one of obedience; doing what they’re told, not what they want to do. Their feelings, desires and thoughts about how things should be, have no bearing on the Drill Sergeant’s actions.

An experienced Drill Sergeant can identify when a Soldier is trying, but is not capable of performing the task, and when a Soldier is not putting forth maximum effort. The sooner Soldiers learn to submit to this totally controlled environment and do their best, the easier the tasks will become.

God wants and expects us to submit to the authorities in our lives. He has given us many verses about this subject in the Bible. The problem is that our human nature wants to do what we want to do. The Apostle Paul put it like this:

Romans 7:19 *For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

God has chosen to use pastors to lead His flock until Christ returns. As a church member I need to submit to my pastor. If I can’t do that, then I need to figure out why and address that reason. Is it my pride, is it something he said or did, or maybe it’s a misunderstanding? The church member that will not submit to his pastor and does not try to correct their lack of submission will give account to God for their attitude and rebellion.

Soldiers that have trouble submitting to the authority of the Drill Sergeant, don’t just affect themselves, they affect others around them. The other Soldiers suffer from one Soldier’s disobedience. They may end up doing more physical exercises, spending “free time” repeating tasks and generally just not being happy.

When a Christians will not submit to God’s authority in their lives it also affects others around them. An unsubmitive father doesn’t spend time with his children teaching them about God and the Bible. An unsubmitive wife will not follow her husband. Unsubmitive children will not obey their parents. The result: broken homes, school shootings, abortion, politicians more worried about power than doing right and societies worried about being politically correct instead of being right with God. It looks just like the world today.

God wants total control of our lives, but we tend to hang onto certain areas. Some hold onto their finances, food or friends, and others hold onto their habits, hatred or haughtiness. God wants total control of your life, but He is a gentleman and will not force you to submit; the choice is yours.

~Entangled

2 Timothy 2:4 *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Without fail, if Soldiers have an opportunity to call home while on a deployment, there will be problems with some of them. Whether it's a relationship problem, sickness, death of a family member or friend, or a financial problem, something will surface. Sometimes these problems cause the Soldier to lose focus on the mission and he endangers his life as well as his fellow Soldiers. His focus has shifted from the mission, to the affairs of his life.

When I was in Iraq and I knew Soldiers were struggling with something going on back home, I would give them some down time to try to get their thinking right. This may have been a day or two, up to two weeks. It depended on the situation and the resilience of the Soldier. Every Soldier that I gave some down time to, regrouped and came back and fulfilled their duties. But, until they refocused, they were essentially combat ineffective.

Christians have become so involved in the affairs of this life that they don't have time to be a Soldier. The word used in the verse is "entangleth". Think about someone being entangled. Anyone that has spent a fair amount of time in the woods has probably, on occasion, become entangled in a briar patch. Several things happen if you find yourself in this position; you're limited on what you can do, your focus shifts to the entanglement, and you are at risk of being injured. It is very similar in the Christian life. When you become entangled in the affairs of this life, it will affect your relationship with God. The longer you are entangled, the greater the risk of being out of the will of God and becoming combat ineffective.

One of the main areas Christians in America become entangled in is finances. How many people could do more for God if they didn't have so much debt to pay off? Long hours at work resulting in no energy to serve God and minimal or no giving to the Lord's work are some results of this entanglement. I'm sure there are some people that want to do more for God, but their finances are so entangled they can't imagine how.

Another entanglement area is relationships. God is very clear that Christians are not to be yoked with unbelievers. While we often reference this yoke as marriage, it certainly pertains to friends as well. In our lives, we have "friends" and "acquaintances". An acquaintance is someone that I have no choice but to be around: fellow employees, students, the people at the store, etc. A friend is someone I choose to be around: who I eat lunch with, who I go fishing with, etc. The wrong friends will almost always result in making decisions that will not help my relationship with Christ. A good friend is one that you can pray with and talk about biblical truths with. Their friendship will not entangle you and limit what you can do for God!

There are many other areas in life that can entangle you and interfere with your service to God. It could be playing video games, or your children being in sports. Regardless of what entangles you, the entanglement will hinder your relationship with, and effectiveness for the Lord!

~TLP's

Revelation 4:11 *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

The Army TLP's (Troop Leading Procedures) are a sequence of actions that enable a commander to use available time effectively and efficiently in the planning, preparing, executing, and assessing of combat missions. In simpler terms, it is a process used from start to finish to execute a mission.

The procedures have eight steps, which I will not list here, but the first one is the most important: receive the mission. In order to be successful at a mission, you have to know what the mission is. The mission statement clearly defines the objective, or goal, of what is to be accomplished. Once this is understood, all the necessary steps can be enacted. Without knowing the mission you will not know how many Soldiers need to go, where they're going, how long they'll be gone, what they need to take, how they will go, when they will be back, and essentially all the information that is needed for the planning process. Step one has to be completed so everything else can make sense.

Revelation 4:11 tells us why we are here: to please God. In Army terms this is my mission; I am supposed to live in a way that pleases God. It is on that understanding that I can make plans for and live my life. I am confident that one thing that pleases the Lord is doing my part to spread the gospel and to encourage the brethren to follow the Lord. The desire to please God should affect every area of my life: where I live, who I live with, where I go, how I talk, what job I have, where I go to school, and on and on it goes.

If my goal, or mission in life is to please God, then this will help me alleviate bad decision making. Many of God's people make decisions based on this question; "Is it sin?" If the answer is "no", it's not sin, then it must be ok. However, if the question I am asking is, "Does this please God?", my decision may be different. I can do things that aren't sin, but don't please God. Let me give you an example: I don't think it is sin to go fishing, but if the time I spend fishing hinders me from spending time with God and serving Him, then my fishing might not be pleasing to God. Maybe I need to put the fishing pole down and pick up my Bible.

Ultimately, people are going to make their own decisions, but if their primary concern is to please God, then maybe some of their decisions will look a little different. When we worked primarily with teenagers, we had a sign in our classroom that read, "The quality of your life will be based on the quality of your decisions."

A leader that would plan for a mission without talking with peers and some of his subordinate leaders to gain their insight, may end up with a faulty or ineffective battle plan. A good leader will seek wisdom from those with more experience than he has so he can make good decisions about the mission. This can be difficult for some leaders because their pride gets in the way. The result can be a flawed plan resulting in a flawed mission that suffers needless loss and/ or injuries. God is concerned enough about His people that He lets us know the importance of counsel: Proverbs 12:15, Proverbs 15:22, Proverbs 19:21 and many other scriptures. It would seem that the wise thing to do before making a possibly life changing decision is to pray and seek the right counsel.

In my experience, very few people, especially teenagers are willing to seek godly counsel, let alone follow that counsel before making job, relationship and schooling decisions. They determine what is “best” for them and nobody can tell them otherwise. I have watched many young people inflict themselves with pain and suffering from bad decisions because their starting point wasn’t to please God. It’s a whole lot easier to end in the right place if we start in the right place!

~Report

Romans 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

One of a leader's responsibilities is to account for personnel and equipment. A good leader is consistently checking to make sure that he has everyone he is supposed to have, and that every Soldier has all the equipment he is supposed to have.

At the first formation in the morning, each squad and platoon must give a report of the location of all the Soldiers they are responsible for. If a Soldier is not standing in formation, then his leader has to be able to report to the next higher leader where the Soldier is, or report them as AWOL (Absent Without Leave). A Soldier that is AWOL has failed to be at his appointed place of duty at the appointed time. He has placed himself in a position to receive punishment for failing to report on time, or not letting his leader know where he was.

It seems fairly simple. Be where you're supposed to be, when you're supposed to be there, or let your leader know why you can't. That way, when the command to "report" is given, all Soldiers are accounted for. When a Soldier is out of ranks, it is up to his leader to find out where he is. This will require the leaders to invest time and energy that they could be using for a better purpose. "Showing up" is one of the easiest things a Soldier has to do. Failing to do so is just plain irresponsible.

Many Christians are out of ranks. They are not where they are supposed to be, when they are supposed to be there. Worse than that, they believe that they are getting away with something. They think there are no consequences for living their life for themselves. They believe that they will never have to give a report for where they are and what they're doing.

The fact is that there is coming a time when every Christian will have to give an account for what they have done since they were saved. This report will take place after this physical life and is called the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is a time when all Christians will "report" to God for the things they did and didn't do.

Nobody can definitively explain how this judgment will take place or who will be present. If God chooses to, He could replay your entire life with all the saints watching. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, immediately after mentioning the judgment seat of Christ, Paul states, "knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." I don't know all the details of this judgment, but I have to believe that there may be some sorrow associated with it, because we made some decisions based on what was important to us, instead of what was important to God. Our goal should be to hear the same things the good stewards did in Matthew 25: "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

~PMCS

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

The Army has standardized procedures to check equipment and ensure it is functioning properly. These procedures are called Preventative Maintenance Checks and Services (PMCS). Each piece of equipment has a set of steps (similar to a checklist) to be followed that are listed in a Technical Manual (TM) for the particular piece of equipment. In order for a Soldier to properly perform a PMCS, he must have the prescribed TM and a PMCS worksheet (DA Form 5988 E or DA Form 2404) to record the inspection results. The results of the inspection will determine whether or not the piece of equipment is serviceable and able to be used, or needs to be turned in for repairs.

When the PMCS process is followed correctly, it is very effective for maintaining equipment and getting necessary repairs done in a timely manner. One of the dangers in the PMCS process is repetitiveness. Some equipment is supposed to undergo the PMCS process on a daily or weekly basis. The tendency of some Soldiers is to rush through the process, because they just did it, and surely nothing has changed. Instead of actually doing the PMCS, they just initial the worksheet and move on to other things.

Anyone should be able to see the potential problems with this attitude: equipment malfunctioning when it's needed the most, accidents and the possibility of Soldiers being injured or killed. Imagine a Soldier in battle whose weapon will not fire because he failed to take the time to check it. His failure to do a PMCS could cost him his life. It is a leader's job to make sure that each Soldier has the resources, knowledge and training to perform the PMCS, but it is the Soldier's responsibility to do the right thing.

As a Christian, God has given us the necessary tools and resources to conduct a PMCS on our lives. He has given us His perfect book, pastors and teaching and preaching to identify the potential problems in our lives, and how to make the necessary corrections. It is our responsibility to acknowledge the problem areas in our lives and take the necessary actions to correct them. Failure to do so can result in a malfunctioning life that hurts ourselves and others. We should be praying that we don't overlook faults in our lives, because we have heard it all before, or it's been ok so far. God help us to be concerned enough to perform a PMCS on our spiritual lives and address any problem areas that the Holy Spirit reveals to us. When was the last time you prayed and asked God to show you where things weren't right in your life, and if He shows you something, be willing to get it fixed?

~Discipline

*Job 36:10 He openeth also their ear to discipline,
and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

A key factor in the transformation from civilian to Soldier is discipline. A trainee that does not follow orders quickly enough or exactly, suffers punishment (I found that putting Soldiers in pain through physical exercise was the most effective attention getter.) This punishment is designed to instill fear into the Soldiers. The Soldiers' fear of punishment results in discipline. Discipline results in the Soldiers trying to do the right thing, even when it's not easy or something they want to do.

Without discipline, the Army would be highly unsuccessful in accomplishing its mission. A disciplined Soldier does his job when it's dangerous, hot, cold, lonely and against his own will. Simply put, a disciplined Soldier follows orders. Instilling discipline in a new Soldier is vital to his success as a Soldier. A Soldier without discipline typically results in his leadership having to deal with problems that would not manifest if he was disciplined; Army Physical Fitness Test failures, policy and law violations, etc.

The word "discipline" is only found in the Bible one time and it is in Job 36:10. Interestingly, after ears are opened to discipline, it deals with returning from iniquity (doing wrong). While the word discipline is only found once, it shares the same root word as the word "disciple". Simplifying a little; it takes discipline to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Discipline is primarily developed through fear and/or love. Many Christians lack discipline in their lives, because they don't have the correct fear of and/or love for God. The result is a "Christian" that is not a "disciple".

It is great when God's people are zealous of doing the things that are right to do: Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, witnessing, etc. But if you've been saved for any amount of time you understand that we don't always have the zeal we should. Those are the times that our level of discipline will become evident in our Christianity. Discipline is reading my Bible when I don't feel like it, praying when I'm tired, going to church when I have the option to do something else, or handing out a Gospel tract when I'm having a bad day. I have found when I have the discipline to serve the Lord, even when I don't want to, I am always thankful that I did.

The lack of discipline has resulted in many problems in the world today. A lack of discipline results in a lack of responsibility. This lack of responsibility manifests itself in every corner of society. The prisons are full of irresponsible men and women, employers have trouble finding a good employee, the welfare system is flooded with those that want what they "deserve", absentee fathers, parents that expect the public school and neighbors to raise their children, abortion, and people that try to sue everyone if things don't go their way. If people are going to be responsible citizens, they must have some discipline instilled in their life first.

It's easy to point at the problems the lack of discipline has caused in our society, but it is also easily identifiable in the church: "Christians" that will sit at home to watch sports, instead of going to church, "Christians" that won't tithe and give to missions because they are in debt for things that don't last, "Christians" that look, act and talk just like everyone else

and “Christians” that expect the pastors, missionaries and evangelists to do what they are supposed to be doing so they can have fun serving their flesh.

Soldiers learn discipline when they are placed in an environment where almost all outside distractions are removed. A right relationship with God results in the correct love for and fear of Him. Love is a choice and will result in me doing things for the benefit of others, even when it is not convenient. A correct fear of God comes from understanding how righteous and powerful He is. You get to know, fear and love God through reading your Bible and listening to Bible preaching and teaching. In order for you to devote time for this, like a Soldier, you are going to have to be in an environment where distractions (certain people, electronic devices, certain activities, etc.) can be eliminated. Will you choose to have discipline in your life?

~One Push Up, One Sit Up or Five Seconds

Isaiah 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

In order for Soldiers to graduate from BCT, there are some mandatory events that they have to complete and get a “go” on. The three big events were the 12-mile road march, weapons qualification and the APFT (Army Physical Fitness Test). The APFT was the last mandatory event and was the one the Soldiers struggled with the most. The APFT consisted of 2 minutes of push-ups, 2 minutes of sit-ups and a 2-mile run. The number of push-ups and sit-ups and the time the 2-mile run had to be completed under was based on age and gender.

In my thinking, the Soldiers had been there for over two months and had done many hours of exercises to get them to the point where they should be able to pass the APFT very easily. They were also given at least two diagnostic APFTs leading up to the final APFT. The diagnostic APFTs were practice tests and let the Soldiers know where they were at and what they needed to work on. The Soldiers that failed any event on a diagnostic APFT were made to do remedial PT (Physical Training) in the evenings. There was also plenty of “free time” that Soldiers could use to do PT on their own. The Drill Sergeants would continually give tips and advice on techniques to help the Soldiers pass the APFT. The Drill Sergeants wanted the Soldiers to pass the final APFT and did everything possible to prepare them to be successful. Short of an injury, there just wasn’t any reason Soldiers should not pass if they had put in the necessary effort to prepare.

For this reason, I was very strict on grading their performance. There are well established guidelines on the performance of each event: what counts, what doesn’t and what will cause early termination of their performance. These standards were explained and demonstrated prior to each APFT. It is important to note that if a Soldier fails one event of the APFT, they fail the test and have to re-test in all three events. Every cycle, there were Soldiers that failed the APFT and would have to re-take the test. Some of them would re-test three times in attempts to pass the APFT so they could graduate from BCT.

I specifically remember a female Soldier that was re-taking the APFT after previously failing it twice. This was the day before graduation and her last chance to pass. She passed the push-ups and moved on to do the sit-ups after the mandatory 10 minutes waiting time. She had about five seconds left and needed one more sit-up to pass. She was struggling to reach the upright position, so she released her grip from her hands behind her head and used one hand to push herself up. She then regained her grip behind her head and went back down (the repetition is counted on the sit-up when they go down). I repeated the same number as before as she failed to properly complete the last sit-up. That means she failed by one sit-up and would not graduate. The Soldier was obviously upset and began to cry.

Shortly after the APFT concluded, I received a visit from her Drill Sergeant, who was basically questioning why I had “failed” her. I explained that I hadn’t failed anyone and the Soldier had failed herself, I just graded and recorded her performance which was a failing score. The Drill Sergeant was adamant that I should give her the one sit-up and let her pass; I refused. I asked the Drill Sergeant if there was any reason that she should not be able to do the required number of sit-ups in 2 minutes after 9 weeks of BCT. No reason. I explained that it didn’t matter if she failed by 1 sit-up, 1 push-up, or 5 seconds (run times are a little

more subjective based on some different factors), she had not met the standard. We wouldn't let a Soldier that was one target short of qualifying with their weapon pass BRM. Why should we let a Soldier that failed to meet the standard pass the APFT?

Some of you might consider this as unjust treatment. After all, it was just one sit-up. But what would that have taught the Soldier if she was allowed to pass when she really failed? This is similar to an attitude that many Christians have; it was just one sin. For us to think that one sin does not affect our relationship with God is wrong thinking. God hates sin, cannot and will not tolerate it. We need to have the same attitude towards sin that God does.

It is far too common for Christians to think like this: "I know it's sin, but it's under the blood." The question for Christians isn't whether or not their sin is paid for in eternity; it is. The question should be, "how does this sin affect my relationship with God?" Right is right, and wrong is wrong.

~Spotlight Rangers

Matthew 7:20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

In the U.S. Army, a Ranger is an elite infantryman. He has undergone rigorous and specialized training and endured physical hardships to earn the coveted Ranger tab and be called a “Ranger”. These are men that you want on your side when the bullets start flying.

There are some “rangers” in BCT too, but they are nothing like the real Rangers. They are “spotlight” rangers. A spotlight ranger is a Soldier that loves the spotlight. They do their best to be recognized by leadership. They know what to say and do when a leader is present, but when the leader is gone, they are at best a mediocre Soldier. They are trying to move up or receive special treatment by acting squared away in the presence of leadership, instead of living it when the leaders aren’t watching.

Most of these Soldiers never fooled their Drill Sergeant. The Drill Sergeant knew what was really going on. We used to tell the Soldiers that they could not get away with doing wrong when we weren’t present, because one of their peers would tell us what had happened. This was almost always the case. If for some reason the spotlight ranger fooled the Drill Sergeant and was given a leadership role, it usually didn’t go well. The other Soldiers that knew how they really acted would not follow instructions from that peer. Within a day or two, the spotlight ranger would be fired and another Soldier would be put in his place.

There are far too many “spotlight Christians”. They know how to dress to come to church and the right things to say and do at church, but outside of church you could never tell that they’re a Christian. Some of them are so good at “faking it” that they even fool their pastors. They are not fooling God and if you look close enough, they will not fool you either.

A good Soldier is consistent. He does his duty (responsible) and is a team player, whether leadership is present or not. He is concerned about doing the right thing all the time, not just when he is being watched. He is someone that his leaders can count on to get the job done, and because of his work ethic will often be given opportunities that his peers will not.

The Bible makes it clear that you cannot hide from God:

*Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
beholding the evil and the good.*

God is looking for some of His people that will serve Him, even if no one else knows who they are and what they are doing. People that will serve Him because it’s right, not for man’s recognition. He doesn’t need any more spotlight rangers!

~BRM (Basic Rifle Marksmanship)

Proverbs 4:25 Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

One of the most stressful times of BCT for the Soldiers is qualifying with a rifle. When I was in BCT I had to qualify with an M16A1 rifle. When I was a Drill Sergeant, the Soldiers had to qualify with an M16A2 rifle. Later in my career I would carry and have to qualify with an M4 rifle. Regardless of the rifle, the standards were the same. The Soldiers would receive two magazines with 20 rounds in each one. They would shoot from a supported foxhole position first, then from a prone unsupported position. Twenty timed targets would come up while in each position from 50-300 meters. In order to qualify, the Soldier must knock down 23 out of 40 targets on qualification day.

The training leading up to qualification day was extensive and lasted almost four weeks. It began very basic- how to disassemble and assemble the rifle- and progressed to the Soldiers shooting their assigned weapons many times before qualification day. There was usually at least two days of practice qualification before qualification day.

During weapons training the Soldiers were taught the four fundamentals of rifle marksmanship: steady position, trigger squeeze, aiming and controlled breathing. There are many drills that helped the Soldiers develop these skills before they ever fired a live round. Some Soldiers have never touched a weapon prior to BCT and some were very familiar with shooting. It doesn't matter whether they were an experienced shooter, or were shooting for the first time, if they wanted to qualify, they needed to learn to apply the four fundamentals on qualification day.

When the Soldiers zeroed⁸ their weapon, it was zeroed in for 300 meters. What that means is that the bullet would hit the aiming point at a distance of 300 meters. So, if the four fundamentals were properly applied, the Soldier would hit the 300-meter target center mass. However, if the Soldier aimed center mass at the 100-meter target, the bullet would go over top of the target. The Drill Sergeant would constantly remind the Soldiers of the correct aiming points: 50-meter targets: the ground right in front of the targets, 100- and 150-meter targets: base of the targets, 200- and 250-meter targets: belly button, and 300-meter targets: center mass. I used to tell the Soldiers, "You're not in the Air Force, aim low."

The problem many soldiers had to overcome was that they were used to aiming center mass. The first live rounds the Soldiers shot were at the grouping and zeroing range. In order to get their weapon zeroed, they had to aim at the center mass of the target every time. Aiming center mass had become a habit; it was what they were used to doing. Now they were being told to aim lower, but many refused to change. If their weapon was zeroed properly, aiming center mass and properly applying the fundamentals of rifle marksmanship would result in them missing the 3 closest targets (50 meters, 100 meters and 150 meters). This would result in them not qualifying.

⁸ Zeroing a weapon is the process adjusting the elevation and windage of the sights, so the bullet hits the target center mass.

On qualification day, during the Soldiers' first attempt to qualify, the Drill Sergeant was not allowed to assist the Soldiers in any way. Without fail, some of the Soldiers would not aim low enough and fail to qualify. The Drill Sergeant could stand there and watch them shoot and see that the target didn't fall and that no dirt in front of the target was disturbed. He knew they were aiming too high, but was unable to help at the time. If Soldiers didn't qualify on the first attempt, they would shoot again. The second time and beyond the Drill Sergeant could stand behind them and tell them what to do. I lost count of how many times I stood behind Soldiers and told them where to aim; they shot, the targets fell and they qualified. I always wondered the same thing, "why didn't they do that the first time?" Other Soldiers were stubborn, wouldn't listen and continued to do it "their" way. It would not be uncommon for these Soldiers to have to shoot 4 or more times until they finally qualified.

Many churches like to use a phrase similar to this: "come as you are". I believe their intention is to let people know that they are welcome at their church even if they don't look like a church-goer. The problem with this "philosophy" is that many times these churches will never breach the subject of Godly standards. God doesn't want you to come as you are and stay as you are. He wants you to come as you are so He can change who you are. A salvation experience should change the desires we have in life. It should affect how we look, talk and what we do. It should affect who our friends are and how we see the world. It should change what we are aiming at.

Sometimes a person will get saved and immediately be freed from some ungodly habits. Another person might get saved and it will take a while for them to identify some of the sins in their life, and overcome them. Like the Drill Sergeant telling the Soldier where to aim so they can hit the target, the Holy Spirit plays a similar role in the life of the Christian. Whether or not we hit the target God has for us in our lives depends on if we listen to and do what the Holy Spirit is telling us. At the moment of salvation, the believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit but has the freedom to choose whether or not to listen to Him. Listen to God so you can hit the target!

~“N819, No-Go, Commands!”

Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

“Almost doesn’t count except for in horseshoes and hand grenades.” That is a saying that I have used and heard often in my life. In horseshoes you can get points for landing your shoes close to the stake and a hand grenade that lands a couple of feet from the target may still impose death or serious damage (the kill radius of a fragmentation grenade is 5 meters and the danger area is 15 meters). Other than throwing horseshoes or hand grenades, it simply means that “almost” isn’t good enough. Ok, so there are some other things where “almost” might be effective, but I didn’t come up with the saying, I just use it.

In the Army most training events are graded as a “Go” or a “No-Go”. You either pass or fail, there is no in between. Almost passing is completely failing. If you have three hours to complete a road march to get a “Go” and you finish in three hours and five seconds, you get a “No-go”. Almost is not good enough.

When I was in Air Assault school the students had a roster number that was displayed on their Kevlar helmet, which they wore everywhere. If you were an NCO then your roster number started with a “N”, which is pronounced “November”. The instructors never called the Soldiers by their names, only by their roster number. I was affectionately known for two weeks as “N819”.

During the rappel phase of Air Assault school, each Soldier must get a “Go” on three different rappels: Hollywood (no equipment), Partial Equipment (LCE⁹ and Kevlar helmet worn) and a Full Equipment (LCE, Kevlar helmet, ruck sack and rifle) rappel. The grading for each rappel consisted of tying on your Swiss Sweat harness¹⁰ (you have 30 seconds to properly tie your seat), following all hand and arm signals (once you were on top of the tower all commands were by hand and arm signals only), hooking up to the anchor point (I believe we had seven seconds to properly hook in), the repel itself and performing your duties as the belay man.¹¹ There were many technicalities that could get you a “No-go” during the process and if you received two “No-Go’s” you failed the course. It was a pretty stressful time.

I had completed my first two repels and received a “Go” on both of them. On my final rappel (full equipment) I was on top of the tower kneeled down, already hooked in and pretty amped up to be almost done with the rappel phase. The signal that was given was to look over the side of the tower. In my eagerness to go, I lifted my knee about two inches off the platform, immediately put it back down, then looked over the side. I knew I had gotten ahead of the command that was given, but figured I wasn’t going to receive a “No-Go” for two inches. I finished the rappel and was relieved once I was off of belay and began walking away. Then I heard as plain as could be from the top of the tower, “N819, No-Go, commands!”

I had officially received my first “No-Go” at Air Assault school. When it sunk in and I realized that I had to do the full equipment rappel again and one mistake meant failing the school; let’s just say I was feeling the pressure. I had almost finished the rappel phase, but

⁹ LCE stands for Load Carrying Equipment and consists of shoulder straps and web belt with certain items (canteen, first aid pouch, etc.) attached.

¹⁰ A swiss Seat harness is tied around the waist and each leg using a rope and specific style knots.

¹¹ The belay man stands at the bottom of the rope that is being rappelled down loosely holding the rope. If the rappeler falls it is the belay man’s duty to quickly tighten the rope to stop the rappeler from sliding to the ground out of control.

two inches could have been the end of school for me. There was already about 10 Soldiers sitting in the bleachers that almost passed rappel phase, but had received two “No-Go’s” and were going home. I could see myself sitting in those bleachers with them thinking that I had come so close to passing. I am happy to say that I passed the rappel the second time and did graduate from Air Assault school.

When it comes to whether or not someone is a Christian, “almost” is not good enough. Almost saved is completely lost and results in an eternity in hell and the lake of fire. While the Apostle Paul was in custody of the government, prior to being sent to Rome, he had the opportunity to share his testimony and faith with three different government officials. Upon receiving the truths about eternal life, the governor, Felix, said that it wasn’t a convenient time, the governor, Festus told Paul that he was “mad” and King Agrippa told Paul that he had “almost” persuaded him to be a Christian. Obviously, King Agrippa had the best response to the message, but he would suffer the same fate as the other two; eternity in hell. Almost doesn’t count in salvation.

I hope you can say that you’re a Christian and that you know for sure you will spend eternity in heaven. There is great hope and comfort in knowing that the death of your physical body is just the beginning in eternity with a perfect body. But wouldn’t it be a shame to stand at the judgment seat of Christ and tell God that you almost lived for Him, or that you almost made an eternal difference in someone’s life? “Almost doesn’t count except for in horseshoes and hand grenades.” Well, definitely not in Christianity.

~A Bad Shot?

Psalms 61:3 For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.

Sixteen years later, I can remember the first serious ambush we went through in Iraq. We were on patrol with four HMMWVs (High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles) in the city of Karbala. It took me several seconds to realize that we were being shot at. Once reality sunk in, it was obvious that we were under attack by an undetermined number of enemies. We were receiving small arms fire, machine gun fire and attack from grenades and RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades) from ground level, up to the roof tops of four-story buildings.

I was the mission leader that day and was in the lead HMMWV. On two separate occasions a vehicle got in our way in an attempt to block the roadway and trap us in the kill zone. On both occasions it did not turn out well for the person in the other vehicle, as we plowed through both vehicles without slowing down. The ambush was about two kilometers long and there were still civilians in the street that were caught in the crossfire. The enemy did not care about hurting their own people. They were more concerned about trying to hurt or kill us than injuring their fellow citizens.

About three fourths of the way through the ambush, I looked to our left and saw a man kneeled down with an RPG on his shoulder waiting for our truck. I yelled, "RPG left, RPG left", to my gunner and over the radio. No sooner than the words came out of my mouth, he fired (we were probably 35-40 meters away). I remember thinking that I was not going to survive, but God had a different plan. The RPG went over the hood of our truck and exploded into a brick wall about 10-15 feet to the right of our vehicle. My driver thought we had been hit, because our truck filled with dust and smoke. I yelled at him to just keep going. The only explanation I can give as to why we made it out of that ambush with all four trucks still mobile and no serious injuries is because God had protected us.

When we got back to our base camp, we took our vehicles to the mechanics for repairs, then gathered to discuss what we had been through. We discussed the ambush and our actions in response to the attack. I am unsure how many enemies there were, how many rounds were fired at us and/or how many rocket propelled grenades had missed our trucks. What I knew was that it was highly unlikely that none of the bullets or explosives hit their marks, because everyone was a bad shot. I told the Soldiers that the Lord had protected us; nobody disagreed.

We got reorganized and headed back out on patrol. There were reports of enemies advancing towards our base camp and we needed to stop them. I am thankful to say that there were no more attacks on us that day. We found out later that a Special Forces team went through the same ambush area approximately 45 minutes after us. They incurred multiple casualties and lost a vehicle in the ambush. They told us to stay clear of the area, and in their estimation, it was going to take a battalion sized element (approx. 400-800 Soldiers) to clear the area.

I am convinced to this day that the Lord had protected us. I believe the reason He did was because I asked Him to (I know that's not deep theology, but it's the truth). I had developed a habit of gathering the Soldiers prior to going out on patrol and asking God for His protection, and to help us to be quicker, smarter, stronger and better shots than our enemy. I believe He honored my prayer on that day and on many future occasions.

While I am thankful for physical protection, we also need spiritual protection. Our enemy wants to discourage us, get us to sin against God, and ultimately get us out of the fight. Simply put, he wants us to ruin our relationship with God. He is too much for us to handle on our own (he does not fight fair), but I fear sometimes we think it's no big deal which is evidenced by our lack of prayers for God's protection. If Satan could hinder Paul (I Thessalonians 2:18), then he certainly can hinder us. It seems that we should definitely be trusting in the Lord to take care of us instead of trusting in ourselves.

God is able to protect us, but we need to be aware of both the physical and spiritual dangers awaiting us and should be praying to Him for safety. I would hate for something bad to happen to me or my family because I failed to realize I needed to ask God for His protection.

~Training

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Training is a vital aspect of the Army being able to accomplish its mission. There are many tangible skills that can diminish over time if not used. The Army is well aware of this and places a very high importance on conducting training. It is so important, that it is mandated, planned for and executed over and over again. You can pretty much assume that if a unit is not conducting its war time mission, then it is training to prepare for that mission.

Training is done at different levels and different intensities. Sometimes training is conducted with three Soldiers, and sometimes it's conducted with 300 or more Soldiers. One of the objectives is to make training as realistic as possible. This means that some training will be conducted with live ammunitions and explosives, and some training could result in injuries and deaths. While steps are taken to attempt to eliminate and mitigate dangers during training, injuries are a reality of Army training.

The more intense the training, the better prepared a unit will be to perform its war time mission. What do you think is better, Soldiers sitting in a classroom watching a video on unarmed combat, or Soldiers rolling around on the ground practicing the techniques? The obvious answer is participation. The reality is that most people learn a whole lot better by "doing" as opposed to just "observing". The Army utilizes several different methods of instruction, but the best training is "doing".

I would submit to you that in the area of training folks to serve the Lord, most churches don't come close to doing enough. I don't want to eliminate the help of the Holy Spirit as we serve the Lord. But how reasonable is it to expect a brand-new Christian to approach a complete stranger to hand them a gospel tract, strike up a conversation and witness to them with no exposure to or training on being a witness for Christ? It seems that a church that is concerned about souls should be doing something to help prepare its members go into battle for the Lord. When was the last time you saw "witnessing training" offered at a church? Instead you often see program after program that focuses on fun and usually accomplishes nothing to help Christians impact eternity. I highly recommend having fun as a Christian, but there needs to be balance.

I do not want to minimize the effectiveness of teaching and preaching. They are both vital as part of the training for a new Christian and need to continue. But what a blessing it would be to see some training that would include role playing and how to handle certain situations while sharing the gospel. Or training on how to conduct a family devotion, or techniques for witnessing. Most good employers train their employees on the tasks to be performed before they expect them to do their job correctly. Shouldn't God's people be willing to do some training to make an eternal difference in someone's life? I don't have all the answers and understand that different churches have different limitations and resources available. One of the best and easiest ways to train someone to serve the Lord is to bring them with you while you are participating in ministries. If you've been going, seek out someone to go with you. If you haven't been going, seek out someone that is and go with them.

There is a huge focus on learning and understanding God's word in Bible-believing circles. That is a great thing, but Bible knowledge means very little if we are not willing to

apply what we know. I like the illustration of a sponge; a sponge is good at soaking up liquids, but if you never wring it out, it will not be good for much and eventually will begin to stink. You need knowledge, but the goal should be to apply the knowledge that you obtain in service to the Lord. Don't be like a sponge that hasn't been wrung out!

~SOP (Standard Operating Procedures)

1 John 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

The Army has a SOP for just about everything. The SOP is the way that things are supposed to be done. From how to park vehicles in the motor pool, to when you have to carry your protective mask, to the process of requesting leave or a pass and everything in between. SOPs are great because they keep everybody on the same page, but they come with their share of problems.

One of the issues with SOPs is that Soldiers can be so used to doing something a certain way that they will resist change. Even if it's better and faster, they will not do it because that's not what the SOP states. Another problem is that SOPs don't always work in every given location.

In preparing for our deployment to Iraq, I remember a day of scenario driven training at Ft. Lewis, WA. One of the training events was that our squad, which was operating in HMMWVs, was engaged in a near ambush. The SOP in response to an ambush while mounted in vehicles was to put as much firepower on the enemy's position as possible and have one team dismount their vehicle and flank the enemy's position. That is exactly how we reacted that day.

Fast forward about 6 months to Karbala, Iraq. My squad of 4 HMMWV's was ambushed in the middle of the city. In spite of the way things were done in training, we did not dismount to flank the enemy. Instead we pushed through the kill zone, called in the enemy's location, returned to base camp to get our vehicles fixed and resupplied, and we lived to fight another day. This area of the city would later be cleared using lots of infantry and armor units. I can't imagine what the outcome would have been that day if we would have followed the same tactics used in training and dismounted a team of three Soldiers to flank the enemy. The point is that things change and the Army has to be willing to adapt to its environment. Our squad changed our SOP for an ambush that day: we would only dismount if the vehicle we were in could not make it out of the kill zone.

An Army unit that is not willing to make changes to their SOPs based on changing missions and circumstances should expect to encounter difficulties. The common sense approach is always the best. If something works better, faster or makes life easier without compromising the mission, it would make sense to adopt that practice.

Churches may not have SOPs, as the Army calls them, but they have traditions. These traditions are the way they've always done things. It is good when church leadership is willing to look at circumstances and admit that the way they've always done things may need to change. Sometimes a different approach or a new way to do things can be of great benefit. If the traditional way isn't working like it used to, continuing to do it in spite of bad results is borderline insanity. Times change, and the culture of today is vastly different from 1990. Technology has advanced tremendously and it has greatly affected how we live. Sometimes, a pastor might have to text someone, because they won't answer a phone call.

What about in your own life? Are there things that you continue to do, just because that's the way it's always been? I think specifically of the television. Many people grew up with a TV on in their house from waking up to going to sleep. That doesn't mean that you need to do the same. I would assess that as wicked as the commercials are today, there's probably some pretty perverted and wicked shows on. Maybe you need to start a new SOP in

your home; unplug the TV and do family devotions instead. I can think of many areas where Christians compromise, because that's the way it's always been done; family gatherings instead of church, children's sporting activities instead of church, the way people eat, clubs/associations that they belong to, attending church only on Sunday mornings, not praying before meals, and the list goes on. Maybe there are some SOPs in your life that need to be amended?

~Motivation

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The Army's definition of leadership is: "The process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction and motivation. Leaders at all levels are responsible for providing their Soldiers with the purpose (why they are doing something), the direction (how to do what they are doing) and the motivation (the desire to do the task) to get the job done. By far, the hardest aspect of leading Soldiers is providing motivation.

Motivation is the "want to" to get the task accomplished. Every Soldier is not motivated by the same things. Some Soldiers are motivated by time off, other Soldiers are motivated by being recognized for their performance, and there are a multitude of other motivating factors. It is the leader's responsibility to figure out how to motivate his Soldiers to get the job done.

Motivation is a key factor in how well a job is done. If the motivation to do a task is: "because I said so", the job will probably get done, but not as well as it could be. How well a leader can provide the necessary motivation will often be the difference between excellence and mediocrity.

When Soldiers would arrive at BCT, as a Drill Sergeant, I would motivate them through discipline. If they failed to follow instructions or accomplish tasks in the given amount of time, there were consequences. I actually lost my voice during my first cycle as a Drill Sergeant because I thought in order to be effective, I needed to yell a lot. After that, I took a step back and observed the Soldiers' responses when they were being yelled at. What I noticed was that after they had been yelled at a few times they almost became numb to it. The yelling was not effective for long.

I decide that losing my voice again was not a good plan. Instead of yelling so much, I would have the Soldiers do exercises (push ups, bear crawls, carrying logs, etc.) that would cause pain and talk to them normally and explain why they were being punished. The result was them wanting to do right so they would not have to be in pain. They were being motivated by fear.

If a Drill Sergeant was effective, the motivating factor for the Soldiers would change somewhere between three and five weeks. Their new motivation was a desire to please their Drill Sergeant. They wanted him to tell them, "Good Job." Their attitude changed from "we have to do this to avoid punishment" to "we want to do our best to make our Drill Sergeant proud of us." Hands down, the motivation of wanting to please the Drill Sergeant produced far better results.

The Bible makes it clear that we are supposed to fear God. First Peter 2:17 states:

*Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. **Fear God.** Honour the king.*

I personally do not like illustrations I have heard about how we should have a reverential fear for God the same way we fear a police officer or those in authority. God is holy, just, omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere all the time), men are not. My fear of God should be much greater than anyone or anything on earth. That being said, I do believe that fear of giving account to God for your actions as a Christian should motivate you to serve Him.

However, like the Soldiers, when our motivation for service is to please Him, it's better service. Someone that serves God out of fear or duty will view the Christian life as a checklist that needs to be accomplished to gain God's favor or stay out of trouble. When the motivation to serve changes to pleasing Him, the checklist will disappear. The driving factor in our lives will be, "Does this please the One who died for me?"

~Chain of Command

Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

The Army is set up so that someone is always in charge. Orders are given and carried out through the chain of command and the NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) support channel. The chain of command is comprised of Officers and the NCO support channel is comprised of NCOs. The chain of command typically starts with a Platoon Leader (Lieutenant), Company Commander (Captain), Battalion Commander (Lieutenant Colonel) and goes all the way up to the Department of the Army level (3 and 4-star Generals). The NCO support channel starts with a Team Leader (Sergeant), Squad Leader (Staff Sergeant), Platoon Sergeant (Sergeant First Class), First Sergeant and goes all the way up to the Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA).

To make it simple, the chain of command develops and implements policies and the NCO support channel enacts and enforces these policies. Typically, NCOs are the ones who supervise the Soldiers and the tasks they are performing. Leaders from both avenues work together to get the mission accomplished. The two basic responsibilities of every leader are mission accomplishment and the welfare of their Soldiers. A good leader gets the job done and takes care of his Soldiers in the process. Every good leader that I have ever met was a good follower. They understood that being a leader did not exempt them from being a follower.

There are good Officers and NCOs and poor Officers and NCOs, but a Soldier does not get to pick and choose who he will obey (submit to) and whose orders he will follow. He has to learn to respect the rank and authority even if he does not respect the person in that position. This can be very frustrating at times, but is necessary for the Army to function correctly. There are tough consequences for a Soldier not obeying the Officers and NCOs appointed over him.

Praise the Lord, as a Christian we have a Commander that is always good, always just, always right and never changes! He will never give you a bad order or expect too much from you. He loved you enough to die for you, and always wants what is best for you.

What reason do we really have not to submit to God? The answer is we don't have a reason. We may have an excuse, but we don't have a reason. He is worthy to submit to and uses men and women that will submit to Him in His service.

In the Army, most of the time a Soldier doesn't get to choose where they are stationed at. The Army assigns them where they want to and they are stuck with the leaders that they have. This is called being assigned according to the needs of the Army. Complaining often makes the situation worse rather than better and usually won't change a thing.

God is our Supreme Commander, but He has given pastors to serve under in the local church. We are expected to submit to the authority of our pastor. A good pastor is not just a preacher, but a good follower of Jesus Christ, and is a leader outside of the pulpit. He is concerned about the spiritual and physical wellbeing of his members. He understands that he is accountable to God for how he fulfills his responsibilities as a pastor. God defines the responsibilities of the pastor and his members for us in Hebrews 13:7. I think it is fair to say that God expects pastors to lead right, and the members to follow right.

Some things to keep in mind are that good leaders were first good followers, and unlike the American Soldier, the Soldiers in God's Army can choose where they live and serve. Are you following in a way that's pleasing to our Commander?

~AAR (After Action Review)

Titus 3:14 *And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.*

While much effort and thought go into mission preparation, I would suggest that just as important is what takes place after any mission: the AAR. The AAR is a standard process throughout the Army that covers what was supposed to happen, what actually happened, what went right and wrong and how to fix or correct what went wrong. While it has no impact on the past mission it can have a huge impact on missions to come. The keys to an effective AAR are maximum participation, honesty and accepting responsibility for individual and collective actions (not trying to justify failures or mistakes). The commanders and NCO's that are willing to utilize the AAR system to learn from their mistakes and implement necessary changes will greatly increase their chances of mission accomplishment of future missions.

The first rule in the AAR process is: no thin skin. Otherwise, don't take any critique personally and get upset about what was said. This is vital to the success of the process. The things that went wrong have to be discussed so a solution can be determined to avoid the same failures in the future. The problem is that failures can almost always be pinpointed to an individual that made a mistake or didn't follow correct procedures. If Soldiers that made an error take it personally, they will not be able to contribute much of anything constructive to the conversation. They will be more worried about how they look in the eyes of others and try to defend themselves instead of having a professional conversation. This defensive attitude can effectively ruin the AAR. On the other hand, when someone is willing to own up to their mistake and has a desire to get better for the benefit of the team, it is usually very productive.

While most pastors that I am familiar with don't conduct an AAR on a regular basis, there are times that it could be very beneficial to their church and the work of God to discuss how things went and how they could improve. I might be wrong, but I see an inherent danger in doing this. Many Christians are easily offended and cannot take any type of rebuke or reprimand. If they are told that they did something wrong, they are apt to spin the story, tell anyone that will listen, then leave the church. The question then becomes, "Should the pastor never have discussions on how to improve because someone might get offended?"

First, it is a carnal and immature Christian that will not accept a rebuke or reprimand. Second, it is the pastor's responsibility to identify "problems" and address them:

2 Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

I do not want to take the spiritual element out of serving the Lord but not every problem should just be prayed about and forgotten. Sometimes, real discussions need to take place. These should take place in love after an ample amount of prayer. If God's people are not willing to have discussions about what went wrong and how to improve for the cause of Christ, can we ever really expect to get to the place God wants us?

~Get Out of My Chow Hall

James 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

When I got to Basic Training, I did my best not to draw attention to myself. I figured if the Drill Sergeants didn't know my name then I was probably staying out of trouble. This seemed to be working pretty good until week three. It was then that I was handed an arm band with Sergeant stripes on it and told to put it on my left sleeve. My reward for laying low was that I was selected to be the first Platoon Guide for 2nd Platoon. I can honestly tell you that I didn't see that one coming.

I was expected to take charge of the platoon in the absence of a Drill Sergeant and given a bunch of responsibilities that I didn't want. However, I soon learned that there were some perks that came with the position. I was the one that made the fireguard schedule and assigned Soldiers to details. (Keep in mind that I wasn't a Christian during this time.) Naturally, I got the first shift of fireguard duty and didn't get put on the unwanted details.

The downside was that the focus was on me when things didn't go well and the responsibilities that came with the position cost me a lot of free time. When the rest of the platoon members were shining their boots, doing laundry and relaxing a little, I was making schedules and working on tasks that I was assigned before the Drill Sergeants departed for the evening.

One of the non-perks was that I had to let all of the Soldiers in our platoon eat before I could eat. I specifically recall a lunch meal that I had a tray full of barbeques ribs, macaroni and cheese and a piece or two of bread. It had been a rough morning which included some extra physical training (punishment) for some mistakes our platoon was guilty of. I was really looking forward to those ribs and mac and cheese.

The way I figured it was that I had between four and six minutes to enjoy my meal. That was the normal amount of time we were given to eat once the last Soldier in our platoon was seated: plenty of time. Then the unthinkable happened. Before I took one bite of anything the Drill Sergeant started yelling, "You're all done, get out of my chow hall! Move, move, move! Get OUT!" I almost went into shock right there. I remember thinking, "This is not fair, I have to eat, I'm not going to make it if I don't eat." You know what I did right then and there? I got up as quickly as I could and went to dump my tray as I stuffed some bread in my mouth. As hungry and disappointed as I was, I knew what was best for me; do as I was told.

While it's a funny story now, I was far from laughing on that day. I was made to be the Platoon Guide, which I hadn't asked for. I had missed what was the probably the best meal that we had been served up to that point, while all the other Soldiers at least got to taste those barbeque ribs. My plan to lay low, go unnoticed and blend in with the crowd had failed and I was in a position that I wasn't really excited about. I actually thought about telling my Drill Sergeant that I no longer wanted to be the Platoon Guide. I didn't though, and I made it approximately two more weeks in that position. I probably learned more about being a leader in those two and a half weeks than the rest of my time in BCT and AIT, which totaled over four months.

As we serve the Lord, without a doubt, there are going to be things that happen and circumstances that arise that we don't plan for. In light of James 4:13-15, this should not be a surprise to us. But often times our first response is, "I can't believe this is happening." (Maybe similar to the response some of God's people had to COVID-19?)

While we may not like the circumstances and difficulties that we find ourselves facing, it is often in these times that we will experience the majority of our spiritual growth. I believe the years that David spent hiding from Saul greatly influenced him for the better when he became king. At a minimum he understood how jealousy and envy could destroy a kingship and empires. If we don't quit, but trust in the Lord during these difficult times, we can gain wisdom and valuable insight to help us in our service to the King.

~Not Clear, Air Assault Sergeant

*Psalms 101:7 He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house:
he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.*

In the U.S. Army, an Air Assault qualified Soldier is someone that went through a two- week course to learn the “Army way” to rappel out of and sling load equipment to a helicopter. My experience of Air Assault school was two weeks of grueling physical activity composed of thousands of push ups and flutter kicks¹², stress, constantly being yelled at, rappelling until your skin was worn off of your hips, stress, culminated with completing a 12- mile road march under three hours. The reward for those that passed all the testing and endured until the end? The coveted Air Assault badge that is worn on the left side of your uniform above your U.S. Army tag.

Upon graduating, each Soldier received their first Air Assault badge. The badge is a black metal helicopter that has two posts with grommets to pin to your uniform. The grommets were quickly removed and the Soldiers that showed up from your unit that already had their Air Assault wings (badge) got to “pin” you. This means that they placed the metal posts through your uniform, without the grommets, and hit the badge as hard as they could driving the posts into your skin resulting in profuse bleeding. These are affectionately called “blood wings”. Sounds like fun, doesn’t it?

Part of the craziness of Air Assault school was daily inspections. Each student had to carry a rucksack containing various items that had to be displayed for inspection every morning. The items were laid out (each Soldier received a diagram of the layout prior to day one of the school) on a poncho that was folded exactly 24 inches by 24 inches. If any of the items were not up to the instructors’ standards (pen and notebook not perfectly lined up, any metal piece not blackened thoroughly enough, etc.) then demerits were received and physical punishment was imposed. If the instructor identified something wrong with your display items then they would identify the reason, how many demerits you were receiving and tell you, “Pack it up and go to the gig pit.” The goal was to hear this, “Pack it up and go to the break area.” If you heard that, you had passed the inspection and escaped any physical corrective training (punishment).

The demerits could be worked off after school hours by raking leaves, painting rocks, digging holes and filling them in, cleaning, or whatever else was deemed appropriate. Too many demerits resulted in a student being dropped from the course. The gig pit was a sawdust pit that had a large (approx. two-three feet in diameter and 15-20 feet long) metal pipe in the center. The metal pipe was often used to elevate feet for push ups or to jump back and forth over.

During the inspection, a highly shined pair of combat boots had to be displayed. The boots were carried around in a rucksack which made it very difficult to present them as “highly shined”. I had found a solution to this little problem: black Varathane spray paint. This is a paint that is very shiny and dries almost like plastic. I would simply spray my boots every night, in the morning I would put them in plastic bags and carefully pack them in my rucksack. When I pulled them out to display, they looked highly shined. Oh yeah, the

¹² A flutter kick is an abdominal exercise where you lie on your back with your hands stacked palms down under your tailbone. You raise your feet off the ground, without bending your knees, and alternate raising and lowering your legs. Your feet are not allowed to touch the ground until the last repetition of the exercise is completed.

problem was that boots were supposed to be shined with polish (Kiwi), not spray paint. If I ever were to put my Varathane sprayed boots on, they would have cracked and crumbled and looked terrible.

My deceitful technique worked until the very last inspection. For two weeks I had heard, "Pack it up and go to the break area." However, during the final inspection the instructor (properly addressed as Air Assault Sergeant) looked very closely at my boots and even rubbed on them to try to scuff them up a little bit. When they didn't scuff, he knew something was up. He asked me if I had used Leather Luster (this is another product used to get a quick shine on a pair of boots) on my boots. My answer was, "Not clear, Air Assault Sergeant." (In Air Assault school you didn't say "yes" or "no", instead you had to say "clear" or "not clear".) He said, "Air Assault, you are lying to me; that's leather luster." Again, I said, "Not clear, Air Assault Sergeant." At this point he directly asked me what was on my boots. This time I told him that it was Varathane, and he didn't know what it was. I told him it was spray paint. His response? A few expletives then, "Pack it up and go to the gig pipe." For the next 30 minutes, I got some of what I deserved for taking a shortcut on my boots and being deceptive.

It takes a lot more time to get a good shine on your boots with polish and it will scuff easily. Instead of taking the time to do it the way it was supposed to be done, I used a shortcut. I was making it look like I had put a lot of effort in, but was actually being deceitful. I can't help but to think of Numbers 32:23:

But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD:
and be sure your sin will find you out.

Deceit is a form of lying. It is trying to make someone think that something is one way, when it is actually another. It usually involves just enough truth to not "officially" be a lie. Like a child that reads one verse in his Bible and then tells his parents that he spent time reading his Bible. He then asks if he could go outside and play. The child is trying to make it seem like he is doing good by reading their Bible, but failing to identify the "time" he spent was actually about 10 seconds.

Adults are pretty good at this deception game too. They will make sure to bring up the one spiritual thing they did in the past week, like handing out a gospel tract, when talking to the pastor to make him think they are spiritually minded. What they don't mention is this person that they handed the tract to was the only person they handed a tract to this past week.

It would be a whole lot better to tell the entire truth instead of the select details to make yourself look good in front of others. Sometimes we just need to admit that we're a mess, repent and get back on track. After all, you can't deceive God!

~General Orders

2 Timothy 2:2 *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

- 1) I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved.
- 2) I will obey my special orders and perform all my duties in a military manner.
- 3) I will report violations of my special orders, emergencies, and anything not covered in my instructions to the commander of the relief.

I learned the above three General Orders in BCT in 1991. I have been retired from the Army for over six years now. Amazingly, I just typed them without looking them up, they are engrained in my mind. My Drill Sergeants made sure I memorized them in BCT. When I was a Drill Sergeant, I made sure that my Soldiers memorized them. All the other time I spent in the military I can't ever remember having to recite them. While they may not need to be recited after completion of BCT, these General Orders are principles that guide a Soldier throughout his career.

The 3 General Orders can be summed up something like this:

- 1) I will do what I'm supposed to do until I don't have to do it anymore.
- 2) I will do what I'm told to do (even if I don't like it) and act like a Soldier.
- 3) I will make sure my chain of command knows what is going on.

It's supposed to be this mindset that guides a Soldier's service in the Army. The General Orders place an emphasis on fulfilling duties and following orders.

I have many times thought about and tried to come up with three General Orders for Christians, but to no avail as of yet. But I do believe there are similar principles that should guide us as we live a "Christian" life:

- 1) I will be a witness for Jesus Christ at my post.

A post is a location of service. It might be a guard shack, a building, a defensive perimeter, etc. As a Christian, my post is wherever I am at: my job, my neighborhood, my city, my school, etc. Every born-again believer has the responsibility to be a witness of what Christ did for them to give them eternal life. We are to share this message with those that are not saved. If a Soldier is not willing to fulfill his first General Order, the rest become irrelevant. The same is true for the Christian. I will not receive "special orders" if I won't fulfill my basic responsibilities towards God. If every Christian would stand for God where they are, the world would look a lot different. Too many Christians have given their post to the enemy.

- 2) I will follow God's specific plan for my life and act like a Christian.

Special orders are any tasks that must be accomplished outside of normal duties. They can be a whole variety of different things depending on location, threat level, normal duties, etc. As a Christian, God has a specific plan for your life. It could be a variety of things: a witness at your job and a faithful church member, a deacon, a pastor, a missionary, a

Sunday school teacher, etc. Christians should have a desire to do what God wants them to do and to serve Him first, and “self” second. Christians need to understand that many times their effectiveness for God depends on their testimony (reputation) among those they are trying to reach for God. A good Soldier is usually easy to spot even when he is not in uniform, because he is still a Soldier. The same should be true of Christians, even when they are not at a church activity.

- 3) I need to be very aware of the things in my life that are hindering me from doing what God wants me to do, and then get those things right with Him.

I have heard it said like this: “Keep a short account with God”. When my relationship is right with God the Holy Spirit will show me things in my life that need to be changed and I will obey. Through this process; conviction and repentance, I will be my most effective for God. As a side note here, God will help us overcome temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13), but the more we are tempted, the more chance there is that we are going to yield to the temptation. The best approach to keep a short account with God is to avoid being tempted. Don’t place yourself in a position that invites temptation!

~Fire Guard

Romans 14:13 *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.*

Fire Guard gives Soldiers in BCT the opportunity to practice fulfilling their 3 General Orders. Fire Guard duty starts at lights out, which is normally 2100 hours (9 PM) and goes until wake up. Wake up for us during BCT was typically between 0500-0530 hours (5-5:30 A.M.). It's not so much guarding against fires as much as it is making sure something doesn't happen that's not supposed to.

Fire Guard consisted of two Soldiers on duty for a one-hour period. They were supposed to do a "head count" at the start of their shift and had varying responsibilities depending on what time they had duty. One of the goals of Fire Guard was to get the barracks cleaned while everyone else slept. The instructions were pretty simple: both Soldiers must be in complete PT (Physical Training) uniform, they were not allowed to sleep and they were not allowed to exit the barracks without permission from the Drill Sergeant, unless there was an emergency.

As simple as it sounds, Fire Guard was a huge problem for Soldiers in BCT. At least once a night, two Drill Sergeants (male and female) would check on the Soldiers in the barracks. It was very common to find a Soldier sleeping on duty or out of uniform. I have gone into a barracks at 0100 (1 A.M.) and there was no Fire Guard. At some point the Soldiers on duty woke up the next two Soldiers for duty and went to sleep. They failed to make sure that the oncoming Soldiers were fully awake, which they weren't. The result was everyone was asleep in the barracks; no Fire Guard.

Depending on the infraction, problems on Fire Guard were fixed accordingly. If a Soldier fell asleep, then I figured if there were four Soldiers on Fire Guard, they could do a better job keeping each other awake. If the barracks wasn't cleaned properly in the morning, then we needed more Soldiers on Fire Guard to help with the cleaning. The more Soldiers per Fire Guard shift meant less sleep. Instead of having Fire Guard once every 5-7 nights, they would have Fire Guard every 2-3 nights.

If a Soldier was out of uniform, then that would also be dealt with accordingly. Being out of uniform could be as simple as having their shirt untucked or wearing flip flops instead of running shoes. The first violation would result in the uniform being changed to the full Army PT uniform which included putting on running pants and PT jacket over the shorts and t-shirt. The second violation would result in the Soldiers having to wear BDUs, instead of the PT uniform. I remember one cycle that ended up having 8 Soldiers per hour on Fire Guard wearing BDUs, MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture)¹³ gear LCE (Load Carrying Equipment), Kevlar Helmet and carrying a rubber M16 rifle. To say the least, none of these Soldiers were happy with the Fire Guard situation. The worst part is that every Soldier suffered, because a few Soldiers chose not to do right. The hope is that before it gets to this point that the Soldiers will fix their own problems so the Drill Sergeant won't have to. I guess sometimes Soldiers don't heed the warnings.

¹³ MOPP gear consists of charcoal lined pants and jacket, protective mask, rubber gloves and rubber boots that were worn over the BDUs to protect against the effects of a chemical attack.

There is a philosophy of the world that has affected churches today: “It’s my life and I can do what I want”. For Christians to think like this, they are ignoring biblical principles. I am accountable to God for “me”, but I’m also accountable to God for how my actions affect others. The Israelites learned this principle at the battle of Ai (Joshua 7). One man’s sin caused men and women to die and resulted in losing a battle that should have been easily won.

I can’t help but wonder how many battles churches have lost because of “sin in the camp”. Whether its financial struggles, loss of members, not seeing people come to Christ, or a whole bunch of other things. Could these results be from the attitude and lifestyle of: “It’s my life and I can do what I want”? God doesn’t tolerate sin, we shouldn’t either. Although, the sin of one may be unseen by others, God will not ignore it! I sure don’t want to be the reason my church is losing battles that could easily be won!

~ROE (Rules of Engagement)

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

The military has established guidelines and rules that govern warfare. The Law of War¹⁴ is unchanging and deals largely with the treatment of civilians and detainees. For example: U.S. Soldiers are not supposed to open fire on public structures such as schools, hospitals and religious facilities, unless it is determined that the enemy is engaging them from one of these structures. They also specify what are acceptable interrogation techniques and the use of certain types of weapons. All Soldiers receive their first Law of War briefing in BCT and will receive periodic briefings throughout their careers.

The ROE are what guide Soldiers in their decision to engage a target or not. They specify who can be engaged with lethal force, when they can be engaged and how (if a warning is required before engaging). From experience, the ROE may change as frequently as daily. The ROE when our unit arrived in Iraq were very vague and changed multiple times throughout our year-long deployment. By the time we departed to return to the states, the ROE were very specific and greatly restricted the use of lethal force.

By in large, American forces have done and continue to do their best to follow the Law of War and ROE. There will always be those that make bad decisions on occasion and violate one of the other or both. These Soldiers' actions will typically be investigated and they will possibly stand trial to determine if their actions were warranted or if they should be punished for their violations.

One difficulty with the Law of War and ROE is that many of our enemies do not follow the same guidelines as the American military. They will hide behind civilians, shoot at American forces from these "protected" buildings and mistreat and torture those that they capture. As difficult and "unfair" as this is, U.S. forces still have to abide by the rules. Two wrongs don't make a right.

As Christians we are encouraged to "fight the **good** fight of faith". Paul also tells us in 2 Timothy 2:5 that we shouldn't expect a crown for winning unless we strive "lawfully". It certainly seems like "good" and "lawfully" would mean that we need to obey God's laws as we fight for Him. There has to be a balance and we should not stand on one scripture and ignore others to justify our actions.

Many that fight like to use verses like Psalm 119:165 to justify how they treat others:

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

They will say that if you are offended, then that's your problem; you would have peace and wouldn't be offended if you were right with the Lord. The problem with this is that they are ignoring a lot of other scriptures to hang their hat on the one verse that gives them a license to do what they are doing. They would have you believe that it's ok not to love people and mistreat them because they are "doing the Lord's work". They will use phrases like "righteous indignation" and tell you how Jesus cleansed the temple on two separate occasions.

Obviously, you should be able to see some problems this can lead to in public

¹⁴ The law of war refers to the component of international law that regulates the conditions for war and the conduct of warring parties.

ministry and inside the church. The result is “mean spirited” Christianity and a misrepresentation of Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples in John 13:35:

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,
if ye have **love one to another**.*

To be honest, I wish Jesus would have said that others would know I am His disciple if I do something like reading my Bible, praying, handing out gospel tracts or coming to church, but He didn't. I guess this would still apply to us today since Paul gives a list of “good works” in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, but said if he did those things without charity then he was “nothing” and it “profiteth nothing”. Or what about everything John tells us about the importance of loving our brother in 1 John?

God wants us to “fight a good fight” and “war a good warfare”, but He expects us to do so lawfully. I am convinced that we don't hear more about loving others as we fight because it can be really hard to do. Some people are just not easy to love. The good news is that God doesn't expect us to do it without Him. The only way we can follow His laws of war are by letting Him love others through us. Simply put, if we are going to fight in this battle where our enemy doesn't fight fair and we are expected to follow the rules, we are going to have to do it in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Fighting a good fight in His power, not our own.

~LDRSHIP

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

The Army has seven core values that they encourage Soldiers to live by. These are officially known as the Seven Army Values and conveniently make up the acronym LDRSHIP: **L**oyalty, **D**uty, **R**espect, **S**elfless Service, **H**onor, **I**ntegrity and **P**ersonal Courage. These values were emphasized on a daily basis in BCT with a hope that the Soldiers would grasp onto them and guide their actions by them. The Army is truly a melting pot and not all of the new Soldiers lived their lives by good values prior to enlisting.

While I am not going to define each one these values (most of them are pretty simple to figure out), I want to emphasize the value of honor. The simple definition for the Army Value of honor is: To live up to all of the Army Values. According to the Army, if Soldiers could live up to the other six values, then they would naturally have the value of honor. If they failed to live by any of the other six values, then it was impossible to possess honor.

As a Drill Sergeant, I did my best to tie the Soldiers' every day actions into the Army's values. This was pretty easy to do once I started thinking about it. If a Soldier was standing in formation with a boot lace untied, I would explain to him that he had failed to live up to the value of duty. It was his duty to make sure that his uniform was squared away prior to getting into formation. I would then explain to the rest of the Soldiers that they had failed to live up to the value of loyalty because they let their peer get into formation without being squared away. The end result was no one in the platoon was living by honor and I would do my best to help them get some honor into their lives. This was accomplished through corrective values training which consisted of physical exertion that normally resulted in temporary muscle failure and lots of sweating.

God tells us in James 2:10, that if we break one law, we essentially might as well have broken them all. It is not good enough to just not commit adultery. We need to not lie, steal, disobey our parents, blaspheme God's name, have no other gods before Him, etc. There are two types of sins: sins of "commission" and sins of "omission". The things we do that we shouldn't do and the things that we don't do that we should.

I think we can all agree that God's standards are a lot higher than ours. We can't even begin to understand how God thinks and sees things so much differently than we do. I can't even come close to grasping the fact that He exists outside of time, but He does. I can't wrap my mind around the fact that He is dependent on and needs nothing: He is completely self-sufficient. That being said, I don't think we come close to understanding how repulsed God is at our sin. Jesus Christ died for our sin, not His own. He paid a debt He didn't owe because of our sin. So, for us to think that we can sin and God won't mind because it's not a "big" sin is ridiculous. We need to understand that one time of bearing false witness carries consequences a lot more serious than we view them. How about not going to church, not loving one another or not being a witness for Jesus Christ? For those of you that would say the preceding list isn't really sin, I share this verse with you:

James 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

The "therefore" in this verse is preceded with the thoughts of planning out our future as if it's guaranteed to us and nothing is going to change. It encompasses thinking like: instead of doing something for the Lord, or the benefit of others today, I can put it off until tomorrow. An American Soldier doesn't live up to the value of honor when he fails to live

up to any of the other values. God's Soldiers are not living up to God's values system when we commit one sin, whether it be of commission or omission! Would God say that as one of His Soldiers you have "honor" in your life?

~Down Time

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

I cannot speak for all Soldiers, but I went through different phases while I was in combat. The first phase was “being on edge”. This phase began after being exposed to enemy fire (small arms, mortars, explosives, etc.). It came with the reality that someone is trying to kill me. You have a hard time concentrating, always thinking worst case scenarios, and when the radio breaks squelch (cracks) you jump.

The longer I was in the combat environment, the more I got used to it. While I’m not sure if my fear ever completely resided, I got to the point that I was almost numb to the dangers. Mortars would be fired, and we would joke around about how bad of an aim the enemy was. The intensity of the combat and the exposure to injuries and deaths, will often determine the phase a Soldier is in. When I say “phase”, I am referring to the mindset of the Soldier that impacts his performance. Combat has different effects on different people.

One of the phases Soldiers can get to is when they have been exposed to so much pain, suffering and trauma is battle fatigue. It is a place where the mind has been overloaded and they can’t concentrate anymore. They often will just sit there and stare straight ahead (1,000-yard stare). They may not eat or want to be around anyone, and they might even shake uncontrollably. They need some down time. They need to get to an environment that they can “relax” and “unwind”, to have a chance to recover. The effects of stress on your body are medically documented. Stress causes many physical problems and there aren’t too many jobs more stressful than a combat Soldier’s.

Sometimes Soldiers need some down time to recoup to get back to being combat effective again. I had a First Sergeant that used to call this “taking a knee”. I would suggest that God’s Army needs the same thing. Effective ministries deal with people. With people comes problems. With problems comes stress. The human mind tends to take a problem, blow it up and only see the worst-case scenarios. Often times the situation doesn’t turn out nearly as bad as we thought it would, but it is still stressful.

Combat is by far the most stressful situation I have ever been exposed to. The second most stressful situation I have been in is ministry. The more I have tried to do for the Lord, the more problems I have encountered and the more stress has been involved. Sometimes, I am just not spiritual enough to “let go and let God”. My time in the Army taught me how to identify a problem and develop a course of action to fix that problem. It is a fairly straight forward process when there is a chain of command and a duty to submit to authority, but it doesn’t quite work the same in the church.

The Army has really tried to get a grip on PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in the past decade. They understand that the stress of certain experiences can have lifelong negative impacts. Leaders at all levels are taught how to identify PTSD, and the steps that need to be taken if it is identified in a Soldier. The only way that I know to prevent PTSD is to avoid stressful situations. That pretty much is impossible for Soldiers.

I don't know how many of the Soldiers I served with were diagnosed with PTSD. What I do know is that I could tell when a Soldier was having difficulties doing his job and he needed a break. Some Soldiers could "suck it up and drive on", while another Soldier needed some time to de-stress.

Christians are exposed to different problems and different levels of stress as they serve in God's Army. They also deal with stress differently. Sometimes, you might just need to get away and unplug from the ministry for a while to get refreshed in the Lord.

One other thing here; physical activity can prove to be an effective counter measure in dealing with stress. I have gone on many long runs to unwind and pray. Regular physical activities might be something to devote time to, if you don't already. The key is to find something that you enjoy to do. If you don't enjoy it, it probably won't last.

Soldiers earn 2.5 days of leave per month: 30 days a year. The majority of Soldiers don't have to be convinced to use their leave days. When we were in Iraq, each Soldier was allowed to go home for 2 weeks. Every Soldier in my platoon used their leave days and went home. They all understood that they needed some downtime and to get away for a while.

While this does not apply to the Christians that are only church-goers, there are some folks that need a break, could take a break, but don't. They will say things like, "The Lord will sustain me and help me through this." He is definitely able to do that, but what if He wants to sustain and help you through by you taking some down time? Everybody needs a break some time. It's great to be busy for the Lord, but don't burn yourself out. Don't be afraid to "take a knee" if you need to, then get back in the fight!

~Welcome Home

*1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved in heaven for you**, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

I am not sure if the average American has any understanding of what the life of an American Soldier is like. Not just the physical hardships and the harsh reality of war, but the time spent away from home. My last duty assignment in the regular Army was Ft. Lewis, Washington. I was assigned at Ft. Lewis for 26 months, of which, I actually was home with my wife for less than six months. There was a deployment to guard the Pentagon, field training exercises at Ft. Lewis, NTC (National Training Center in the Mojave Desert), YTC (Yakima Training Center; high mountain desert in Yakima, Washington) and a year long deployment to Iraq.

To put it lightly, a husband and wife spending that much time apart can create some major difficulties in their relationship. Add some children into the family and the difficulties only increase. I am thankful that my wife, and at the time, our two boys had an excellent support group through our church. Army units have Family Support Groups (FSG), but I have seen some of them do more harm than good. I'm sure there are some excellent FSGs out there, but they can be a source of unneeded contention and rumors.

There's a saying that "absence makes the heart grow fonder"; that isn't always true. Sometimes absence makes the heart grow cold and influence in the relationship may be lost with distance. The more Soldiers are gone, the more independent spouses tend to become and get used to doing things their own way. The Soldier returns from their deployment and things have "changed" and become unfamiliar. On top of the stress of their deployment and trying to unwind, they are faced with the stress of getting to know their wife and children again; not the easiest life to live.

I remember returning home from Iraq and the overwhelming feelings of finally being back home (a year is a long time to be gone!). The tears of joy from Soldiers, spouses and children alike and "Welcome Home" signs hanging on buildings and trees. I can't help but think that this is just a small taste of what it will be like to get to heaven.

While the Bible gives us some glimpses of heaven, no one can be 100% sure what it is like. Here's what I believe: It's going to be better than we can possibly imagine!

***Revelation 21:4** And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

I can't help but get excited about a mansion in glory, but I also think about the finality of it all. No more problems, trials or struggles, but what about those that we come into contact with daily, now? Will they be with us there one day because we shared the truth with them, or are we hoping someone else tells them about Jesus?

There's a song that says, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, life's trials will be so small when we see Christ." Is that how you live your life now? Nothing is too much for Jesus because someday you will be with Him? The American Soldiers are willing to face hardships, time away from their loved ones and possibly death for an imperfect country.

Shouldn't Christians be willing to do at least the same for a perfect God? I hope when I see that final "Welcome Home" sign, there might be some others there because I was a good Soldier for Christ.

~Drive On

1 Corinthians 16:13 *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*

Army life comes with its share of hardships and hard times. These hardships can be physical and emotional. Stress is a common characteristic in most Soldiers' lives. Imagine being awake for 72 hours, being physically and emotionally exhausted and having to make decisions that could result in injury or death to someone else. This can be the stark reality of being a Soldier.

Unfortunately, there are no time outs in war, no "do-overs" and oftentimes no second chances. Decisions have to be made in some of the most difficult circumstances and the mission has to be accomplished. Depending on the mission, some loss of life and equipment may be acceptable. By the way, many times the life of a Soldier is not "fair", but they chose to be a Soldier.

A common phrase used throughout the Army is "suck it up and drive on". This phrase is used when things get tough and when a Soldier wants to quit, or feels like he can't go on. This may sound cruel or heartless to some, but many times a Soldier just needs to push through. He needs to stop focusing on the negative and focus on getting the task at hand completed.

Our mind is powerful, but not always right! I cannot begin to count the number of times I have been running and wanted to stop, because my lungs hurt, my legs hurt and my mind was telling me to stop. Amazingly, the times that I have not stopped, but just kept going, I did not pass out, collapse or die. I just kept going because I chose to continue.

If a Soldier thinks he can quit or shirk his responsibilities because things are difficult or not going his way, then often times he will. But when and if the Soldier gets to the point of wanting to quit and is told to, "suck it up and drive on", he normally will.

Most people have no idea what their body is able to endure, because they quit doing whatever they are doing at the first sign of discomfort. There is a point at which precaution is necessary, but many times when dealing with hardships and discomfort a Soldier's mindset has to be that he can keep going.

Trials, difficulties, disappointments and uncontrolled circumstances are a fact of life; saved or lost. If you have a biblical view of life, then you understand that you have an appointment with death. Unless the Lord calls us out of here (1 Thessalonians 4:16 & 17), you will not miss this appointment! Whether this is through sickness, accident or martyrdom is beyond your control and nothing is accomplished by worrying about it.

The Apostle Paul never complained about his circumstances (and they were very difficult), he just kept going, because his focus was on Jesus Christ, not himself. I think it's fair to say that most Christians will never come close to suffering the kind of persecution that Paul did. What we often refer to as persecution, is really just our feelings being hurt because of our pride. You can quit, God won't stop you, but who will be affected by that decision? Maybe, we just need to be like Paul and press toward the mark!

Onward Christian Soldiers!