

# ***“Lessons Learning”***

***Christian Devotionals from OEF & OIF 1***



***Dedicated to the soldiers of 2-6 Cav & 2-101<sup>st</sup>***

## *Personal Note from Chaplain Jeff Dillard*

This is my journal of experiences with Task Force 2-6 during OEF and OIF 1, but it is primarily a series of Christian devotionals. I have tried to write in the spirit of 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the Word, be prepared in season & out of season, correct, rebuke, and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.” I hope it will bless you.



Regarding readability, there are several aviation-specific abbreviations. If you're a military dependant, consider any questions as opportunities to talk to your soldier about their experiences. It's an imperfect work. I wrote until the last moment in order to capture the complete experience, submitted it for Command and Chaplain reviews, and had it published before our troops' 60 days stabilization ended. Although I took hundreds of pictures, I didn't always have a photo that would properly illustrate a given devotional. Therefore, once in a while I used a picture from another time during the deployment. For example, a story about AAFES in Doha has a picture of the AAFES setup at Ali Al Saleem. I believe the key dates are accurate, however. Again, my first intent is spiritual.

I have tried to teach God's Word by being relevant, transparent, honest, and tactful without being boring, self-righteous, or religious. At times, I fail on each count. All these flaws withstanding, I hope the Lord Jesus will use these devotionals to bless you.

I am grateful to the soldiers from 2-6 who shared pictures with me, to SPC Luis Rodriguez, who facilitated the publication of this second edition, and especially to SGT Kerry Boese, CPT Chad Ward, and MAJ Stuart McRae. They got me through some hard times in the desert. Truly, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). Lastly, to my wife – Lauren, I never fully realized how much God had blessed me until I spent those 7 months without you. You are my faithful sister, friend, and love. I missed you so much!

My last night at home was awkward. For the first time in 7 years, I was about to separate from my family, not knowing when I'd be back. I talked with my older boys about why the Army was sending me to the Middle East. I told them that I loved them and stressed the need to help their Mom - she would have to do it all without me, starting tomorrow.



I almost dreaded tucking in my 2 year old. Would he say goodnight in his usual way? After the standard big hug, big kiss, and sip of “big water”, I prayed with him, and he laid his head down. “I see you in the morning, Daddy”. I was afraid of that.

I tried to explain that I would be gone for a long time with the Army, and he seemed to understand. “You going to work with Army men?” he asked in a cute, high-pitched voice. “That’s right”, I responded. “Okay, Daddy. I see you in the morning”, like it was any other night. I wiped away a tear (mine) and kissed him one last time.

Truthfully, I wasn’t that concerned about how they would do without me, but I wondered how I would do without them. We all want someone to love us, & we put great hope in those relationships. When those special people accept us, trust us, and depend on us, then we feel on top of the world.

That kind of hope, however, is fleeting. Sooner or later, we will be separated from, and even the best of friends let us down at times. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a **Friend** who sticks closer than a brother” (emphasis mine). In John 15:13-15, Jesus calls His disciples ‘friends’ because He commits Himself to His followers. We must put our hope in the only One Who will never leave us or let us down. Only then will we have the peace, confidence, and wisdom necessary for the hard times that will certainly come. Knowing Jesus’ love gives us inner peace by finding our value in Him. Then we’ll have the strength to care for our loved ones without worrying about who loves us.

The last thing I grabbed as I went out the door on the way to the unit was 2 bags of goodies my wife had prepared for SPC Antone (my assistant) and me. I had asked her not to, but she did it anyway. When I got to the hanger at 0230, I gave one bag to Antone and started breaking mine down to store in my carry-on, grumbling to myself, “She should’ve listened to me! This is too much trouble!”

Two days later, I was sitting in a hot warehouse in Kuwait, coated with dust, alone among 400 other soldiers in the Task Force. I reached into one of my bags for some paper to take notes for our 1900 briefing, and my hand touched one of the pieces of candy that Lauren had packed for me.



In Psalm 23:5, David says to God, “. . . You anoint my head with oil - my cup overflows,” a picture of the abundant gifts of God. It does seem at times that He “blesses” us with more than we can carry. But He is like a Shepherd caring for sheep who don’t always know where to go or what they need. In verse 2, David (a former shepherd) reminds us that God may even make His sheep do things that are good for them.

My wife had sent reminders of her love for the times that were yet to come. God also blesses us for times that are yet to come. This deployment will provide me with a lot of time to work on my character. There will be opportunities to reach out to people. I can take advantage of the solitude and spend extra time with Him. Tough times are yet to come, but when we re-deploy, I believe we’ll find that He filled our cups with exactly what we needed to grow in our relationship with Him and understanding of Him. Drink from the cup He’s given and thank Him – even if it seems a little full right now.



With almost 10 years of active service, you'd think I'd be used to the "hurry up and wait" game. I'm not. Hundreds of soldiers rushed to get to our hanger that first morning, only to wait for buses that were 2 hours late. When we got to the air base, the first thing we heard was, "the planes are taking off at midnight (instead of the scheduled 1400)". Even our projected 3 days of in-processing at Camp Doha, Kuwait turned into almost 2 weeks of waiting.

I was fuming! "I could have been spending extra time with Lauren and the kids" I thought. Other soldiers were voicing their displeasure, too. "What is taking so long? The sooner we get started, the sooner we can go home!" The circumstances had set our bitterness to 'slow brew' and my cup was almost full. But my attitude wasn't from the Lord.

I thought about Psalm 90:12. "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom." I was suddenly embarrassed at my selfishness. I was about to have a 6 month opportunity for 'God only knew what'. I could sit and sulk or I could act on what God had given. Immediately, I recommitted to see it as a chance to rely on Him more, to work on my faith, patience, my diligence, service, contentment, and to introduce my family to a better husband and father when I returned.

Take a look at the areas of your life that need changing. You're on God's training schedule. Don't fight what you can't change – make the most of the time. How can you serve through your strengths or become more obedient to God in your weaknesses? Being separated from loved ones does not mean that God made a mistake or overlooked you. He intends you to "number your days that you may gain a heart of *wisdom*". May He bless us in our journey of faith and opportunity!

After I picked out a spot to sleep and stored my gear under my cot, I set out looking for Camp Doha’s Dining Facility. I wasn’t really hungry, but Germany had been in the mid 60s when we left, and it was now well over 100 degrees. I thought the D-Fac might have air conditioning.

I was stunned when I walked in. There were tile floors, decorated walls, a short-order line, main line, salad bar, coolers of ice cream, real tables and nice chairs, and of course - AC!! It was a palace compared to the MKT and tent we usually have in the field.



As I sat down with my glazed chicken, snow peas, fruit salad and Coke, I thought, “this is great chow!” In fact, it wasn’t that special. The chicken was too greasy, the peas were a little tough, and my drink was noticeably light on syrup. What made it seem so great? - the atmosphere! Here we were in the middle of the desert, getting ready for war, and someone had put a lot of time, effort, and money into bringing us some ‘creature comforts’. We were being treated like honored guests.

1 John 3:1a says, “Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” When you follow Jesus, you are better than an honored guest, you are part of His family. There are a lot of things that I miss about home, but I comfort myself with the knowledge that God is putting His time and effort into me. As my Father, He brings me the comforts of home to my heart every day – peace beyond my circumstances, the renewing strength of His Spirit, and guidance from His Word.

Seek after the blessings that are eternal. Rest in His commitment to your spiritual growth. Remember that blessing is often given just before strength is needed. Let’s thank Him for His good work in our lives that gives us the proper perspective to face the challenges ahead.

Today, most of our Task Force left the security of Doha for the port where we would convoy our vehicles to a temporary holding area in the desert. We were a bit nervous that other soldiers at the port (outside TF 2-6) had complete control of the process, but we had no choice in the matter.

It was almost dark when the 3<sup>rd</sup> serial began the 3-hour drive into the desert. About 5 miles outside the gate, a civilian cut the first vehicle off and we had to stop at an intersection. Our escort had not blocked traffic; we had no map, directions or GPS, virtually no ammo, and our assigned ‘security’ was gone. We also began to notice that the same Toyota pickup had been circling our 40 vehicles over & over. We were being watched, but for what reason, we weren’t sure. What were we supposed to do now?



I thought about Elisha and his servant, who were surrounded by enemies in 2 Kings 6. When his servant panicked, Elisha prayed, and God opened the doubter’s eyes to see what had been there all along - an army of angels and flaming chariots, ready to defend them at a single word from the Lord!

At the port, I had been concerned that we had no control. When we found ourselves stranded, I became angry that our security had left us. Now, I was completely at peace, reminded that human beings are never in complete control of anything!. Our security was in His hands, and this was a great opportunity to ask for His protection, act responsibly, and trust Him – whatever happened. I got out of my vehicle and began walking the line, smiling and talking with each soldier.

Pray for our strength to live our faith in the face of fear – to step out & serve. Let’s trust in our Father’s power & plan. “Greater is He Who is *in* you than he who is in the world!” (1 John 4:4)

It’s amazing how quickly we forget what God has taught us. Maybe that’s why we seem to relive the same lessons over and over again – they haven’t sunk in yet! The day after the convoy chaos, we were back behind the secure walls of Camp Doha. I was taking a walk around to familiarize myself with the post when I saw another soldier disappear into a small opening between two high concrete slabs. I decided to take a look.

I found myself looking at a series of small buildings, each surrounded by a maze of similar slabs, each about 10 feet long, 6 feet high, and 18 inches thick. The entire area was also peppered with fortified bunkers every 20 yards or so. I thought, “Man!



If we ever get shelled, this is where I’m coming!”

I wondered who lived or worked in there – VIPs maybe, civilian contractors, or just individual soldiers who were not assigned to large Task Forces like ours. At any rate, they probably slept pretty well, knowing their front yard was a veritable Fort Knox.

Almost immediately, I remembered the previous evening, when we had ***no*** protection for hours and got to our destination without a single incident. I thought about our enemies in the Gulf War, who felt secure in their underground hideaways, until our “bunker busters” cut through their defenses like a hot knife through butter!

Psalms 20:7 says, “Some trust in horses, and some trust in chariots, but we trust in the Name of the Lord, our God.” Remember where your security comes from. Of course, God calls us to be responsible with what He has given us and in the circumstances that He has placed us. Every smart soldier improves his fighting position daily, but soldiers of Christ ***trust*** in the wisdom, love, & strength of their Dad Who rules the universe!



By now, I was beginning to enjoy our prolonged stay at Camp Doha. There was a decent PX, a great gym, morale phones and computers in the library to email our loved ones. And every soldier's favorite - “Frosty's”!

Frosty's was almost like a club. There was always a movie or music playing (sometimes both). They had ping-pong, pool tables, video games, darts, etc., and they served free burgers, hot dogs, fries, and sodas from lunchtime until midnight!



Since I was promised Lauren I would return “a lean, mean, semi-tan machine”, I stayed away from the free food most of the time. But there were a couple of hot days when I slipped in to experience those wonderful salty fries, the delicious combination of sour pickles, sweet ketchup, and cheese on a hamburger, and most of all the refreshing burn of an ice cold soda!

Frosty's was nice, but I was thirsty again in no time. In fact, there isn't anything in this world that will satisfy you for very long. Sometimes, it even seems that God has made the world sweet enough to thank Him for it, but not filling enough that you can do without Him as the main course.

Being in this hot desert has helped me better understand desert life in Biblical times, especially during Israel's 40 years of wandering. Just a short walk outside and my teeth are lightly coated with dust. When I run, it's so dry that my sweat evaporates before it can even collect in my shirt. In John 4, we read Jesus' conversation with a woman by a well on a hot day. He called Himself “living water” that would always satisfy and never run dry. No burger joint can offer that!

I must remind myself to go to Jesus to quench my soul's thirsts for meaning, guidance, love, hope and more (Isaiah 55:1-2). Unlike Frosty's, He truly satisfies – and He won't run me out at midnight!



In the past 10 years, I've deployed all over the United States & Europe. In almost every place, there was a PX or at least a tractor-trailer loaded down with goodies for us – snacks, CDs, and T-shirts with the latest “Operation so-and-so” printed on the front. I used to think it was unusual, but it's not.

AAFES is made up of spouses, adult children, and former soldiers. The vast majority of their profits come back to us in community programs & soldier benefits. They are quiet literally an extension of the Army family, so they have a vested interest in serving G.I.s.

When God commissioned Joshua to take Israel into promise land, He was acting as a Father with a vested interest. He was fulfilling a promise to go with them (Genesis 17:8). He intentionally placed the Israelites at the literal center of three continents (the promise land is the only land bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa), so the entire world could see what a relationship with God looked like! (Ezekiel 5:5)

In Joshua 1, we see Him comforting and preparing His people. “Meditate (on My Word) day and night, that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”. “Do not be terrified, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” - His guarantee that He would never leave His children. You can bet that AAFES won't be there in the heat of combat!

If you're nervous, look to God's Word for guidance and strength. Put your faith in Him, and you will begin to see the changes He makes in you and the work He does around you. Your difficulties are not accidental. He often intentionally sends His children to places that reveal their needs. But He also goes with us to build our faith and character. Trying getting some of that from the PX! Separations and other hardships may be painful at the time, but God will never send you anywhere alone. He will strengthen you, increase your wisdom and patience, and show you the glory of His presence.

Security continues to be foremost on our soldiers' minds. From the time that we got the OPORD back in Germany, I continue to talk to men and women who wonder “Is our Army ready for war? Am *I* ready?” Readiness is something that the military trains for and talks about constantly. It's important that our equipment is fully mission-capable and that our people are well trained. But you never fully know your level of confidence until something happens.

Today, I was relaxing on my cot during lunch when we all heard a loud, whooping siren. Several soldiers stepped outside to have a look around. Some might have just been curious, many were looking for an example to follow, but I was looking for scuds! None of us knew what it was or what to do!



Scriptures say “the Lord will come back as a thief in the night.” That means it will be sudden. When He comes to steal us away, many will be unprepared – and scary for some.

How can you know if you're ready for war? I am convinced the answer to that will only come after you can answer, “How do I stand with God?” Fearful people usually fall into one of three camps. 1) Some are spiritually blind and value their comforts, achievements, etc. more than anything. They are terrified when their stuff is threatened. 2) Some believe, but do not love. They realize that their treasures should be 2<sup>nd</sup> place to loving God, and they're afraid to face Him. And 3) some true believers do not yet fully know the power, love, and plan of their Lord.

It turns out that the siren was just a test. But in the end, when we individually stand before God, there will be no test or second chance. We tend to turn to experts to prepare our kids for basketball and mechanics to ready our helicopters for flight. Shouldn't we turn to God to get us ready for life? Whatever your spirit is like now, the merciful and power Savior can take you from fear to confident faith.

As the only Chaplain for over 400 soldiers, I try to get around to as many soldiers as possible, everyday. Most of our guys are pretty accessible – hanging out in the warehouse where we slept or walking around the PX for the zillionth time. Some of them, however, are more difficult to reach. Our Command and Staff have a temporary TAC in a secure building, and the only way in is through an armed guard’s post. Those who didn’t have a pass have to call for an escort.

I don’t normally spend a lot of time checking on our C & S. They are a fairly mature and healthy group. Occasionally, however, it is important that I can go quickly and directly to talk with the XO or SCO. After going through this painful procedure with the guard three or four times, I applied for a security pass.

A few days later, I had my pass and needed to speak with someone in the TAC. As I approached the guard shack, I pulled out my new I.D a good 50 feet away, just to get ready. When I stepped in, he simply glanced at it and motioned me to go inside. What a difference!

That’s exactly the kind of access that Jesus gives us to God. We have no right to come on our own authority. But, when we apply for the stamp of Jesus’ forgiveness and are given the new “I.D.” by His Holy Spirit living in us, we are welcome every time. Got a problem? Come on in! Need wisdom? You’ve come to the right place!

Hebrews 4:14 says we have “a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, (so) let us hold tightly to our confession.” Go to the Father with confidence. With Jesus as your ‘pass’, you don’t have to worry. His perfect life and sacrifice on the cross has secured your access - 24/7. There’s no waiting, and no escort required!



Finally, the day came - we were leaving “Disneyland Doha”, as some referred to it. Ten buses picked us up in front of the warehouse to take us to a new Tactical Assembly Area, where our vehicles were temporarily being held – about 1 ½ hours into the desert. You could tell that some were getting nervous again – closing all the curtains in the bus, peaking through tiny openings to see who or what was out there. “How safe were we?” was the question of the hour.

When we finally arrived, we stepped off the bus onto an endless sea of fine sand. It was just as I had imagined that it would be - other than a few empty tents to our West and some limited construction to our North, we were in the middle of nowhere.

Our senior NCOs did a great job of getting us organized and ready to convoy out. I was in the HHT convoy, and our 1SG did a particularly good job instilling confidence and calm through his sense of humor. The safety brief was very upbeat. He was smiling and cracked joke or two. We left that brief feeling a lot better about our situation.



Confidence definitely flows downhill. Soldiers need to see that their leaders have it together. But as good as many Army leaders are, only God has it together perfectly, *all* the time! Psalm 118:8-9 tells us “It is better to take refuge in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. It is better to take refuge in God, than to put confidence in princes.”

Consider what God has proven in the Bible and in others’ lives. Nothing takes Him by surprise. No trouble is too little for His attention or too great for His strength. Get to know Him better through His Word and prayer. Discover the many reasons that He is always reliable. Be confident in Christ and experience the power of His peace!

Whenever a unit deploys, you always get new toys – Desert Camouflage Uniforms, cool-looking tan boots, and the Camelback water system, for example. I particularly liked my Camelback. As soon as I got it back in Germany, I filled it up, adjusted the straps, and slipped it on. “I’ll never be thirsty again!” I thought.

Today, we were transporting personnel to Ali Al Saleem on buses and I wanted to make it in one trip, so I put on the Camelback under my LVB and strapped my rucksack on top of that. When we arrived, I took off my rucksack and began to feel a cool, wet



sensation on my lower back. I thought it was just sweat. It wasn’t. My new toy was leaking.

My soul was grieved! I had been counting on this thing. It’s supposed to get pretty hot out here, and it was made for a rugged desert environment! How could it fail me the very first time I wanted to use it? It turned out that the combined weight of the LVB and rucksack was just too much for it - the valve at the bottom had popped. It was never meant to hold up under that kind of pressure.

How many times have all of us looked to something to meet a thirst – a new toy, a relationship, achieving a personal goal - you name it. Nothing in this world can take the pressure of our deepest thirsts. Jeremiah 2:13 says “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, and made their own cisterns, broken cisterns, that can not hold water.”

Life is full of hardships that carry heaven burdens. You need more than your own strength and more than the earthly resources around you. Take your soul’s thirsts to God. Give all your pressures to Him, and He will bring relief to your soul. Go to ***Him*** to for satisfaction, and you will never thirst again.

No one was very excited before our first MKT meal. Don't get me wrong. Our cooks do a great job with what they're given, but they don't always have the freedom to do their own shopping or follow their own recipes. So when we heard, “Steak night!”, every mouth dropped. It was good steak, too – seasoned and tender, with mushrooms and onions. We even had baked potatoes with sour cream!

On deployments or long FTXs, meals like that are often saved for the end. In the desert, I never expected steak at all - we were too far out for too many supply runs. But our cooks' had a connection. There was a well-established kitchen about 30 minutes from our location. Our guys just had to go and pick up the food.

Steak in the field can be a great way to boost morale, but real appreciation comes from the person's spirit, not the circumstances. When God fed the Israelites manna in the desert, they grew tired of it and complained, so He promised them meat. But Moses doubted. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Has My arm grown short? Now shall you see whether My word shall happen to you or not’” (Numbers 11:23), and God made quail literally fall from the sky.



The second time we had steak, not many were excited; the third time, a few even complained. As Christians, we've got a connection with best Resource in the universe – God Himself, Who can give us anything that we need. But true peace, satisfaction, and contentment come from the heart – a new heart that's been changed by Him.

The bottom line is, our Lord blesses us (or disciplines us) so that we will remain close to Him. His answer may be ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘wait’, but He always gives us what we need to grow in faith and character. Be thankful for His gifts. Take action where you are, and be careful to guard your spirit against complaining. He knows your situation and exactly what you need.

As we rolled out to Ali Al Saleem, we saw Abrahms, Bradleys, Longbows, Paladins, and more. “Now, that’s fire power!” I thought. “I’d hate to be on the wrong side of those!” There is good reason for calling our country the world’s greatest Superpower.



It’s funny though. As much military might as we have, we can’t seem to get one man – Saddam Hussein – to change his mind. Diplomacy and deadly force might make him afraid to do the wrong thing, but no earthly power will make him *love* to do the *right* thing.

Do you have any personal ‘enemies’? You’re probably thinking of a few people right now, but have you thought that our selfish desires may be our greatest enemies? Consider the dangers of a stubborn heart that refuses to do something God’s way, a selfishness that will not bend in your marriage, a spirit of disrespect, anger, or pride that is hurting your relationships at work. Psalm 32:9 says “Don’t be like the horse or mule which have no understanding, but must be controlled by bit and bridle, or else they will not come near to you.” That is truly a painful existence - to be beaten daily until you give in. God offers freedom from that kind of life.

In Mark 5, we see what Jesus did when He met such a person - ‘Legion’ (because he had many demons) was so tormented that he screamed and cut himself day and night. No one could even get near him, but with just a word, Jesus called the demons out. The formerly tortured soul was now a new man – calm and in his right mind.

Abrahms will eventually rust; Apaches’ can malfunction; and Paladins may misfire, but the Lord never fails. Let’s pray for His work in our heart and in the hearts of those around us. His strength works miracles! When we daily submit our lives to Christ, He changes the very desires of our hearts. Now *that’s* power!



‘Be at the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing’ is standard advice that many leaders give soldiers. It may sound cliché, but it’s also full of wisdom. Last night, I watched a movie with another soldier and chose to forget that wisdom.

I hadn’t seen the movie in almost 20 years, but I remembered that it had been pretty funny. By God’s grace, my values had also changed a lot in those 20 years – what was acceptable to me then, I now knew was wrong. As the movie progressed, I suddenly remembered a brief nude scene that was about to show. I got up and walked away, but not before I had sat through a couple of seconds of it.

Temptation is that way. It often starts with something that seems innocent, even good, and quickly leads to disobedience, failure, and guilt. In 2 Samuel 11:1-2, we read that “at the time of year when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, his servants, and Israel’s fighting men. They destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah, but David stayed at Jerusalem. That evening, David arose from his bed, and walked on the roof of the king’s house. From the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.”

The good seasonal weather in Israel made the ground firm for marching troops, and their King should have been serving his people by leading them in battle against their enemies. Instead, David sought his own comfort. On top of that, he went somewhere that he knew he would likely be tempted – on a roof at night, where he might see over someone’s privacy walls. Be at the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing. It sounds simple, even childish, but – then again – we are only children compared to the God of infinite wisdom and power. Guard yourself - we have too much to lose for temporary pleasures.





Rumors abound with every deployment. This one was no exception - “Since we’re OPCON to 3<sup>rd</sup> ID, the combat patch we receive might be theirs.” I don’t think I had ever seen 3<sup>rd</sup> I.D.’s patch, but I didn’t want it. I’m proud of the 11<sup>th</sup> Aviation patch. It’s my unit!

We didn’t like falling under another’s command. ‘We have confidence in our soldiers and our leaders. Why do we need someone putting their hands in our business?’ It didn’t seem fair, and we didn’t like it. ‘Who knows how to command us better than our own leaders? Besides, we know them, and they know us.

Regardless of how we felt about it, in the Army’s infinite wisdom, we were no longer calling our own shots. And, as soldiers, we were to answer, ‘Yes sir!’ and move out. That’s what it means to be a soldier – you often have to take orders whether or not you understand or agree. There’s a greater cause at stake than our personal preferences, and (we hope) there’s a greater wisdom in charge.

The Apostle Paul describes Christians’ in the same way. “You therefore, my child, be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus. The things you heard me teach among many witnesses, commit the same to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. You must endure hardship, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets involved in civilian affairs, in order that he may please his commanding officer.” (2 Timothy 2:1-4)

As a soldier in the U.S. Army, duty can be very different from personal preference and understanding, but there is the greater cause of God’s glory through our trust and obedience. Also, as Christians, obedience to God and lawful orders is not optional. Jesus is the good and wise Boss – we must salute Him and move out! In the words of a familiar hymn, “Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

There are just a few MOSs for which I truly hurt – the infantry, who may face the enemy in hand-to-hand combat; cooks, who work incredibly long hours and rarely get thanked for what they do; supply clerks, who deal with “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!”, all day long; and any communications MOS in the field.



Tonight at our BUB, we went through the usual briefs - Troop Commanders, S1, S2, etc. Then it was the SIGO's turn to brief. “Sir, half of our HF is down. We still don't have TACSAT. That part for the SENS isn't here yet . . .” and he continued on and on with the bad news. Due to difficulties beyond his control, only one of the seven possible modes of communications was in the green. As you can imagine, the Commander was not happy.

Communications is extremely important, especially when you have talk to someone about basic needs. When it comes to needs, there is no one more capable or significant than God. Listen to the communication that is available in Christ.

In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus says, “When you pray, do not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most assuredly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your private room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. “When you pray, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, even before you ask him.”

Talk with Him. Listen to His Word, and His commands and promises will guide you through every relationship and decision. Then you can live your life with real clarity and confidence. Need wisdom or feedback? Go straight to the Source. His lines of communication are ‘green’ all the time.

If you’ve ever been part of a Task Force, or OPCON to another unit, you know that there can be wrinkles to iron out - differing SOPs & resistance to change, “red-headed step children” vs. perceived favorites, and so on. TF 2-6 had relatively little of that, and when there were issues, we generally worked them out quickly.

Today, as I made my daily rounds, I witnessed the beauty of what unity is all about. Some of our soldiers with carpentry skills were building showers for others; our depot wheeled maintenance crew was helping with unit level services; and we had a handful of DA civilians attached to us who were using their channels to order Apache parts because our systems were down.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to “Bear each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” When God first created man, He said, “Let US make man in OUR image” (Genesis 1:6). Part of living in God’s image is to live in unity in our relationships, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are unified – 3 persons in 1 God. When we help each other, listen to each other, share ideas with one another, and work together toward good, common goals, we are living part of God’s design. It’s not easy, however. Nor does it come naturally.

Sinners tend to “look out for #1”! That’s why the Apostle Paul’s command in verse 2 is preceded with, “Brothers, if a man is caught in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently; but be careful so that you aren’t tempted also.” It takes courage and work!

God is One in three Persons - Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, so teamwork glorifies Him by being a illustration of what it means to live in His image. It shouldn’t surprise us that working together also builds others up. Teamwork not only glorifies Him. It benefits us, too.

Because all of us have fallen away from Him, however, fully being like Him can only be realized through the forgiveness and changing power of Jesus Christ.

Let’s stay close to Him so we can serve in power of His Spirit.





Between my 8 years of National Guard time & 10 years of active duty, I've had the opportunity to work with Signal, Field Artillery, Air Defense, Transportation, and Aviation. I've observed that some units, because of their unique mission, have every soldier dig their own foxhole every time they go to

the field. Others do not.

Foxholes are not the norm for aviation exercises - it's unlikely that our ground troops would ever see a fire fight. So when our CSM called for a half dozen positions to our front, the senior NCOs inspected them thoroughly. The CSM reminded us that, because of the type of sand here, they would need to check them every few days for slow leaks in the bags, shifting foundations, and potential cave-ins.

Isn't life just like one big foxhole? In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell - and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:26-27)

We tend to look for something to make us feel safe – our reputation, a loving spouse, job ratings, etc, but all of these are like sinking sand. Reputations have slow leaks – it's just a matter of who sees the leak. Relationships shift under the weight of personal demands and circumstances. Cave-ins are inevitable.

Whose wisdom is perfect? Whose love never fails? Who can keep their word EVERY time? As good as many of our relationships are, none of them can always be there for us. None of them has infinite patience and strength. None except One, that is. Build your life on Jesus' firm foundation. Make Him your Rock. The rains and winds will still come, but we'll make it. He takes great pleasure in protecting those who build their lives on His foundation.



It's comforting to know that we have soldiers with loaded weapons guarding us 24 hours a day. Kuwaitis are watching the front gates; British soldiers patrol in their ATVs; and our guards are posted at key intersections. There have been a couple of drive-by shootings and terrorist acts in the city of Doha in the last

couple of weeks. All of them were miles from here, and coalition forces brought a quick and lethal response each time. Still, all of us like to know that we can lay our heads down in peace.

My mother tells me that, when I was a child, I had a security blanket. She says that I kept a corner of it in my mouth all the time and acted like I couldn't do without it. All of have our own security blankets – “I proved that I was right today. Now I can relax” or “I feel so much better since I made them laugh. I guess I am an okay person.” That's not security. That's a fearful clinging to “I hope I'm good enough.” Listen to Psalm 121:1-8.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. God Almighty is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. He will keep you from all evil. He will keep your soul. The Lord will guard your going out and coming in, from this time forth, and forevermore.”

At times, our area seems like Fort Knox. But at other times, our security was marred with human frailties: fatigue, divided attention - even apathy. Once or twice, I drove through the main gate and there was not a single guard to be found. Cling to the One Who is perfectly strong, loving, and wise to protect you. May He blanket you in His security. When you trust Him, you don't have to wonder *if* He remembers, *if* He wants to help you, or *if* He has a good plan. He does!

Few things are more uplifting than a love letter from family or friends. There are different types of love letters – it could be a nice smelling letter from your spouse, an “I’m so proud of you” card from one of your parents, a “just wanted to say ‘hi’” note from an old friend, or even some “Any soldier” mail from a grateful American back in the States. However you define it, love letters remind us that someone is thinking about us, that we’re special, and that the work we’re doing matters.



The entire Bible is a series of love letters. John writes, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

The Apostle was writing to a group of Christians almost 30 years after Jesus had gone back into heaven. The Romans were persecuting them for not confessing Caesar as a god; a group of heretics (who used to be members of the church) were teaching that Jesus never really came in the flesh; and the believers needed a reminder that God hadn’t forgotten about them. So John writes about the eternal life that God has already begun in them and encourages them to remain steadfast.

If you are in love with Jesus, then God cherishes you as His child. Even now, He is working through you to accomplish things that will have *eternal* significance. I know that it hurts to be away from loved ones, but take comfort in the Savior’s love. He understands your pain. Remember that He, too, was separated from His Father because of our sins, which He willingly took on Himself.

Get into His Word and discover His love for you. Spend your free time with other believers whenever possible. Fill your mind and heart with His commands & promises. Your spiritual growth will bring Him glory, and He will not give up on you and your work for Him.

There was a hilarious TV commercial a few years ago in which paramedics burst through the doors of a hospital with a man wearing a business suit, lying on a stretcher. They raced him down the hall into the ER, got him up on the table, and frantically looked for the problem. Suddenly, everything stopped. In little more than a whisper, one of the doctors gasped, “This guy’s got money coming out the wazoo!”

That’s the level of religion in much of Kuwait. It’s Ramadan now, the Islamic holiday in which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset for one lunar month. It’s such a pervasive part of the culture here, that our leaders (for public relations) have directed our females to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts so as not to offend the locals.

Religious practices like this may seem extreme to many of us, especially when we’ve witnessed some unethical Muslims – men sitting in the desert drinking alcohol around a campfire; husbands who claim to cherish their wives, but have them do most of the manual labor; Kuwaiti guards who like power plays when we need to get through the gate, and so on.



But hypocrisy is not an exclusively Muslim problem – it’s a human problem. There are a lot of ‘christians’ with religion coming out the wazoo, but lack Christ in their soul. Only Jesus can change a heart. There’s a big difference between living religious rules and having a relationship with God, and generally it’s not hard to see the difference.

Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will tell Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your Name, in Your Name cast out demons, and in Your Name do many mighty works?’ But I will say, ‘Depart from me. I never knew you.’” (Matthew 7:21-23) Stop trying to do things to *earn* His love and accept what *He* has done to pay for your forgiveness.



At times, I’ve been so lonely here – it’s almost unbearable. God created us to be in pure relationships with Him and each other, so it’s not natural to be cut off from people who love Him. We need the encouragement, the accountability, and the common Spirit that only other Christians can provide.

I have always made it a priority to seek out fellow believers when I am going to be away from my wife for a long time. It’s vital! “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, that ran down on the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that came down on the edge of his robes; like the dew of Hermon, that comes down on the hills of Zion. For there, Lord gives the blessing - even life forevermore.” (Psalm 133:1-3)

Chad Ward is a Christian brother here who recently returned from UTP and is attached to us from Regiment. I had gotten to know him for a few months before he left. Humility, patience, kindness, and servant hood are his defining characteristics. He is a real joy to be around. Last night, I caught a ride with him



and another soldier into the middle of the desert. They were assisting with a simulated battle handover in a squadron STX. I didn’t know the other soldier very well, and we didn’t want to appear to push “religious conversation” on him, so Chad and I talked quietly and in generalities about the beauty of God’s creation, His promises, friends back home, and things we were learning about ourselves on the deployment.

It was the best 5 hours I’ve had since I’ve been here. Find a brother or sister. Only a fellow Christian will look out for your spiritual welfare. Only another believer will encourage godliness and confront sin in your life so that you will grow in Christ. Only someone who is truly born again will rejoice with your victories over sin and weep when you fail. We all truly need the fellowship!

Psalm 46:10 says “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” That’s not so much a comfort as a command. In other words, ‘Quit running around like a chicken with your head cut off, and listen to Me!’ Busyness is not necessarily the same thing as godliness. The latter must come first. Especially if we know that the former is right around the corner.

There are a lot of things that I don’t like about being deployed. I miss my family; my back aches most mornings when I roll out of the cot; and I can’t keep myself as clean as I would like to. I could go on but, I’ve already crossed the line of complaining. There is at least one blessing, however, that God seems to give me on deployments – quiet.

In my opinion, we Americans are generally so busy “entertaining ourselves to death” (to borrow a phrase from a good book), that we don’t take time to sit still and think about what’s important – things that will be lasting, true and valuable - with or without popular approval.

Last night, I stood outside my tent. The only sounds were the generators and the whisper of a gentle, desert wind. The sky was amazingly clear - even with my bad eyes, I could see everything. I thought about what God said in Genesis – that man was His greatest creation.



I tried to imagine that, as beautiful and bright as those stars were, you and I are even more precious to the Creator. Then I dropped my gaze to the lifeless, desert floor – what a contrast. Scripture also tells us that the all of creation has been affected by sin and groans for His return. It’s so easy to miss the simple but important pictures that God daily paints around us. Turn off the video game tonight. Put down the novel for a while. Play dominoes some other time. Do you really need to watch that movie? How long has it been since you’ve really read His Word and talked to Him about it? Take some time to meditate on a passage of Scripture. Let us get to know the One Who is perfect in every way. He will guide us in the things of everlasting significance.

All of us long for someone who understands, appreciates, and accepts us. It's our nature to look for those relationships, because God made us to be like Him - in relationship. Although my family and most of our Christian friends are a continent or two away, I have not given up the search. As a Chaplain, I am here to help others so they can concentrate of their mission. But as a Christian, I need friends to share a laugh or tear – fellow believers with whom I can enjoy God's Spirit.

At lunch today, I was sharing a story with another Christian about the strange joy of fellowship in Christ. About 8 years ago, I had been deployed to Haiti for Operation Uphold Democracy. I was an E4, helping with a "Cash for Weapons" program to disarm the locals. Just outside the concertina wire, in the back of the crowd, was a thin Haitian girl holding a thick leather-bound book. In my broken, high school French, I asked her, "Is that a Bible? Are you a Christian?" She nodded and smiled broadly to both questions. I then told her that - all of the obvious visible differences aside - she and I had more in common than I had with many of the soldiers I see every day.

In Matthew 12:49-50, "(Jesus) stretched out His hand towards his disciples, and said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

One of the things I like most about the military is meeting Christians of different colors, cultures, accents, and personalities. It truly reminds me that we are joined by His salvation and Spirit, not simply by similar backgrounds. Praise God!

Wherever you are, there are probably Christian 'family members' around you. Seek them out; encourage each other; hold each other accountable; love one another. It's God's good will for your growth & joy.



Yesterday, I let time get away from me, and before I knew it, it was 1430 and I had forgotten to eat lunch. I was getting pretty hungry, so I went to the D-Fac and made myself a P.B.J. The rush of sugar felt pretty nice, so I chased it with an ice cream from the MWR tent. Life was good. About two hours later, I got in line for



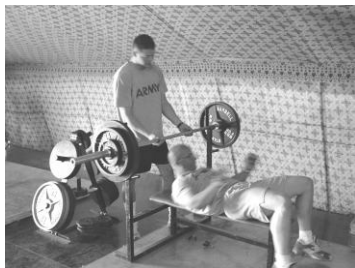
chow. I've been trying to eat earlier, so my food has more time to digest and not gel around my waist, but that was a joke tonight! We were having Gyros, with Tseziki sauce and all! They were great, but I had one too many. Well, maybe I had three too many.

Today, I got up to go running. I hadn't slept too well the night before (I wonder why?), so I stretched until I realized I wasn't going to magically feel better. I got a little over two miles and "BAM!". My stomach ran right into that proverbial "wall". I fussed at myself the whole time I walked back to the tent.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race set before us." The image is a typical Roman, whose daily garb was a long robe. In a race, athletes would throw it off so as not to trip.

There's nothing sinful about P.B.J.s, ice cream, or Gyros, unless it hinders your ability to serve or your craving begins to rule your spirit. Trying to substitute sweets for a skipping lunch hindered my sleep, my P.T., and my concentration for most of the next day. If we're not careful, even the simplest desire to have lunch at exactly 1130 can rule our hearts when we're confronted with an opportunity to serve a soldier who needs us at exactly 1130. You get the picture.

Is anything hindering your peak service? Throw it off! Sacrifice is part of serving God in a world where personal satisfaction competes for pleasing our Savior. It will involve some pain, but don't all things that are worthwhile and lasting? Run God's race with no distractions!



Next May, I hit the big “40”, and I am determined to maintain my physical fitness as much as possible. This deployment has been a great opportunity for me to get back into shape. I had two back surgeries earlier this year and the three months of recovery that you’d expect to go with it. I did manage to keep up my running, however – back and forth to Burger King, Taco Bell, and the Doner stand in by the German train station! I could have dealt with that when I was 21. I can’t keep that pace anymore.

Physical conditioning is important, and I take it seriously. I sleep better when I’m in shape; I have more energy; I’m better able to focus on my family and work; my wife appreciates my conditioning; I can keep up with my older boys when I play sports with them; and I feel better about myself – all good reasons to keep working out.

But 1 Timothy 4:7-8 says, “. . . train yourselves to be **godly**. For physical training is for *some* value, but godliness has value for *all* things – holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (emphasis mine) That means when we are forced to decide between our physique and our godliness, our priority should be godliness. Our schedules should daily reflect the wiser decision in everything.

What is more important - having a body that can run 2 miles in 13 minutes or having a spirit will not give up on another soldier? What will benefit your family more – having arms that can throw your children up in the air, or a heart that refuses to scream at them when they scream at you? What impresses your God more – 8% body fat or 100% of your soul devoted to doing the right thing?

The answers are pretty clear. Most of us need to be in better physical shape, but even that is defined by a test. This is how I test myself – how are my relationships? How is my character when no one is looking? When the pressure is on and the ‘real me’ shows up, what do I look like? If my answers concern me, maybe my workout isn’t what it should be. How do you measure up? Jesus can help!

I don't know anyone who really enjoys NBC training (except maybe 54Bs) - the desert is hot enough already! So when our Commander announced that we were doing 4 training, we threw him a party! Not! Just the thought of putting on more clothes and throwing on a rubber mask and hood for who knows how long was already making me sweat. We tried to make the best of it, though, because we knew that it's for our protection.



MOPP training is essential for a conflict that could involve NBC. You have to put on protective gear and put off any contaminants as quickly as possible. A good Commander is not concerned primarily with what makes you happy. He wants you to live!

The same is true for Christians and our spiritual Commander. Ephesians 4:22-24 commands ***“put off*** the old man and your former way of life, that is being corrupted. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and ***put on*** the new man who has been created in God's image of righteousness, holiness, and truth.”

It's not enough to do one or the other. Can you imagine putting on the mask, but not using your M291? Can you simply put away the doughnuts, but not put on the weights to work out? How fit would you be? When you want to build your relationship with your family, you can't just turn off your 2 hours of TV a night, you have to get off the couch and put on your shoes to play basketball with them. Sacrifice and action are essential combination to any plan's success.

None of us are perfect. What do you need to sacrifice in order to grow in holiness? What new habits do you need to adopt to have integrity as a mechanic, NCO, leader, spouse, or parent? Our Lord wants us to excel, not just exist. Let's begin now. Let's not wait for spiritual contaminants to kill our opportunity for success and joy. Today is literally the first day of the rest of your life!

I’m in my fourth week of getting back in shape. As I mentioned earlier, I had two back surgeries earlier this year, and everyone keeps telling me that I need to take it slowly. But like many soldiers, I like to push myself - just a little.

Monday, I ran a hard 4 miles and still felt pretty good, so I finished up with some very light squats. On Tuesday, my legs still felt okay, so I jogged a slow 7 ½ miles with my assistant and finished up with about 100 sit-ups. Wednesday, I did a 4-mile road march with flak vest, Kevlar, and a 40 lb rucksack. The next day, my hip-flexors hurt so much that I could hardly swing my legs out of bed! Today, whenever I lift my legs to climb steps, I wince in pain. If I have to jog a little to get out of a HMMWV’s way, it stings. I’ve set my training back 2 or 3 days just because I overloaded 2 tiny little muscles.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul refers to believers as the Body of Christ.

Some of us are eyes; some are ears; and (if I can continue the analogy) some are like hip-flexors. They seem small and unimportant compared with other parts of the Body, but we have to work together. God made us with intention to depend on each other.

Think of the believers you know. Some are quiet; some are young in the faith; some have subtle, spiritual gifts, so they are in the background a lot; but they’re all essential to God’s plan of glorifying Himself through godly unity. Let’s not kid each other either. All of us have needs that require others’ help. Do you realize that human beings - God’s greatest creation - spend over 1/3 of their lives depending on others? Lions, birds, even roaches are independent shortly after birth, but people need each other. That’s His intentional design! When even a small part of your body hurts, it affects everything.

Watch for our hurting brothers and sisters. They are part of Christ’s Body. God has equipped and called us to help each other. Our unity, joy, and witness to the world depends it.



As a V Corps asset, our unit regularly receives General Officers, Sergeants Major, and other VIPs. Too often, a VIP visit can go hand-in-hand with a “dog and pony show”. Bays can be scrubbed down to look as if they had never seen a drop of P.O.L., and soldiers with a little downtime (heaven forbid!) may be given insignificant tasks so it appears that they work 24/7.

Today, we had a one-star and his CSM visit from Heidelberg, & the whole time they were here, something wonderful happened – nothing! There were no parades and no work generated to make folks look busy. No one panicked. We didn’t have to make any last minute changes, because our soldiers were already doing the right thing.



That’s the way it should be when Jesus returns – no last minute rushing around to look busy, no sweeping our dirt under the rug in hopes that He won’t find it. We should always be ready for Him. "The coming of the Son of Man will be as the days of Noah. They were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they didn't know until the flood came and took them all away. So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left; two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one will be left. Watch therefore, for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.” (Matthew 24:37-43)

Keep your hands to the grind, your feet on the ground, and your eyes to the sky. The Lord is returning, and He’s coming for the faithful. Let Him find us ‘gainfully employed’!



Today was officially a down day, and I wanted to enjoy every minute of it. There were hamburgers and hot dogs for lunch, steak for dinner, games of volleyball, horseshoes, & hackey-sack, and movies all day. Everyone did whatever he wanted. I practiced my guitar, went running, took a lot of pictures of the soldiers having fun, and (of course) did some writing. Most played as hard as they'd been working. Some just slept all day.



Just one thing bothered me. Most of the movies I saw had so much profanity, violence, or sexual innuendos that I had to leave. I don't try to impose my values or beliefs on soldiers who aren't interested - even Jesus never forced Himself on anyone. When it comes to sitting in on sin, however, Christians should only do the things that our Lord would have done or would want us to do.

I bring it up to illustrate a point – every human being does what he or she *wants* to do. Problems with anger, jealousy, depression, etc. during hard times are not *caused* by the Army or deployments. They are usually graves that we had already dug for ourselves because of our previous selfishness. In most cases, marital problems that come up in the field were there long before we deployed.

If you read the books of Judges, you'll see humanity at its worst. The prophet (Samuel) makes the point twice: “In those days, Israel had no king, and each man did whatever was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6 & 21:25) Psalms 14 and 53, too, are virtually identical. “God looks down to see if there are any who understood, who seek after God. Every one of them has gone back. They have become filthy together. There is no one who does good, no, not one.”

My leisure time reveals a lot about me. It's my guess that the same is true of you. Shouldn't our fun time be 'good' in both senses of the word? It could be time for a spiritual checkup, or even heart surgery. If you don't already know, the great Physician specializes in transplants – your sin for His Spirit! Not a bad deal, huh?

There’s nothing quite like having an extra large “shnoz” in the medium nose cup of an M40 protective mask for over an hour - except maybe having it there for 4 hours. NBC training remains a priority for our troops (as it should be), but it’s not getting any more enjoyable. It’s like insurance – nobody wants it, until they need it!

Human nature is amazing. I remember grown adults in basic training who ripped off their pro masks because they didn’t want that restrictive rubber thing on their faces anymore – even though they also knew that CS was waiting right there in the chamber. As sinners, we know what is good for us, but often reject what is right and do what is comfortable, regardless of the danger that awaits us. It’s early in the deployment now, when soldiers are still nervous about force protection issues, yet I’ve seen some take off their helmets in potentially dangerous situations or put the muzzle of their weapon in the floorboard when civilian vehicles pass us for a perfect drive-by!

Have you ever known someone with a stabbing toothache, but refused to see a dentist? Do you have any friends who will not take time to balance their checkbook, even though they’ve paid a dozen fees for bounced checks? They live for the moment. God may call us to do some things that feel restricting, but He does it knowing the danger that awaits us if we tear away His protective commands. In Galatians 5:22, “self-control” is listed last. It may be because it’s the hardest quality to attain, but it may also be highlighted as most essential for warfare.

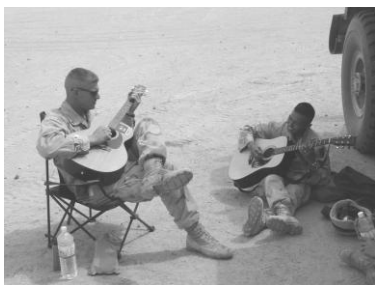
Our growth and joy in Christ will be severely hampered unless we exercise self-control daily. Look at the word – it’s *self* control. As long as we live in this flesh we will be tempted to do things that please our desires. That’s one of the key reasons that we put our faith in ***Christ***. We trust and obey Him, because we know that He is wiser, kinder, and stronger than we are. Thank God for Jesus, our deliverer! (Romans 7:14-25)



When I found out that I was going to Kuwait, I promised myself that if I practiced my guitar for 6 months, I would buy myself a nice one to play in chapel. It adds so much to the services – energy, excitement, and variety. So far, I’ve kept up the practice, and I’m very much enjoying the time. I’m not so sure that those who can hear my picking and plunking enjoy it quite as much.

Seriously though, music is a big part of Christian worship. The Scriptures are full of psalms and songs that believers offered to God - melodies of thanks for deliverance, songs of praise for His faithfulness, even somber hymns to communicate times of sadness and struggle.

Someone once described music as expressions of the soul, too deep for words. That’s a good definition. Chords on a piano or guitar can convey subtle tensions that want to be resolved. Combinations of brass and strings illustrate strength and gentleness working together. The beauty of a duet is musical proof that two are better than one. Listen to the words of Psalm 150.



“Praise the Lord! Praise Him in his sanctuary! Praise Him in his heavens for his acts of power! Praise him for his mighty acts! Praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet! Praise him with harp and lyre! Praise him with tambourine and dancing! Praise him with stringed instruments and flute! Praise him with loud cymbals! Praise him with resounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”

Notice the variety of instruments that are used to praise Him. Like musical instruments, your service for the King may be subtle, strong, complicated, or simple. Some are background pieces, and some are upfront players. Some take much practice and talent, and some are simpler and come more quickly. Just do your best with whatever He’s given you. Everything done for His praise is music to His ears.



I'm tired of hearing it. I'm a grown man. I don't need someone to tell me to 'Drink water!' Yeah, right. Earlier this week, I found myself a little dehydrated, and I felt pretty stupid. As I mentioned, I've been trying to get into shape. What I failed

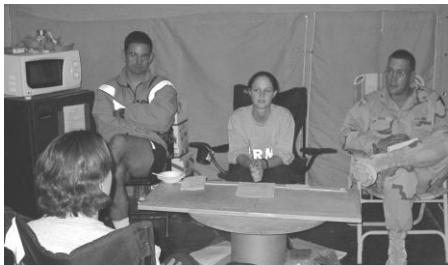
to mention is that my progress for the last two weeks has been almost non-existent. In fact, my run is actually slower, and I'm weaker in the weight room – until yesterday, that is!

This week, the temperature got up a little again. It had been very comfortable in the mid 80s everyday, but then it climbed back to the high 90s. So, two days ago I drank three big bottles of cold water. I wasn't aware that I needed it - I was just a little warmer than I wanted to be. Then yesterday, I noticed that I had a lot more energy. I was more alert during the day, and I slept better that night. Today, I went for a run, and “wow!” – I felt as if I could have run forever! What made the difference? Water.

Water helps your blood carry nutrients and oxygen to the muscles for energy. It's necessary for your electrolytes and brain synapses to function properly. It also assists the acids in your stomach to break down your food for digestion. In short, the reason your body is made up mostly of water is because you need water to survive!

It's no wonder that Jesus referred to Himself as “Living Water” (John 4:10-38). When His Spirit flows through us, He clarifies our thoughts, strengthens our wills, and enables us to grow. Let this be your prayer today. “Jesus, I need You to be my very life everyday. Wash my heart and fill me with Your Spirit. Keep me close to You, so I can be strong to do Your good will. Amen!”

We talked for almost 30 minutes, and I knew where he was coming from. This soldier knew how to do his job, and he did it well. But he was tired of putting in his time and talents and seeing no real change. When he did something wrong, he received a quick correction, but when he did something well there was usually no feedback. He felt like an E4 working hard to get promoted, but the points were always 798.



At times, we all struggle to stay motivated. Some of us hate doing PT alone, while others find it challenging to work the night shift. When we put in our best efforts and nothing seems to happen, it's easy to become depressed. The issue for most is, “am I getting anything out of this?” Motivation is important, but motivation by external circumstances is like wet tissue paper - it won't hold up under pressure.

A Christian's basic motivation cannot be personal gratification. God cares for us, and He delights to bless the obedient. But are you ready for a news flash? We aren't smart enough, good enough, or important enough for the world to revolve around us! God's Word says the greatest gift He can give us is ***His*** glory. When we have a front row seat to His power, mercy, and wisdom, we're witnessing the best show in town – our God in action! And when His bigger plan does not include our immediate comfort, He gives us the ability to stand, like a deer in the crags of a mountain.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 says “Although there are figs on the tree, or grapes on the vines; though the olive crops fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places. (for the music director, on my stringed instruments)” You don't have to ‘suck it up’. He wants to hear from you, but in the end, we must trust Him and drive on.

LTC Thompson surprised me while I was working at my desk today - “You’ve got an appointment with your wife, tomorrow at 11:30.” I couldn’t believe my ears! Was I going home early for some reason? Was she coming here? Then reason kicked in. “How do you mean, sir?” It turned out that he was testing a new DSN line that would bypass the operator and connect soldiers directly with their families in Germany. After the initial elation and disappointment, I was excited at the prospect of talking to Lauren again.



Proverbs 5:18 says “Let your spring be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.” Although we’ve only been married for 7 years, I’ve been crazy about her since we were in college. The more I learn about her, the more attracted I am to her. She is truly my best friend, lover, and soul mate.

Being here in the desert, away from her and our four children, I have grown to appreciate her more each day. The things I often take for granted at home – her compassion for others, her commitment to her family, her deep desire to please God – are completely missing in the lives of many non-believers. When I hear some people describe their ideal mate, it sounds like they’re looking for a free prostitute rather than an equal partner. Be careful to whom you give your heart.

Proverbs 6:26-28 says “For a prostitute reduces you to a piece of bread. The adulteress hunts for your precious life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?” Guard your heart against those who simply want to use you to please themselves. Some want your body, and some want to build their reputation by being seen with you. That kind of person will take a piece of your soul. Entrust yourself to the One Who has everything to give, but doesn’t *need* anything from you to feel good about Himself. Then you will *know* that you’re loved.

At our Command and Staff meetings, my briefs usually take one of two forms. One is a “spotlight on a soldier”. During the day, I look for an act of outstanding leadership or service and relay it in the meeting. Then the word gets back to the soldier that their actions were noted in front of all the leadership.



It's a great motivator for everyone involved.

The second is relaying soldiers concerns so that the leadership can address any problems that might hinder the mission. It may be a conflict with a supervisor, a marital problem, a fear, religious questions, doubts about going the war – you name it. Both briefings are forms of ministry meet soldiers' basic needs: all of us want to be noticed for our good work. We'd also like someone to help us when we're hurting.

Unfortunately, many good works are done when soldiers are alone on a helicopter pad or behind closed doors in a work van. Most of their hurts are kept inside, never to reach the ear of a leader. But God sees every good work and knows every need. 1 Peter 3:12 says “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers.”

If you belong to Jesus Christ, know God is watching you and He sees everything that you do for His glory. Remember His words: “If you even offer a cup of cold water because you are one of My disciples, I tell you the truth – you will not lose your reward in heaven.” (Matthew 10:42)

The next time you're working alone and give it your best, go ahead and claim His promise. Smile at Him because you know that He's smiling on you. Take your burdens to Him, too. He will comfort, direct, and strengthen you so that you can shine for Him. Remember, He has a vested interest in you as a soldier in His spotlight!

Can you believe that Chaplains sin, too? If not, allow me to fill you in on an ugly truth. When I was single, it was easy to pretend that my life belonged to me and to me alone. When I got married, however, it quickly became clear to me that this self-centered man had responsibilities to other people.

My wife, Lauren, is a wonderful woman – she encourages me and supports me; she is so creative and committed to our children; and she is extremely involved with our community in Germany. One of the things that attracted me to her the most was her ability to look me in the eye and compassionately tell me that I need to rethink what I’m doing - especially what I say and how I say it.

I’ve been convicted lately (as she has often & gently tried to tell me) that I tend to be critical rather than encouraging. I am better at faultfinding than suggesting answers. Colossians 4:6 says “Let your speech always be filled with grace and seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer everyone.” Grace is God’s undeserved kindness. Salt brings healing and flavor. That means what we say and how we say it should point to the kindness and flavor that following Jesus Christ can bring to our lives. As His children, our speech should be kind and add flavor to others’ wounded and bland spirits.

About three times a week, I have briefed our Commanders and Staff on ethical problems – some big and some small. But, God’s Spirit has impressed me that I have not been bringing as many answers. There are also great things happening in the Task Force, and I need to

focus on those more often and let the positive examples remind leaders of what the soldiers should continue doing. For the next few weeks, my thought for myself will be “WWJS” – what would Jesus *say* to bring light into the darkness of this life? Pray for me!





## *“Care Packages”*

**21 Nov**



Few things boost morale like a package from home. A gift, some cookies, even a copy of the local newspaper communicates that someone cares about us. Those little gifts and letters strengthen us. They often motivate us to keep going because someone is waiting for us at home.

Sometimes, even Christians find it hard to stay motivated. Time away from our families and home churches can lead to depression, complacency, and even temptations to walk away from God’s will. More than once, I’ve wished for some “care package” from heaven – some sign that God cares about me and hasn’t forgotten about me.

But if you’re a follower of Christ, He’s already given you such a gift. Listen to the Apostle’s words in 2 Peter 1:3-4. “His divine power has given us every thing we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them, you may become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Look at that Scripture again, but beginning at the end - He has promised to change us to become like Him – simply because He is glorious and good. And how will He do it? By **His** divine power! Our only part is to maintain our ‘knowledge’ or relationship with Him.

Think about what makes you feel sad, angry, or tempted to stray from God’s will. Doesn’t it begin when we stop working on our relationship with Him and start thinking that the world revolves around us? Joy comes when believers focus on the fact that they are a child of the King, Who is molding them to into His glorious and good image.

Positive verbal feedback and boxes from home are not guaranteed. God’s promises and love are. He even uses hardship to keep one of His promises - to mold you into the image of His good character. After all, everyone knows that it takes pressure to make a diamond. He does care for you, even though it hurts sometimes.



Several times this past week, I heard “Ground Hog Day is showing in the MWR tent tonight”, but whenever I went, there was always something else playing. I finally caught on to the joke: everyday here is just like the last one. (Yeah, I’m a little slow sometimes.)

Our soldiers get up and have the exact same breakfast: yellow eggs (as opposed to the T-Rat kind), bacon, some type of sweet roll, etc. They go to work on the same projects, under the same cloudless sky, on the same scorched

earth, and come back to the same soldiers in the same dusty Bedouin tents every single day. It sounds exactly like an Old Testament book.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Preacher; "Everything is meaningless! What does man gain from all his labor under the sun? One generation goes, and another generation comes; but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and goes down, and hurries to its place where it rises . . . That which has been will be again; and that which has been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:2-5, 9)

At first glance, this book by King Solomon sounds pessimistic, but he is actually teaching us to re-examine our perspective by repeating a single, subtle phrase “under the sun” throughout the book. It’s important to understand that the Hebrews described the heavens in three tiers: the first where the birds fly, the second where the sun and stars were, and the third where God lives – above the sun. In their eyes, the world was “under the sun”, and God was above it.

If there was no God working a greater plan, then our labor here would be truly meaningless. But there *is* a God, and He *is* working a greater plan. He is orchestrating His glory through your growth.

Live each day as an opportunity to grow in His image. If you are following Jesus Christ, you will find that He is making your very soul into a masterpiece of meaning & value! Take joy in His higher plan.

Currently, we are ‘the only show in town’ and subject to every VIP in the area. That has its advantages and disadvantages, depending on whom you ask. General Shinseki, the Chief of Staff of the Army, came to visit us today. Days before he arrived, we were told that the General’s visit would be extremely short and tightly scheduled. Only Command and Staff would be allowed to attend the briefing, and his stop at the hanger would be for selected personnel. Needless to say, a lot of soldiers were disappointed. Some were just plain angry.

In the first chapter of Leviticus, we find that God has a different approach to ‘VIP visits’. In God’s detailed instructions to Moses and the Israelites, the burnt offering was to symbolize the giver’s complete dedication to God. The process is outlined three times by Moses – each one exactly like the other. The only significant difference was the animal being offered. A perfect, male bull was preferred, but if you could not afford that, you could offer a perfect, male sheep. If you could not afford a sheep, you could offer a bird.

What’s the point? God wants a relationship with the wealthiest General and the poorest Private. No one is so high that God excludes him from their obedience. And no one is so low that God is not interested in him. He has provided instant access to His power and love through His Son’s sacrifice, foreshadowed in the offering.

I was pleasantly surprised when General Shinseki voluntarily stretched the length of his stay, talked to five times as large a group as originally scheduled, and took time to have individual pictures with different groups of soldiers as he gave each one a coin. What a beautiful picture of God’s love for each one who comes to Him – regardless of rank.

If you think God’s love is just for the good people, think again. He didn’t come to love the good people. He came to make us good so that we would learn to love Him and others.



I’m looking forward to tomorrow. It’s the first organized PT event since we’ve been in country. We’re kicking off Thanksgiving with one of two run choices (although choosing one of them is mandatory.) I’m torn between the 5K and the 10K. The 5K will be a slower, formation run, but I can be there to help motivate soldiers who haven’t had opportunity to do much P.T. The 10K will be self-paced and I could test my physical & mental endurance.



Life is full of choices, competing priorities, and mixed motives. When it’s as simple as deciding between strawberry or Rocky Road ice cream – the difference between nice & nicer - it’s not a big deal. Even when the choice is good versus evil, at least the right decision is clear. It’s when we have mixed motives that our hearts have difficulty making the right decision.

Will I do what I believe a Chaplain should do and cheer on fellow soldiers, or will I do what appeals to my pride and go for the 10K glory? My spiritual trophy is to please my Lord by becoming more like Him. And what child would not like to grow up to be like his Dad, when His Father is perfectly wise, patient, loving, and committed?

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, the Apostle Paul says “Every man who competes in athletic games exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a crown that will rust one day, but we (serve God) to receive a reward that will last forever.” There’s a good reason that Paul uses the image of an athlete to illustrate that spiritual marathon called ‘life’. It takes daily (and sometimes difficult) self-control to resist selfish desires – the kind of self-control that comes only from His Spirit. If your ‘want’ is over-powering your ‘should’ - go to God. He rewards us with wisdom, love, and strength that equip us for every one of life’s races!



It's Thanksgiving morning, and once again, the Army is doing their best to motivate soldiers. Weights, ping-pong, TV, and a surround sound stereo fill our MWR tent. We have ice cream everyday. Our mess tent is decorated with nice cutouts of autumn leaves. Each table has “any soldier”

cards from school children back in the States. We were even given a live turkey for the day (although we were warned not to kill and eat it). Still, most of us would rather be at home, in the middle of a cluttered house, eating bologna sandwiches with our loved ones.

When I was growing up in South Carolina, my father would always begin Thanksgiving dinner by telling us what he was thankful for. He usually had a whole laundry list of things, but he always named Jesus and family as God's greatest gift to him. Then it was our turn. Mom had an equally full list, but my brothers and I struggled each year to squeak out one or two things.

It's human nature to be thankful for the things that make us happy, and my brothers and I were pretty miserable and selfish at the time. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, a Christian can actually be thankful in all circumstances, knowing that his Heavenly Father is at work for his good. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you.”

In one of the prayer meetings I hosted this week, a soldier actually gave thanks in the midst of feeling sick all day. He wasn't glad for the illness, but he said that it gave him perspective on the blessing of health that he normally took for granted. That's a good perspective. Our Lord is ruling over the ‘circumstances’ in our lives to shape us and bless us when we're faithful. Thank Him, even when you do not understand it all. He always has a good plan for His children.

Most American families practice some tradition at Thanksgiving, and the Army family is no exception. Wherever I’ve been stationed, at turkey time the officers and senior NCOs dress up in their Blues (or cleanest DCUs in this case) and serve the other soldiers. We kept up the tradition, even in the desert.



We had two CSMs, a full bird Colonel, a two-star and a three-star General dishing out our turkey and stuffing. Talk about classy service!

What was so special about getting a scoop of dressing from these men? They were V.I.P.s living the heart of love – service. In Philippians 2:5-9, Paul says that “Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus’, Who although He was God, He did not consider equality with God something to hold on to. Instead, He emptied himself (of His right to rule from heaven) by taking on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. Therefore God exalted him, and gave Him the name which is above every name.” (parenthetical explanation mine) God, the Father, honored His Son’s act of humility because Jesus was living out the heart of love.

What do we want from our spouses, our children, our co-workers and every other relationship? Don’t we want them to meet our needs for affection, respect, assistance, etc.? We might not call it ‘love’ or ‘service’, but that’s what it is.

Now – what do you think they want from us? - Basically, the same things. The most incredible part of Jesus’ life is that He did not demand what He deserved. Instead, God took on the form of a servant. Do you want to please the Lord? Serve Him. Bless His children. Love your enemies. Be thankful for where you are and know that it is part of His larger plan to mold your faith and character.



Today, I watched some of our pilots play volleyball during some down time. Some of them were excellent servers; some were great setters; others' forte was spiking the ball; and 1 or 2 were good at everything. Others cheered them on from the sidelines. Yet, it took all of them to

have a great game. That is a good picture of God's plan for the Church.

1 Corinthians 12:6-11 says "There are many kinds of gifts, but the same God works each of them in us. To each believer the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one, wisdom is given through the Spirit, and to another a word of knowledge by the same Spirit. To another faith is given by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit. To another He gives workings of miracles, and to another prophecy. To another He gives discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of languages, and to another the interpretation of languages. But the One and the same Spirit works all of these, distributing to each one separately exactly as He desires."

In His perfect wisdom, goodness, and power, God has gifted each Christian with the ability to serve others so that we can live the image of His Son, Who humbled Himself to serve us. He also made our gifts different so that we need to seek each other out to work together.

There's a reason that the Apostle Paul refers to the Church as the Body of Christ. Through His spiritual gifts and the work of His Spirit, Christians continue Jesus' work of glorifying God on earth. When we work together, serve each other and reach out to the hurting, the world sees Jesus working through us. Love is truly a "team sport".

I accompanied some soldiers on a mission a few weeks ago in the back of a 5-ton vehicle. Before I knew it, I was a captive audience to some pretty explicit and horrific conversation. I wasn't quite sure what to say, if anything. A Chaplain often walks that fine line of living his faith (which I must do) and giving the appearance to being a conscience to someone who hasn't professed interest in Jesus (which I can't do).

Aside from the typical stories about their sexual victories, there was a lot of complaining about the dust, the bumpy ride, the separation from family, etc., etc. Finally, one soldier asked me how I keep from going crazy. “My relationship with God”, I answered. “He never wavers.” You could have heard a pin drop. I guess they didn't know what to say.

As I trust and obey Jesus daily, He proves that He is what life is all about – but it's like tasting food, you have to try it before you really know. In 1 Peter 4:3-4, the Apostle gives another reason that we should cling to Jesus. We've tried the self-centered life, and it is far from satisfying. “For you have spent enough time doing what the Gentiles do - walking in lusts, drunkenness, orgies, wild parties, and idolatries. (But) they think it is strange that you don't run with them into the same flood of dissipation.” That's a great way to put it.

To dissipate means to break up, until there is nothing left. Running into a flood of dissipation is like eating a giant box of cotton candy. It would look and smell great, but you would quickly find out that it's really a whole lot of nothing. It would also make you sick!

That's what life is like without Jesus. It's the difference between a cotton candy stomachache and the strength you get from a good meal the night before a marathon. Read Isaiah 55:1-9, Jeremiah 2:9-13, or Psalm 34:8 - “Taste and see that the Lord is good!” Let's eat!





It takes a lot of creativity to love someone when you're a whole continent away. It takes even more initiative. I have four children: two middle-school boys and two toddlers. All of them need my time, energy, and patience. One of the things I've been praying while I've been in country is that I would become a better father to them – especially to my older boys. Then it hit me – I'm waiting for God to do a miracle, while He commands me to be a good father right now.

Matthew 21:28-31 is a good example of the difference between good feelings (which most of us associate with love) and action, which is the proof of love. Jesus said, “What do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work in my vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went. He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will go, sir,' but he didn't. Which of the two did the will of his father?”

The answer, of course, is that the first son did his father's will. Action speaks louder than words. It speaks louder than feelings, too. In the last few weeks, I've written my boys four individual letters – just to them. I spend part of my allotted 15-minute phone calls talking to them. I've mailed them each a rock (for some reason, they like unique rocks), and I'm about to go Christmas shopping for them. I may be depressed that I can't hug them from Kuwait, and I may get frustrated when they don't obey me at the drop of a hat, but that doesn't mean I can't take action to love them right now, right here.

Who is on your mind? God has not overlooked your situation. There are ways that you can love them from where you are. What would they appreciate? Think about what they need – affection, respect, attention, guidance, support? Reach out and care for them today! God will bless you for your loving obedience.



Red Cross messages are probably the most painful part of my work. Earlier this week, I went with a 1SG to notify a soldier that their child had died. As we were walking over to the tent to meet the soldier, I asked the 1SG all types of questions: “How did he die? How old was he? Does the soldier know yet?” I was trying to anticipate how he’d take the news so I could prepare to comfort them as best as possible.

When I heard that the child was an adult stepson and that the soldier and his wife were in the process of a divorce, I thought that he might not take it as hard. I could not have been more mistaken. This grown man was visibly shaken and began to grieve instantly. The soldier had raised him since the boy was 6 ½ months old, and even though their relationship may have been hindered because of the divorce, he was still very much his son. Nothing had changed his fatherly affection or commitment.

That is a glimmer of how much God feels for his adopted children in Jesus Christ. Although the relationship might be hindered at times because of our sins, His affection and commitment to us are still very real. 1 John 3:1 says “Behold how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God . . .”



We may think that God only accepts perfect people - not true! Remember the words of Isaiah 55:7-9. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and He will abundantly pardon. ‘For

***My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways***’, says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Human love may be conditional, but when we rest in Jesus’ sacrificial death, He takes our guilt and makes us perfectly acceptable before God. That is His steadfast commitment to His beloved children.

In my constant quest to motivate soldiers, I’ve been working on the design for a Chaplain’s coin. The idea first came to me from a soldier who had received one from a Chaplain in Hawaii. I want my coin to be general enough that it would reward junior enlisted and leaders, soldiers and civilians, Christians and non-Christians. But I want it to be specific enough that, when a believer read the inscription, it would mean something more.

I finally settled on Judges 5:2. “When the princes in Israel take the lead; when the people willingly offer themselves – Praise the Lord!” The verse commends leaders and soldiers for taking a risk, having faith, and making a decision to move ahead, even when they are faced with a history of hardship. That’s what faith is all about – a choice to act based on God’s command or promise!

If you read the story around the verse, you’ll see Deborah convincing a man named Barak to lead the Israelites into battle against an enemy, and they enjoyed a great victory. Deborah had already prophesied victory, even if Barak did not help. But he would personally benefit from the victory only if he disciplined himself to set aside his fears, ignore temptations of complacency, and take action.

There are big differences between discipline & self-discipline. Self-disciplined soldiers take the initiative to clean their M16s because it’s the right thing to do. Undisciplined soldiers must be told and watched. Discipline comes because we were doing something wrong, but self-discipline is the first step toward doing something right. Discipline is for the immature, but self-discipline is a sign of maturity and wisdom.

Both are a matter of personal choice. Let’s help each other make the right one. Only then will we experience God’s peace and joy.



When I make my rounds to check on the soldiers, I typically ask how they’re doing, try to make small talk, and see if anyone has any issues with which I can help. The response I’ve received lately is “I’m just trying to stay busy.” I completely understand what they mean. When we’re not busy, we start thinking how much we miss home.

It shouldn’t surprise any of us that work has such a positive affect on people. In the very beginning, in Genesis, God put Adam and Eve in the garden to work it, even though the world – including the garden - was perfect. In the 10 Commandments, God said, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” Exodus 20:9.

A big part of being in God’s image is being productive. God is, after all, a Worker by nature. As such, He has made us to create, fix, and improve upon things in this world. Work was never meant to be grueling or just a way to pass the time. It should be a daily expression of what it means to be created in God’s image, putting His stamp of high quality on whatever we do.



You’ve probably heard people say, “what ever you do for a living, it’s important that you enjoy doing it.” That makes perfect sense and is consistent with what the Bible teaches us about God’s will for us. Our creator has made us each with different skills that He expects us to use. When we experience success and fulfillment we’re living out His personal design for us.

Are you good with your hands? Maybe you’re a motivator, teacher, organizer, or leader. However God has made you, use that skill to serve others. You may feel that you enlisted in the wrong MOS, or you can’t get along with your supervisor. Think creatively. Look for opportunities to use your talents where you are. He will work in you and bless you through your unique, God-given abilities.

Every Christian wants to please their Lord. That’s part of the nature of the love that He works in His followers. The sinful nature, however, tempts us give up or give in when things get hard or even just uncomfortable. But all growth in this world requires a little pain.

We have several running routes for PT here. One of them – “the loop” - is about 7 miles. I’ve run it twice, but at 39, 230 pounds, and recent back surgery, I’m not really built for speed! I usually pace myself at a 9-minute mile and kick it in at the end.



Last week, I ran the loop again. I started with a group of guys who were running with their guide-on, but at the three-mile mark they slowly pulled away from me. I was okay with my pace though - running with different soldiers, talking with them to encourage them, then picking it up to get to the next runner.

At the 5-mile mark, there was a little downhill stretch, but too far for me to sprint. Even at ½ mile from the finish line, I didn’t have it in me to blow it out the rest of the way. “Wait! I don’t have a ½ mile left - there’s the guy with the stopwatch, just 100 yards ahead!” I poured it on, but it was too late. I had a great ¼ mile kick left in me, but I was further along in the race than I realized.

Life is like that. In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul knows that we’re in a long, hard race, but encourages us to stretch it out to please Jesus. “Brothers, I don’t think of myself as having attained my goal, but one thing I do - forgetting the things that are behind, I stretch forward to the things that are before me. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The day isn’t over until you’re asleep. How can you please Jesus tonight? Who can you serve? I know you’re tired, but kick it in! You’re further along in the race than you realize!

Absolutely. I've personally seen God work against the laws of nature to glorify Himself by blessing His people (healing, money showing up at the last minute when no person knew it was needed, etc.). That's usually what we mean when we think of miracles. But most of us don't witness those kinds of miracles every day. Scripture tells us, however, that God works little miracles around us all the time.

Acts 17:26-27 says “God determined the exact times and places where people would live, that we might seek and know the Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” In God's perfect wisdom, goodness, and power He has put non-believers in Kuwait, right now to provide them with opportunities to know Him. Ephesians 2:10 says, “We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which He prepared in advance for us to do.” By His same wisdom, goodness, and power God has surrounded believers with opportunities to serve.

Now, put those two acts of God's sovereignty together. The Lord has set Christians up for success, to be a part of daily miracles. He placed the people around you, at this time & in this place to reveal Himself, and He has chosen Christians to be His primary instruments. Every act of a Christian's kindness is a witness of His heart. Every commitment to personal holiness it is a testimony to God's standard. Every credit given to Jesus is a reminder of where hope comes from.

We may not see God split the Red Sea or raise someone from the



dead. If you're a Christian, however, you can show someone the miracle that God has done in you through your changed heart. Serve the people in need around you. Stand up for the right thing, no matter what others think. And if

they ask about your faith, tell them about your Lord. God may use you to work His miracle in their hearts, too!

A lot of things boost morale when you're deployed – good chow, mail from home, MWR stuff, etc, but most of us wouldn't normally put hygiene in the top 10. It's not that we don't want it or need it. We expect it! Can you imagine not ever having fresh water to brush your teeth, no way to wash your hands after using the latrine, or no water to de-funk your armpits after a long day at work? I know you can! We've been there, and some of us are still wearing the stinkin' T-shirt!



No one likes to be dirty. Filth stinks; it's uncomfortable; and it invites infection. The same potential problems should motivate us to get clean inside, as well. When our souls are soiled with hatred, arrogance, fear, guilt etc. we repel the people around us, we have no peace, and it's a downward spiral to spiritual death.

In Jesus' day, it was common to think that God had cursed lepers because they had sinned in some horrible way. In Matthew 8:2-3, however, Jesus shows His power and compassion to cleanse even the filthiest person. "Behold, a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying, 'Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean.' Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, 'Be clean.' And immediately his leprosy was gone."

You may remember the scene in Shakespeare, in which Macbeth frantically tries to wash the blood from his hands, to cleanse himself of murder's guilt. He couldn't do it, because water can't wash the soul. Even today's good deeds can't remove yesterday's stains of sin.

Do you ever feel like a leper? Remember Christ's willingness and power to take your sins upon Himself and give you His righteousness. Only He can clean us of guilt and wickedness. He volunteered His death to pay the penalty that we deserved. Put your faith in Him, just like the words of the old hymn: "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"



You know the old children’s saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones . . .” But it’s not quite true - words are **powerful**. They’re **supposed** to be. God spoke the world into existence. Throughout the Bible, He revealed His power, character, and will for mankind by talking to us. 2 of the Ten Commandments

are about speaking. When the Son of God came to earth, the Apostle John called Him ‘the Word’ (John 1:1-4).

God is a communicator, and being made in His image implies that we are to speak as He speaks – in truth & love, to bring hope or correction when appropriate, and always with purity. Ephesians 5:4 says that the Christian’s life should have no part in “. . . filthiness, foolish talking, or coarse joking, which are not appropriate; but rather giving thanks. Know this - no sexually immoral, unclean, or greedy person (which is idolatry) has any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming.”

By ‘empty words’, Paul may be referring to those who say they are Christians, but whose lives are empty of proof. More specifically, he is probably describing those who speak carelessly – empty of godly content and purpose. Consider vulgarity and profanity, for example.

Vulgarity raises despicable things to an everyday level of conversation. Casual references to excrement and hell empty them of repulse and fear. Profanity brings holy things down. Careless references to sex and God’s name empty them of awe and beauty. Neither reflects God’s will for our words. Both are power plays – speaking of horrible and holy things as if they were nothing. They fail to reflect the true nature of spiritual realities, and reflect Satan’s oldest lie: ‘if it feels right, do it - don’t worry about what God said.’



61 years ago today, the Japanese bombed our Naval Base in Hawaii. The enemy may have chosen that target because it was vulnerable, because the strategic impact would be devastating, or simply because it was close. That tragic event led to lots of questions about how it happened. The only thing all Americans seemed to agree on was, “we can’t let this happen again”.



No sane person goes through each day, looking for attacks around every corner. Paranoia invites panic, and panic is a serious problem all by itself. During war, however, prudent soldiers look twice at dark alleys, defilade, and buildings that could hide an enemy. We also make special provisions for any weaknesses that we have. Night vision goggles, flak vests, and trip flares are used to see, deflect, and detect harmful situations that might otherwise take us by surprise.

Christians are attacked daily by the lusts of the flesh, the devil’s temptations, even by people trying to “push your buttons”. While you can’t anticipate every challenge to your faith, you would be wise to guard your weak areas. When Satan came to tempt Jesus, he waited until He was tired and hungry. Even when he failed to trick the Lord, Scripture says that he left Him “until an opportune time.” (Luke 4:13)

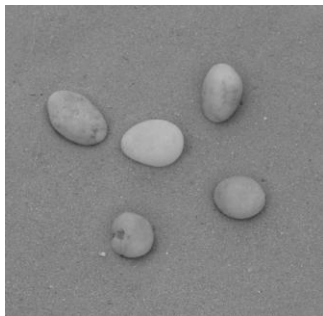
We must know the ‘Pearl Harbors’ of our lives. Where are you most vulnerable? What are your common temptations, failures, etc.? What spiritual defeats would be devastating to your faith, to your witness, to your family? Is there an area of your life that is close to enemy territory? You may be a prime target for a strategic strike! Christians don’t need to be paranoid, though. Jesus is the King. Avoid obvious spiritual danger and walk with Him. (Proverbs 6:27-28).

One of the most courageous warriors in the Bible was David - not as just a king, but since he was a young boy. It's one thing to be brave when you have thousands of well-trained soldiers behind you. It's quite another to face an armed giant when you're alone, 5 foot nothing, and armed with only a slingshot! But that's exactly what David did. And scripture says that he **ran** - he ran right at Goliath with all the courage that any soldier has ever shown! (1 Samuel 17) But where does this kind of courage come from?

When David came at Goliath, the Bible says that he scooped up 5 smooth stones for his sling. That is significant, because it tells us a great deal about the sources of David's confidence. The young boy chose stones because he was skilled with a sling, and stones were the right equipment for the job. He also made sure that they were smooth because his training had proved that smooth stones fly straighter and faster than rough ones.

You may say, “well, that makes sense, but he couldn't have been too confident – he picked up five!” Actually, picking up five stones was the greatest indication of his confidence. You see, Goliath had 4 sons who were also great warriors (see 2 Samuel 21:15-22 and 1 Chronicles 20:4-8). David was ready – one shot, one kill!! Goliath had publicly insulted God, and David was jealous for God's glory. Because David's cause was **God's** cause, David knew that God would support him. God honors those who honor Him.

If you've seen “K 19 - The Widowmaker” or similar military movies, you know that in times of war servicemen will often face grave dangers out of love for their fellow comrades. They've lived together, loved each other, and are prepared to die for each other. How much greater courage should come from those who know that God has faced and **defeated** death on their behalf? Stay close to Him and the love that will grow will increase your courage daily. He will be faithful to you!



Contentment is broader than happiness. It does not depend on circumstances. Contentment (or its look-alike) generally comes in one of four ways: a relatively easy life, a cold heart, a fantasy mindset, or a spirit of faith.

Like an old wooden bridge, many people hold up only because they have not yet been tested by enough weight yet. Some people seem content, but are really just cold. They care about nothing, so nothing bothers them. Others appear calm because they’ve divorced their mind from the real world for a fantasy world. Christians, however, should be truly content because they put their faith in the fact that God is always working for their good. He is rescuing them from hell and transforming their hearts - once coal for a furnace, now spiritual diamonds in process.

Romans 8:18, 29-31 says “For I consider that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory which will be revealed to us . . . We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom He predestined, He also called. Whom He called, He also justified. Whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say then - if God is for us, who can be against us?”

Behind every difficulty, God’s loving hand is applying just the right pressure to strengthen Christians’ faith. In each responsibility, He is polishing our character of love. Through all of our flaws, we learn to rest more and more in the Master for hope. And after every spiritual victory, He displays a new side of His gem, revealing His good and powerful work of salvation. True contentment comes through knowing that God glorifies Himself through our wonderful transformation.



Have you ever had an addiction that was tearing an important relationship apart, but you didn't want to give it up? Temper, lying, pornography, drunkenness, spending sprees, bragging, thrill seeking, etc. – you get the picture. The reason they are so hard to kick is because they give our body temporary pleasures that seem to fill a spiritual craving for control, caring, acceptance, recognition, integrity, commitment, etc. Only God can meet those desires perfectly.

Intellectually, a hot-head knows that blowing up may get temporary results, but will cause even greater damage later. Still, his body doesn't want to give up the adrenaline rush & the physical release. A habitual liar knows that getting caught could destroy him, but his craving for reputation is insatiable. In fact, all of us have loves that we don't want to give up, but Jesus warned us that those 'loves' keep us from a more intimate relationship with God.

In Luke 18, a rich, young ruler asked Jesus about how to please God. He claimed to have obeyed all the commandments, but then Jesus told him to sell everything and follow Him. The man couldn't do it. He wouldn't do it. In verses 25-27 Jesus told the Apostles, who had been listening, "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." (The Apostles) said, "Then who can be saved?!" Jesus answered, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

The Apostles knew that all of us have a death grip on something. But there is real hope in Jesus, because He can fix the real problem – our hearts. Can't seem to change? None of us can on our own. Go to the One Who holds the world in the palm of His hand. (Not the guy in the photo!) God is in the business of making changes, and you and I need nothing less than His daily miracle of spiritual renewal!



All soldiers exercise to get into shape or build their fitness level, but they often neglect one thing - rest. When you exercise, there are several essential elements for physical growth: stress, proper form, perseverance, nutrition, etc., but all of them eventually demand rest. God uses the same principles to grow a Christian's spirit.

The Lord brings “stress” on His children in many forms – unexpected timing, new duties, challenging relationships, etc, but we are eventually driven to rest in Him for the strength to continue. The right form is important, too. Shortcuts can rob you of an intended benefit. But doing things the right way physically is often hard emotionally and requires resting in His perfect commands.

Perseverance separates the men from the boys. All of us can do things well for a short time, but perseverance goes beyond the comfort zone, and even the most ‘hooah’ soldier has to eventually rest in God’s promise to watch over him while he sleeps, or he’ll burn out.

Proper nutrition refuels our bodies, but requires rest after the meal. It’s like working out right after eating a big meal. Have you ever read something from Scripture, but walked away without meditating on the passage? You need time to be still and absorb the spiritual food. Isaiah 40:31 says “They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up as on the wings of eagles. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not grow faint.”

Waiting in Christ does not mean that we do nothing, but that we rest in Him to do what we cannot - to give us His peace in times of stress, to change our hearts to desire the right way, to strengthen our spirits to persevere beyond our comfort zones, and to hunger for the true nutrition of His Word. These are His miracles, and none of them are optional for the spiritual soldier who wants to grow in God.



As a Chaplain, much of my job is to help soldiers solve their problems, or - if they wish – I can bring the issue to their leader. I say ‘if they wish’ because sometimes part of the problem *is* their leader. Some leaders lack people skills (although, like any skill, they can make improvements). Others wear so many hats, that individual soldiers may fall through the cracks.

The problem goes the other way, too. No leader likes to baby sit soldiers - soldiers shouldn’t be babies. Many are inexperienced and vulnerable, however. Some never had a checking account before they came into the military. Some got married when they were barely 20 years old. For others, this is their very first job, and they’re still learning organization skills and teamwork.

Leadership may be a burden or a privilege – depending on the individual’s perspective. But at the very least, it is a responsibility. Like it or not, the Army is a family, and leaders must be good parents – role models, teachers, trainers, discipliners, and encouragers. But the ***parent*** is responsible to set the tone for the relationship.

Galatians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Rather bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Nurture without admonition will spoil a soldier. Even your best friend will occasionally correct you to keep you on the straight and narrow. Admonition without nurture breaks their spirit. Being picked up and encouraged after a failure can greatly strengthen a soldier. Great leaders do both.

I believe nurture and admonition are the two hands of love. Either without the other is exasperating. A spoiled person believes the world is all about them. They’re in for a shock!

The broken soldier believes there is no place in the world for them. Praise the Lord – God loves His people with both hands.



Before we deployed to Kuwait, our S-2 was good enough to get us copies of the ARCENT Kuwait “Smart Book”. According to the “Smart Book” we weren’t going to see much rain in Kuwait. I guess the book wasn’t that smart.



In the first two months, we got more rain than we were supposed to get in a year! To top it off, the Bedouin tents that had been provided for us were 100% cotton – great for hot weather, but not too great for rain. The first time I saw the rain coming, I thought “that looks like rain, but it must be a sand storm.” In less than 2 minutes, we were in the middle of a downpour. Everything got soaked.

The next time I thought “there’s no way it could rain like that in the desert twice in the same week!” Wrong! Once again, we scrambled to shift things around in the tent, trying to keep our stuff dry. What made me feel even more foolish was the fact that I blew off the weather report that said it was coming! Why don’t we learn? We had all the signs. I guess we just didn’t want to believe it.

In Matthew 16:2-3, Jesus said to the Sadducees and Pharisees, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ In the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to read the weather, but you can’t discern the signs of the times!”

In Matthew 24, Jesus says that the signs of the end - false prophets, wars, and natural disasters – will be as ‘labor pains’. I believe that means these will be increasing in frequency and severity. Examine the patterns in history - His coming is just a matter of time. Watch the signs, and keep your head up!

I love to see daily life illustrate the truths of Scripture. In previous devotionals, I’ve tried to show some of the things that nature teaches us. The military offers some great lessons, too. Colossians 3:3-14 is about living in Christ, but it could just as easily be a page from the FM 3 series on NBC.

Verses 3 & 4 tell us that living in Christ is a matter of life or death. Like a soldier in MOPP 4, our hope is in being hidden in His protective power. The Lord tells us in verses 5, 8-9 that we need to ‘decon’ because of the world’s pollutions. We’re even reminded of our motivation to decon in 6 & 7 – because ‘we’ve smelled CS before’ and we know the hazards of this world from personal experience.

Verse 10 even emphasizes the same order, saying that decon is done *after* we “have already put on the new man”. Can you imagine performing a decon before you put on the mask?! We need to rest in the protection of Christ first. Otherwise, we have no spiritual strength or calm to wipe off the contaminants of sin and temptation. In verse 11, we see that everyone looks the same in Christ, just like soldiers in MOPP 4. In 12-14, we’re given the specific equipment that we are to use – love. It’s the overgarment that is most evident to others.

I’ve written about NBC before. It’s not natural to us, but when we’re under attack it is a soldier’s peace and strength. The thing that Christians often forget is that we are always under attack. Worldly temptations of anger, complaining, lust, lying, etc. are all around us.

If I can take the analogy one step further, we were dead in our sins until Jesus injected us with ‘atropine’ and gave us CPR by His Holy Spirit to quicken our hearts. He masked us up - if you will - because we couldn’t do it ourselves. He did this so we could continue the mission that He describes in verses 14 and following. Read it. Think about it. Get out there and do it!





Before we deployed to Kuwait, I had a picture in my mind of what the land would be like – nothing but sand. That’s not exactly true. The area around Ali Al Saleem is peppered with tiny shrubs and even small trees. The evidence of life is all around us.



Yesterday, as I was riding through a wooded area in a HMMWV, I wondered to myself “How do the shrubs and trees survive in this harsh, dry climate?” Yeah, we’ve had some rain lately, but for 90% of the year, it doesn’t rain at all. The answer is in the root system. God made them with deep, thick roots so they can reach the water and hold it until the next rainfall.

Again, God teaches us from our own back yards. In Colossians 2:6-7, we read “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him, **rooted** and built up and established in the faith, even as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving.” Did you catch the image of growth and hope? Read it again and notice the natural progression from where the life starts, the growth, and its fruit.

The “seed” of the Holy Spirit was planted in us, and we “root” our faith in Jesus. From that simple beginning, we grow upward, becoming stronger as we following the teaching of Jesus, until our lives blossom like the fruit of a healthy tree. If you think I’m overstating our hope in God. Look at 1 John 3:9, Ephesians 2:1-10, and Philipians 2:13. Trusting in Jesus means more than hoping, ‘maybe God can do something for me’. It’s resting in Him for life, from beginning to end.

I’ll leave you with Galatians 5:22, 25 “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let’s also walk by the Spirit.” Rest in Him; hope in Him; then get up and live in Him. Gardens that are not worked are destined for weeds and death. Those that receive proper care, however, spread their beauty and perfume for all to enjoy.

Today is my 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My wife and I have a great marriage, but ‘no’ - ours is not the model! In fact, we’ve had a LOT of ups and downs in our relationship – arguments about toilet seats, sex, parenting, money, & everything else. There were times that I didn’t know how we were going to make it. Most of our fights started before we ever said a word – with our expectations.

We all have expectations about the checkbook, the holidays, kids, personal time, etc - you name it. Each of us has a vision of what we hope will happen (or what we fear will happen). The question is, ‘what should happen?’

This may sound like an obvious answer, but only **God** has the right to say. He is the source of all goodness. Where would you look to get the most out of your car – a cookbook or the owner’s manual? Where should you look to learn about traveling & double dribbling – a textbook on physics or an official rulebook on basketball? You always go to the source, right? God created the institution of marriage with Adam & Eve. He is the source. He wrote the manual (or rulebook) on how relationships are supposed to work.



The original wedding vows are in Genesis 3:6-19. God is even there to give the bride away. Notice that God said in chapter 1, ‘Let US make man in OUR image.’ Later, Eve was taken from Adam’s rib, yet Mankind was to be born through the woman. God’s design is a wonderful interdependence of husband and wife under His authority.

God’s goal for marriage is unity – single-mindedness, reflecting the unity of God Himself. Whether you’re married or single, take time to let God’s goal sink in. You’ll find His commands and Spirit will promote love, curb selfishness, and bring strength to your relationships.



Drew Carey came to Doha today as part of a USO tour. He's the host of "Whose line is it anyway?" - a show in which other comedians improvise skits & songs made up of suggestions from Carey and the audience. It's mass confusion and is usually pretty funny.

Marriages can look like that.

"Whose role is it anyway - to lead the family?" It's mass confusion, but it's not very funny. You may already be thinking, "O boy, here comes that 'man of the house' business". Before we look at the Bible, let's examine a

great model of biblical teamwork – a CO & 1SG.

A CO and 1SG are equally valuable. Both are necessary. Both are assigned their positions. Both have strengths & experiences that make them valuable. Both must do their parts according to the regulations. But they have different roles and must work together for one goal - the mission.

The CO (analogous to the husband) is held responsible. They cannot set their own direction or choose to ignore the good of the team; they have to lead according to the authority over them; and they cannot choose not to lead. It is their task, assigned by a higher Authority. The 1SG (like a wife) is there to help the mission succeed. Wise leaders listen to their helpers, because they have hands-on insight that leaders need to make a good decision. But after the decision has been made, unless their leader wants them to do something immoral, they can not choose not to help. It is their task, assigned by a higher Authority.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:3-12, Ephesians 5:22-33, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Husbands must love by leading in selfless initiative. Wives must love by helping through respectful support. If we want to experience the power of God's love, we must live the example of the Father, Son, and Spirit. They lead ***and*** help. Love your spouse God's way. It will take some work, but He will fill you with peace, joy, & strength.



Lifting weights has been a tremendous stress reliever out here. I see some guys working out everyday, and the trend seems to be growing. Each of us has different motives. Some want to feel better about their bodies. Others want their spouses to be proud of them. For many, it's just a matter of personal achievement. When you think about it, exercise of any kind is simply another search for hope.

There's nothing wrong with exercise, but it can deliver only so much hope. 1 Corinthians 9:24 says, "Do you not know that in a race, all runners run, but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize." The Apostle is using a metaphor to emphasize the importance of striving for *spiritual* excellence.

Exercise can make you feel better about yourself – when you're in shape. What about when you're 75 and can't bench 300? What about when you're on leave and can't find a gym? Being in shape can make you more attractive only when fitness is your mate's priority, too. What if you spend so much time at the gym that your family begins to fall apart? What if they want you at home more than at the gym?

There's a reason the Bible puts godliness above physical fitness. Pursuing godliness means that you're resting in Jesus for your self-image. Because He loves you, there's nothing you need to add to become acceptable in His sight. Pursuing godliness makes your character shine. Then you begin to attract the right kinds of friends and bring out the best of your present relationships.

God's Spirit of love, unlike our bodies, only gets better with time. The pursuit of godliness offers hope for our personal relationships and eternal life after death. After all, what do you think impresses God more – a reputation for a great PT score or your love toward others?

On Fridays, our Bible Study has been discussing how to know God’s will. I chose to lead the group through Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church. It’s a great place to look for principles of godly decision-making. Chapters 7-13 contain Paul’s divinely inspired guidance for some of the church’s questions on making hard decisions.

In 7:1-7, Paul is addressing some questions on marriage, but the principles apply to any decision. Read the passage for yourself later. I’ll walk you through the basics here.

First, avoid temptation. It’s one thing to find yourself in a tempting situation. It’s quite another to put yourself there! Think creatively – if you’re pretty sure that a certain decision will put you in temptation’s way, there’s probably another option available.

Secondly, remember your duty. Where has God put you? What responsibilities has He given you that you must not ignore? You must serve your spouse, children, soldiers, leaders, etc. Again – think broadly. You *can* be a good spouse, parent, and soldier in Kuwait.

Thirdly, talk it over with other believers. Your brothers and sisters in Christ can help you focus on God’s will, not your agenda. If two or three of you look at the Scriptures together, pray, and come to an agreement, you’re much more likely to be on the right track.

Fourthly, consider your spiritual gifts. God has given you certain abilities so you can serve with excellence in specific ways. The key word, however, is ‘serve’. Look at Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. He empowers us to serve others, not to serve ourselves.

Lastly, we must pursue godliness as our ultimate goal. What decision will bring Him glory and please Him? Which choice will require obedience & faith? How can we best build up His people? Hard decisions require careful thought. If we follow these godly principles, the answers will become clearer and clearer.



Without a doubt, the part of my job I enjoy least is confronting people. Chaplains want to encourage people, not put them on the spot. Actually, love should be willing to do both, as needed. Sometimes we have to tell someone about their spiritual cancer before they will seek out the treatment of good news.

Most Christians can quote Jesus' words on the second greatest commandment. Very few, however, know from where He is quoting. Check this out. "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rather, rebuke your neighbor, so that you do not share in his sin. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against your neighbor, but ***love your neighbor as yourself***. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:17-18, emphasis mine)

Did you catch that? The Lord put confrontation and love in the same context! How is that possible? Isn't love supposed to be warm, fuzzy, and blind? If we love someone, aren't we supposed to overlook things? Not if it's their sin! If you look at chapter 19 as a whole, you'll see that holiness is the goal. In other words, God wants us to be pure, and sometimes we have to help each other stay on track.

Look back at the verses again. What happens if we don't confront a brother who has sinned? We either begin to hate and judge them in our hearts, or we may plot revenge. Then we are sinning. Only God can judge sin. Scriptures says that revenge is His, too.

If you know someone has done something wrong, especially if they claim to love God, pray for a right heart - yours and theirs. Then go to them privately. Ask them about it. Give them an opportunity to explain. Be bold & compassionate. God will be with you. Their purity and probably your friendship can greatly benefit from some tough love!





What do you think when you hear the word, ‘justice’? Most of us probably think of giving the guilty what they deserve, but that is only one example of justice. The Bible more often uses the term when encouraging us to give the *needy* what they deserve. That may

sound strange, especially to those of us who were raised in a society that teaches its citizens to try to make it on your own.

Presently, I’m waiting to have a Chaplain’s coin delivered for our soldiers. ‘Justice’ is one of the 7 biblical values that I chose to circle the rim of the coin. Of all the Army values, it is closest to ‘Duty’, but it implies a higher calling. Military duty is defined by human standards. Justice is defined by God’s standards. You can retire from the military duty. God says that justice must be a way of life.

The very fact that some awards say that a soldier “went above and beyond the call of duty” implies that duty is a type of minimum. Justice, because it is measured by God’s standard, should be as much as we can give. It is not limited by written agreements or signed contracts. It is not bound by our work schedule or the responsibility of our rank. It is a 24/7 call to help when we are able to meet a need.

A soldier deserves respect, training, compassion, honesty, discipline, and more – not because they are the best soldier in the unit. They may even be the ***weakest!*** Help them simply because they are created in the image of God. Isaiah 1:17 says “Seek justice, help the oppressed, defend the fatherless, plead the widow’s case.”

Look around. Who are the needy soldiers in your section? What would you want if you were in their place? Help them out. As a person in God’s image, they deserve the help. And you, especially if you are being transformed into the image of Jesus, may be just the one to help them.

Generally, soldiers are not real big on dishing out mercy. Armies exist to exercise wrath, not forgiveness. We train for combat, not for making peace. But God Almighty is big on mercy, and for that reason, ‘mercy’ is one of the words I chose to use on the Chaplain’s coin.

Have you ever noticed what kinds of people were attracted to Jesus? Matthew 8 shows us a pattern that was pretty standard - a leper, a Roman officer, a woman, and the demon-possessed. What do they have in common? All were rejected by their society. Lepers were viewed as being under God’s curse; Romans were the Jews’ enemy; women were seen as second-class citizens; and the demon-possessed were feared and avoided. But they were all drawn to Him because He was a man of mercy.

Mercy is what we need from God. You may remember the story in Matthew 6 of two men praying on the street. One was a religious teacher who prayed many eloquent and proud words, thinking that God would hear him because of how ‘good’ he was. The other man simply beat his chest in despair praying, ‘Lord, be merciful to me – a sinner!’ Jesus tells us that God heard the second man’s prayer.

Our need for mercy implies that we are guilty before God and deserve His punishment. His standard is perfection, not 51% good, or even 99%. That is why Jesus had to live a perfectly obedient life.

When He died in our place, His sacrifice would completely satisfy God’s standard. Now, through our faith in Jesus, the Father can be merciful ***and*** just.

The price for sin has been paid. But you may have heard the saying ‘you can only give what you have’. Only when you rest in His forgiveness and mercy, can you find the peace to extend it to others.





I got a wonderful letter from my wife’s former mother-in-law this week. Yes, you read that correctly. Lauren’s first husband’s Mom wrote me a beautiful letter. We have a truly blessed relationship. I won’t go into all the details, but I want to tell you enough so you will see that this could only this happen in Jesus. The whole matter is nothing less than a series of little miracles.

Pat is an incredibly godly woman. Her husband came to the Lord late in his life, after he was diagnosed with cancer. She cared for him at home, waiting on his every need until he died. At the same time, she was teaching at a Christian school, serving in various church ministries, and praying for her son who was not a Christian at the time.

To make a long story short, Lauren divorced her first husband; she got custody of their two boys; and a few years later, she and I married. Through it all, Pat stayed faithful to her son, helped him when he was down, kept up with Lauren (who is extremely fond of her), had all of us over to her house for dinner when we came to visit, and became very dear to my heart.

She has always treated me like a good friend, not like a man who married her son’s ex-wife. She thanks me for loving her grandchildren, and even sends me Christmas gifts. How can this be? The Holy Spirit fills her heart, and now He fills her son’s heart, too.

Over a year ago, Lauren’s ex-husband gave up his old ways to follow Jesus. God has changed Him. You can see it in his face and in the faces of his other children. He is patient, wise, committed, self-controlled, and has peace – the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I look forward to seeing him almost as much as seeing my own flesh and blood. He *is* my blood brother - through the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus!

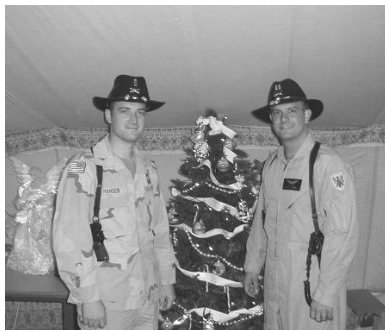


The Cav is full of traditions - just one of the things I enjoy about this unit. Stetsons and Christmas trees look pretty cool together, too. Traditions are wonderful and common to all Americans. If we're not careful, though, sometimes we can forget the holiday's real meaning.

Who is Jesus? One good indicator is how his enemies and friends respond to him. Lets look at Matthew 2:1-6, 10-11.

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." When Herod heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all of the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for it is written through the prophet, ‘You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come forth a governor, Who shall shepherd my people, Israel.’" . . . When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They came into the house and saw the young Child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Opening their treasures, they offered to Him gifts: gold, incense, and myrrh.”

Jesus is a threat to the self-exalted and fearful. Herod didn't want anyone on the throne, but himself. Most of the people in Jerusalem feared Herod's wrath and just didn't want anyone rocking their boat. He is also the promise of hope to the humble and wise. God chose Bethlehem intentionally. Even now, it is still an unimpressive town. They brought gold for their King, incense for their Priest, and burial spices for Him Who would die for their sins. Jesus came to the humble 2000 years ago, and wise men still seek Him! Praise the Lord that His love is freely given. None of us have earned it.





Imagine a birthday party at which everyone got presents except the person having the birthday! That's how many people celebrate Christmas – with little thought of the Person being honored. But what would Jesus want anyway? He owns everything already!

In Psalm 50:9-15, God actually rebukes those who try to earn His love. “I do not need your bulls or goats. For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains. The wild animals of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Pay your vows to the Most High. Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

We see the same thing in Psalm 116:12-13. “How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness toward me? I will lift up the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to Him in the presence of all His people.”

Although God does not need anything from us, did you notice that He does want something? He wants more than a token of affection – He wants our hearts and lives to honor Him. He wants to show the world His goodness & power by working through your faith and obedience. When you love Him and call on Him, He delights to bless you with His wisdom, power, and goodness in His timing. By watching faithful Christians, the world can be a “fly on the wall” and learn what real peace and joy are all about.

If you don't know Jesus, but have been watching a real Christian - someone who has God's peace and power in their lives, take this special day to ask them to tell you about their Lord and Savior. Merry Christmas, & may God be with you!

Today, dozens of our soldiers are going to an M16 and 50 cal range at Udairi. We did the same thing about a month ago, but everyone is taking it a bit more seriously now – we’re getting closer to war. We’re also prepping for a convoy live fire. The dry fire is just a couple of days away, and



then they do the real deal. The training is necessary to our survival. If one of our supply runs were to be hit, we want to be ready. In an Apache unit, the chances of having to use your personal weapon may not very high, but it’s too late to prepare when you’re under fire.

If you are a Christian, you’re under fire everyday. Your old nature will tempt you to laziness just when a buddy needs your help; other soldiers may try to push your buttons just to see if you’re serious about your faith; and Satan will look for exactly the right moment to appeal to your weaknesses. It’s too late to prepare when you’re under fire.

Consider your weapons for spiritual warfare, from Ephesians 6:13-18. 1) The “belt of (God’s) truth” to keep your pants up so you don’t trip over lies, 2) the “breastplate of (Jesus’) righteousness” to guard your heart against the flaming arrows of sin, 3) “feet fitted with the gospel of peace” – not steel-toed boots or James Bond’s shoes with a hidden knife – but ready to bring the good news of peace to your enemies; 4) the “shield of faith” that rests in Jesus (not ourselves) to defeat Satan; 5) the “helmet of salvation” to save your life; 6) the “sword of the Spirit”, which is the Word of God; and 7) prayer, at all times in the Spirit, for perseverance and requests for all the fellow believers.

It’s too late to prepare when you’re under fire. God has given you all of these to use now, every day. Use them. Rest in them. Press forward in them. Be strong in the strength that Jesus has to offer!



A few of our soldiers got some hard news the other day – “unless you’re ETSing or retiring, you’re here until it’s over. PCS moves, schools, etc. are frozen until this is over.” Most understand that the needs of a Task Force preparing for war outweigh a soldier’s wants. When things are out of your

control, it can be frustrating, however.

Let’s get philosophical for a minute. If you’re a Christian, how do you resolve God’s complete control, evil in the world, & our responsibility? We believe that our good God is working in our lives, but we experience hardship, suffering, and the likelihood of war, too.

There are several places in Scripture that put God’s goodness & sovereignty side-by-side with evil & man’s responsibility. Luke 22:21-22 is a good example. Jesus is talking to His disciples about Judas, who is going to hand Him over to be killed. “Behold, the one who betrays Me is here at the table. The Son of Man must go as it has been determined, but woe to him who betrays Me!”

What Judas did was certainly evil, and he was held accountable, but notice that God was definitely in control – “it has been determined.” God not only allowed such a thing, He ordained it! God was drawing a straight line with a crooked stick. Do you remember why Jesus had to be betrayed? He was going to die for us! What should we draw from this? Christians can rest in two facts: 1) God will judge evil, & 2) He is working His good plan - even through the “crooked sticks” of war.

Whatever you’re going through, trust in God’s goodness; praise Him for His sovereignty; and be faithful in your duty. Judas made his decision, but the other disciples were still responsible to follow Jesus. Hang in there – God *is* on the throne!

The forefathers who drafted the Constitution saw Chaplains as a necessary part of our fighting forces. Virtually all of the founders believed in the God of the Bible; they recognized a “just war” by God’s Word; and they knew that He honored



faithfulness. Chaplains were to teach soldiers God’s ways, encourage obedience, remind them of His faithfulness, and help them to worship.

Rightly placed faith powerfully touches the heart of God, but a lack of faith powerfully reveals the heart of man. Soldiers who do not follow the Lord trust in themselves as the final hope of wisdom, strength, and victory. There are two problems with that, however.

When all is well, the faithless soldier can become easily arrogant. After all, whom does he have to thank for his daily victories, but himself? Also, since there is no God, there is nothing special about people, and there is no “right” – so he doesn’t see the need to take care of his buddies, to listen to anyone else, or to do the right thing when he is alone. Chaplains can advise, counsel, even confront these soldiers.

When all is not well, the faithless soldier can become easily frightened. After all, whom does he have to guide him? There is no higher wisdom. Who will protect him? There is no God who takes a personal interest in anyone. Whom can he trust? There is no Savior, Who can forgive and change a selfish heart into one like His. Ah, but he is wrong. Chaplains’ can bring encouragement and guidance.

God *is* there; He is ***personal***; and He calls us to trust and obey Him. A true Christian is compelled to be a team player, look after his buddy, stand up for what is right, and can face danger with faith! Courage and integrity come from within – from the Holy Spirit Whom Jesus freely gives to those who follow Him. Everyone puts his faith in something. Think about it. If you’d like to talk to someone, chances are, there’s a Chaplain or another Christian close by.

Today is my mother's birthday. I've written her and emailed her, but I'm not sure that she's gotten either. There's not a military base close enough to connect me by phone, and I haven't gotten any response from her. I know that she worries about me – she knows I'm the only soldier here who is not allowed to carry a weapon! I want to let her know that I love her and that I'm safe, but my hands are tied.

Many soldiers often feel that their hands are tied about different things. Our children often do not understand why we can't be there for their birthdays or Christmas. Spouses have to deal with car repairs, rude neighbors, and more - all by themselves. I have to smile inside (just a little) when a soldier's basic problem is that they trying to be God and are worried that they can't make it happen - trying to be in two places at once, wanting to change someone's heart, feeling the need to bring someone to justice. Of course they can't do it! Only God can do those things!

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus when He was sick. He wanted to wait until His friend died, so that Lazarus' sisters would see the even greater miracle of his resurrection. When He arrives, you can hear the mixture of sadness and faith in Martha's words. "Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that, whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (11:21-22). With two words, Jesus called him out of the grave, alive and well.



Our hands may be tied, but God's aren't. If you think an Apache is powerful, consider the Lord! He only asks for your trust and obedience. We may be limited by our fears and failures. But when we follow God, His desires become ours, and He uses all of His resources to do His good work in us.

Do you remember hearing that in school? It was the dreaded signal that your time was up. Whatever you had done (or had left undone) was about to be graded. Tomorrow is New Year’s Eve, and that’s how some people feel inside. It’s a time of reflection on past accomplishments, but most of us probably focus more on our regrets. Why? Well, if we’re completely honest – human beings are much better at failing than succeeding. I can’t think of one thing I have ever done perfectly. Can you?

In Romans 7, Paul is ‘grading’ himself in comparison to God’s perfect law, and he’s not doing very well. With great frustration and disappointment, Paul admits that he still fails on a regular basis. But in his heart, he loves God and wants to serve Him. How does he survive in that tension of contradictions? How can anyone?

If you’re a Christian, you have high moral standards for yourself because you want to please your Lord. In fact, your standard should be perfection – but who can meet that? Only Jesus can. Hear Paul’s conclusion. “What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this



death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! I myself, in my inner being am a slave to God’s law, but my flesh is a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For what the law couldn’t do, because our flesh is weak, God did by sending His own Son in human form, and condemned sin in Him.” (Romans 7:24-8:1 & 3)

Not measuring up? Of course not! But if you love Jesus, He has traded your guilt for His innocence. Walk in the newness of His Spirit’s power. He will continue to guide and change you, for He has promised never to leave His children, no matter what they deserve.



I didn’t watch the ball drop in Times Square on our high speed satellite system tonight. But I did stand in the middle of the LSA and stare at the sky. I just can’t get enough of the moon here. On most nights, the sky is so clear (and there are so few streetlights around) that the moon is especially brilliant!



I’ve heard other soldiers say the same thing.

What is so beautiful about the moon? It shines in the darkness, and it sheds light on us when we might otherwise stumble around or fear what we cannot see. But it has no light of its own. It is basically a huge mirror in night sky. It can only reflect light, which says a lot about the sun’s power, since the moon is just made of dirt - not very reflective stuff. I don’t think I’m reading too much into this, but you’re welcome to disagree with me since this is not clear from Scripture.

It seems to me that one of the reasons God created the moon was to illustrate the relationship between His people and Himself. What is so beautiful about His people, anyway? Well, for one thing, we shine in the darkness. We shed light on the world when people might otherwise stumble around in ignorance or fear. We are also mirrors. We have no light of our own, but we reflect the Son’s light. And what are we basically, but dust - not very reflective stuff without God shining in us.

In Psalm 136:7-9, we read, “To Him who made the great lights; for His loving kindness endures forever: the sun to rule by day; for His loving kindness endures forever; the moon and stars to rule by night; for His loving kindness endures forever . . .”

When Jesus was here on earth, His truth, power, and goodness were as ‘clear as day’. Now that He has gone back into heaven, the world seems dark by comparison, but He calls His people to “rule” - to stand out in the darkness, to provide the light of godly example for others to see. That is our beauty. But just as the moon must give credit to the sun, we must credit the Son Who enable us to shine.

Before you make any New Year’s resolutions, ask yourself a simple question – “Is God calling you to it, or do you simply feel driven?” Maybe you’ve never thought about the difference.

A newbie surfing a tidal wave feels driven. He’s out of his element, and there is a huge force behind him. He doesn’t know where it came from, but the fear of it controls him. It’s all he can do just to stay afloat. He feels that he has no choice - he must ride it or drown. It’s just a matter of survival.

A talented high school quarterback who loves football feels called. College scouts recognize that he is in his element on the field. Their phone calls and letters are a powerful pull on his life, but they bring him confidence, not fear. He is drawn in a specific direction that brings him clarity, and he is excited about the possibilities. He has choices available to him, but wants to choose wisely. It’s a matter of personal growth and joy.

The Lord seems to have given talents in leadership to my son, Christopher. He can rally other boys to follow him, and he gets excited about bringing people together as a team. I believe that God will use him to be a great leader one day. But he needs to choose wisely. It’s a matter of personal growth and joy in the Lord.

If you’re a Christian, God has gifted you to honor Him. What opportunities is He providing for you to serve others? Listen to Paul’s words to his student in 2 Timothy 1:6-7 “. . . I remind you to stir up the gift of God, which is in you through the

laying on of my hands. For God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.” We have to listen to God’s Word to discern the difference between God’s call and Satan’s drive. Make your choices out of faith, not out of fear. You will experience the wonder of God working through them to bless others’ spirits.



I want to share part of an email from my wife. She is such an encouragement to me. In the spirit of Psalm 136, she writes . . . *“I want to tell you about some small Christmas miracles this year. God is good. I let the boys call Pat today and Ebbie (their biological father who recently became a Christian) answered the phone. We never seem to be able to talk to him lately, but I talked to him for a while and he sounded so encouraging. He is still high on the Lord and praising Him for the change. God is good.*

*Our stairwell got together to eat. Dana read the scripture about the birth of Christ, asked the kids questions and gave them candy. I really enjoyed being there. It was a comfort to hear a godly man caring for the stairwell (1/2 our stairwell are believers). God is good.*

*Gayle Braley got sick today and couldn't play piano for the Christmas Eve service, so I led the songs acapella again. But Jordan Johnson stepped in and played a few of the songs at the last minute. Several of the readers for scripture got sick during the week, but only one ended up not coming. God is good.*

*The most moving thing of the day was when I let the kids open one present tonight early, and Hannah opened a new baby. She loved it, hugged it, gave it the fake bottle, and then sang to it. I almost cried. I thought of the wonderful gift God is already working in her to care for her family. God is good.*

*My dear, I will be thinking of you throughout the day, tomorrow. It is hard to expect that you would have a merry Christmas, but may God grant you a joyful Christmas Day. May He bless all that you do. I love you! God is good!!*

*Love, Lauren*



I received a tasking today from the Brigade to which we are attached. They deployed only about 80 soldiers in their advance party, so their Chaplain did not come with the main body. Now they need someone to provide them with religious support. Of course I'll go - in the Chaplain Corps, supporting people outside of our immediate unit is part of our duty. We call it area coverage.

At first, I was a little perturbed and thought, “We have over 400 soldiers, and they have less than 100. There are a couple of Chaplains closer to them. Why do they want me to drive for over an hour to their location?” Then I remembered Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan. When the Lord told the crowd to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, & strength, and love your neighbor as yourself”, a religious teacher tried to trick Him by asking “and who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10)

You remember the story. Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews as traitors to their religion – half-breeds with foreigners. When a certain man was beaten and robbed, two ‘religious’ Jews passed by him. Although he was lying on the road and bleeding, they offered no help at all. Afterward, a Samaritan stopped, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, and offered to pay the innkeeper for any other medical aid he might need later.

It’s our action that counts, not who we are or who we help –. God calls all of us to ‘area coverage’ every once in a while – additional duties, taking care of soldiers who are not in our unit, working late, etc. When we serve those whom God has placed around us, we are fulfilling part of the mission that He has prepared for us. It’s no accident when others need the talents or gifts that God has given to you – it’s His design! May He bless you as you serve those whom He has placed around you.



Soldiers’ responsibilities generally fall into one or two categories: leading people and operating equipment. Unfortunately, many in both groups seem to believe that service is a dirty word. We’ve all met leaders who will quickly tell you that manual labor is not in their job description. But there are even more worker bees that also believe their tasks (and, therefore, they) are not important.

Today is my son’s birthday, and I believe that God will one day make him into a great servant. Bradley is 10, and I’m so proud of his compassion for others & his boldness to stand up for what is right. I can’t count the times that he’s come to the aid of friends at school or gone out of his way to put a piece of trash in a garbage can. He reminds me of Ebedmelech in the Old Testament. Ebedmelech means “servant of the King”.



In Jeremiah 38, we read that Jeremiah (God’s prophet at the time) had been giving some unpopular predictions about Israel going into captivity. When some irritated men had heard enough, they threw him into an old well. When Ebedmelech found out, he went directly to the King to ask for permission to get Jeremiah out.

“So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the king’s house under the treasury, and took rags and worn-out garments, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, ‘Use these rags and worn-out garments to cushion the cords under your arms.’ And Jeremiah did so.” (verses 11-12)

If you’re a “worker bee”, remember that the success of any mission depends on **you** doing **your** job. If you’re a leader, don’t forget who makes you look good! Even God’s Son came in the form of a servant. Take some time to read Philippians 2 and Mark 10:45. You might be surprised at how much God esteems a simple, humble worker. No matter what your part, He will bless you when you trust Him and give your best.

Of all godly virtues, perhaps humility is least understood by the military mind. That’s because we do not understand it biblically. Let’s test my thought for a moment. Close your eyes and draw a mental cartoon picture of someone who is humble. What’s he look like? I’ll bet he’s thin, dressed in some drab or out-dated clothes. He’s probably slouching a bit and has a bit of sad look on his face. He’s a wimp, a dork, a loser! Am I right?

That’s not God’s picture of humility. Someone once said that humility is not thinking less of your self. It’s simply thinking of yourself less often. I like that. Being humble doesn’t mean that you throw yourself to the bottom of the trash heap, rather that you exalt God as the King of the hill!

What can humility do for the soldier? Let’s contrast pride and humility to see. A proud soldier will try to do it all himself, but a humble soldier will ask for help if he needs it. A proud soldier will take full credit for work (whether he did it all or not), but a humble soldier will recognize the work of his peers. A proud soldier will not take advice from the team, but a humble soldier will be wiser by listening to others’ advice. A proud soldier will protect himself in a crisis, but a humble soldier will think of his buddy before himself.

Which do you want on your team, the stereotypical, proud stud, or the humble soldier who wants to please His God and take care of soldiers around him? The answer is clear. Now - what does our teams need from us? Again, the answer is obvious. Humility is not in our nature, however. We truly need God’s supernatural work to change our hearts. Go to Him. When we ask for His forgiveness and salvation from our pride, He is faithful to work miracles.



I don't know how many times I've heard, "I'm ready to go kick some Iraqi butt!" I've even thought it myself. But is that the way a Christian should respond? In His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus corrects several human traditions that were never part of God's law. Over and over, He says, 'You have heard that it was *said* . . . but *I* say to you . . .'. Listen to one example from Matthew 5:43-48.

"You have heard that it was said, 'love you neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He



makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward should you get? Even the sinners do that! And if you salute your brothers only, what do you more than others? Even the Gentiles do that! Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Saddam Hussein may deserve God's judgment, but that is God's lane, not yours or mine. We should pray that God changes the Iraqi President's heart. If he does not, then we can use military force with a clean conscience (to dispense justice – not revenge – for the sake of peace). Genesis 9, Romans 13, etc. tell us that God has approved the use of deadly force against those who will not listen to reason. But we should never be eager for it. Nor is it a necessary evil. It's God's tool for a dangerous fool (in the Biblical sense of the word).

Are we eager to discipline our children? Do we enjoy seeing the poor jailed for stealing? Should we even cheer as a serial killer is being put to death? No. These are three very different & extreme examples, to be sure. But I chose them intentionally to show that the principle is the same. If reason does not prevail, we do what we must, but it is a sad and last resort for those who refuse to keep peace in the world.

Early in my career, I met a soldier who saw no place for religion in the military. I knew what he meant - he was thinking of faith and religion as a crutch for the weak. The military is certainly no place for physical or emotional weaklings. But faith is not a crutch for the crippled – it is a weapon of the warrior!



Look at Caleb and Joshua in Numbers 13 & 14. Their faith brought them courage, built their team, blessed their Commander, and won the battle! Those who would not believe were falling apart! Of the 12 spies who went to spy out the land, 10 focused on the size of the Canaanites and were terrified. Caleb & Joshua focused on God’s promise – ‘Let’s go! We can take ‘em!’ When you know God’s strength, His character, His promises, and have experienced His work in your past, your faith is not blind – it’s wide-eyed and ready to watch God in action!

Their faith also led them to build their team. The unfaithful complained, wanted to break up the team, and even stone the faithful. Moses & Aaron, however, prayed for them. Caleb & Joshua mourned for them and encouraged them. What a contrast! That’s because faith comes from a heart that is filled by the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, look at the impact their faith had on the heart of God. If Moses had not intervened, God was ready to strike them down. But because Moses prayed for them (modeling the need for Jesus, the permanent and perfect Mediator, Who would come later), God forgave them. A father wants to hear the requests of his children! Why should we be surprised that this is true of God?

The real battle for the Israelites (and for us) was not in the desert, however, but in the heart. And when they didn’t learn the lesson, God took them back into the desert for 40 years of Sunday school lessons! Let’s learn the lesson the first time each day and have faith in the One Who is faithful.





Today is my Dad's birthday. If it seems that I've been writing about my family a lot, it's because this time of the year holds several significant dates in my family (and maybe because I miss them). Of all the men I have ever known, my father is still the one I look up to the most. He is

humble, patient, wise, caring, committed – all the things that I think a man should be. Yet, he did not give me everything I wanted when I was growing up.

Saying 'no' or 'not now' is an important part of any parent's vocabulary. Children do not always want what is good for them. In fact, many times they don't even know what is good for them. Our heavenly Father sometimes tells His children 'no' or 'wait', but it is always out of love. He knows exactly what we need and when we need it.

Hebrews 12:8-11 says, "All of us had the fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits, and live?! They disciplined us a short time as they saw fit, but God disciplines us for our good, that we may be share in His holiness. All discipline seems difficult at the time, but later it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

When we follow Jesus, God will say 'no' or 'wait' more than a few times. Rest in His answer. Discipline does not mean that He doesn't love you. On the contrary - it means that He does! Your heavenly Father uses hard times to mold you, strengthen you, and teach you. Think of it as spiritual advanced training or BNCOC. He is prepping you to be rock hard by resting on the Rock than cannot be moved!

A friend of mine came down this week from Germany to check on his soldiers who are attached to us. My friend is a ranking officer in another unit, but more than that, he is a truly, godly man. For months before we deployed, he and I met regularly to encourage each other in the Scriptures and prayer. We have also agreed to hold each other accountable to strive for personal holiness.

The other night, he and I were catching each other up on our families, personal lives, work, etc. I confessed that I had upset a few NCOs by confronting them on some ethical issues. My good brother smiled a little and reminded me that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. He called me to have compassion on all soldiers, even when they’ve done something wrong. *How* we talk to someone is often even more important than what we have to say. If our tone or body language is overly aggressive they may not hear a word of our counsel, as wise as it may be.

How thankful we should be that God is committed to us, even when we do not deserve it. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 says “This is a trustworthy saying: if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

After we prayed together, I looked up the sergeant that I had offended. He was very professional, even though he didn’t know what we coming. When I apologized to him, he not only accepted, he agreed that I should have spoken to him differently. That took courage, and he did it with respect. I may have benefited more from saying “I’m sorry” than if it had never happened.

Jesus was a true friend in the best sense of the word. He bought us at the cost of His own life. Through His work on the cross, we are literally His “blood relatives”. Still, our emotions can get the best of us – tempting us to fear or anger, when either only leads to personal defeat. The next time you or I am tempted to be rude or mean to someone, we must remember that *all* of us are sinners; that we have done the same kinds of things; and God was *merciful* to us. Then we’ll think twice before pronouncing judgment on someone else.



In 2 days, we will be at the ½ way mark to going home - hopefully. Our unit is the only unit in theater with a guaranteed return date because we are scheduled to turn in our birds for the Longbow transition this summer. But we still don't know if we're going to be part of a battle, or if we'll just leave

after 6 months of training in the desert. Not knowing is really getting to us. Many soldiers are standing at an emotional fork in the road, “if this happens, then I will feel . . . , but it that happens . . .”

I find myself at that same fork. If we are sent into the fight, some soldiers will be scared and depressed, and I will have certain kinds of counseling to do. If we aren't used many will be angry and depressed, and I will have a different type of ministry. Really, though, it doesn't matter which road we end up taking. God's commands and promises are the same, regardless of where we are or what we do.

Moses probably wrote Psalm 90 in the desert while Israel was captive in Egypt, or when they were wandering in the wilderness before they reached the Promise Land. Either way, the thing that kept staring him in the face was ***time*** – the difficult times that he had experienced and the question of how he was going to get through the times ahead.

The way Moses saw it, he could look to one of two places to ‘establish the work of his hands’ – other people or God. Verses 2-6 are pretty clear – people aren't around very long - human strength fades. Verses 7-11 remind us that we are also flawed with sin. So Moses asked for 4 things – God's wisdom to make the most of his time, God's compassion to forgive the times that he had failed God, joy in God to face difficulty with inner peace, and to see God working in his life to increase his faith. Don't waste time – work on what He has set before you. And when you've done all you can do, rest in His sovereignty.



I wanted to go to Doha today, just to buy a few things for my family. So yesterday, I double-checked with the ALOC about the departure time and went to bed early so I

would be ready. I even kept myself from falling back into a deep sleep after I got up at 0400 to use the latrine. I did PT and got back in plenty of time, showered quickly, wolfed down breakfast, and was 20 minutes early for the scheduled ride. It had already left 40 minutes earlier.

Sometimes – no matter what we do – things do not turn out the way we would like. There are soldiers here who had military schools, vacation reservations, ACAP hopes, and birthday plans but had to cancel everything. So why does it anger us so much?

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that war within you? You want something, but you do not get it. You kill and covet, but you do not receive what you want. You quarrel and fight. You have not, because you do not ask God. And you ask, but do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend it on your pleasure. You adulterers, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself God’s enemy. Or do you think that the scripture says for no reason ‘the Spirit He causes to live in us envies intensely’? But God gives more grace. That is why the Scripture says, ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” James 4:1-6

What’s the problem? We believe that we should have it our way. But when you believe in God’s goodness, wisdom, and power, it becomes natural to rest – even to be *thankful* – for whatever comes. Things shouldn’t always go our way. In the grand scheme of things, we’re like little children – we don’t even know what is good for us. Praise our heavenly Father that He does.

Generally, most of us make no distinction between faith and hope. Although they are related and sometimes even interchangeable, they are not always the same, however. Faith is personally resting in God, based on what He has done. Hope is also certain, but it is the attitude of leaning forward in the saddle, based on what He has promised to do.

It is exactly at this point that some Christians open themselves to disappointment, depression, and even anger at God – they are not familiar with God’s promises. As we prepare to go to war, it is important to know that God does not promise to spare us from all hardships. In fact, Jesus said, “Whoever does not take up his own cross and follow Me can not be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). Personal sacrifice and hardship will necessarily be part of living for Christ.

On the other hand, God has made us great and precious promises in Jesus. He promises to conform us into the image of His Son by the fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22); He promises to create opportunities to do good works for Him (Ephesians 2:10); He promises to use us to bless others (1 Corinthians 12); He promises to reward us for serving Him (Matthew 10:42); He promises to never leave us or forsake us (John 14); and more. But we must KNOW the promises of God before we can have real hope.

It’s the difference between having a desperate wish for artillery support, versus having a friend in the FSE who knows your position, is in constant communication with you, has the responsibility to cover you, and sees the bigger picture.

If God is our Father, we can have a sure hope, knowing that He will make good on all of His promises in His perfect wisdom, love, strength, and timing.



Now that I’ve driven in the open desert a few times, I really enjoy it. You don’t have to go very fast to have a pretty exciting ride. I told another soldier, “this is more fun than Six Flags (a theme park in North Carolina), and we’re even getting paid!” It wasn’t like that in the beginning, however.

There was a time when I was the only Protestant Chaplain covering about 600 soldiers. Some of those soldiers were about 50 miles out in the desert, and the only landmarks on the way were a series of tracks in the sand. Antone and I were a little nervous the first time. We had a radio and strip map, but no GPS or experience getting there. I kept checking the little compass on my watch and following the tracks of those who had gone before us. It was a very long journey of faith.

Isn’t life in Christ just like that? We have only His Word to tell us how He walked and His Spirit to keep our spiritual compasses in check. But isn’t that more than enough? I can tell you that my assistant and I never got lost. There were a couple of times when we doubted, but we kept driving. We could have given in to our fears and turned back, but we would have looked foolish, having gotten halfway there only to abandon the mission.

What does God have for you to do? Whether your mission is technical support, troop supervision, or firing bullets down-range, simply walk in the footsteps of the One Who went before you. Watch His wisdom; catch His courage; and follow His faith. Stay in His Word so that you know His S.O.P. Listen to His Spirit as He testifies to yours through prayer, fellowship, and worship with other believers. Your faith in Him will be a great adventure!



## *“Halfway To What?”*

*14 Jan*

Lots of soldiers have told me that today is almost halfway, but halfway to what? As a Chaplain, I’ve had a few soldiers come to me over the years wanting help to get out of the military, and I often ask them, ‘are you trying to run to something, or just running away?’ Right now, some soldiers have the goal of simply not being in the desert. Yes, they want to go home so they can start a college course, be with their families, PCS back to the States, and other great things. But if you listen closely, many just want life to be nice to them. Does that strike you as self-centered? It should. We have a duty and opportunity to serve here. We simply can’t focus on what will make us happy.

‘Looking out for #1’ sounds good, but it quickly comes back to haunt you. Imagine being married, sharing an office, or even just carpooling with someone who thinks of himself before he thinks of you. You would quickly grow tired of bowing to the king! No one deserves to have the world revolve around them – well, almost no one. Only God should tell us how to use our time. Only His ‘opinions’ are perfect.

“Do not live any more time in worldly desires, but live for the will of God. We’ve spent enough time trying to satisfy empty cravings, lusts, being drunk, going to wild parties, orgies, and other forms of idolatry. They think it strange that you do not run with them into the same ‘flood of nothingness’, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to Him that is ready to judge the living and the dead.” (1 Peter 4:2-5)

We mustn’t simply spend time in the desert – we must invest it! Let’s work on a specific aspect of our relationship with God; polish our character; help someone else grow; do something great. Only what is done for Jesus will last. Everything else is really just dust in the wind.





I can understand why we put expiration dates on milk, set appointments in our calendars, and plan in advance for birthdays, but why don't we learn (especially in the military) that we can't make promises about the future? We have a little sign hanging below the Task Force sign in our

LSA, "Best if used by 15 April 03". A high-ranking Army official had promised us weeks ago that we would be home by then. I'll believe it when I see it.

In James, the Lord's brother tells us, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and make a profit.' You do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are like a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes. You should say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'. Instead, you glory in your boasting, and that is evil." (James 4:13-16)

Early in my military career, I learned that I can't even tell my wife that I'll be home by 1700 - even though I worked only on a few minutes from the house. From where I am sitting right now, we are about to go to war with Iraq. But I am more than a G.I., who does not own his own life. By faith in Jesus, I am a son of the living God, Who orders my steps! And although I may not be able to make many promises, I can stand tall on His.

What are we doing when we make human promises, or put our faith in them? Aren't we saying that 1) we have the ability to make it happen, 2) we have the right to make it happen, and 3) we have the wisdom to make it happen? In fact, Christians should immediately realize that we strike out on all three. But praise God that our Father does. Walk in His ways and trust Him with your future.



One of the greatest challenges to my soul is controlling myself in the presence of practicing sinners. I can be tempted either to join in or to judge them. Neither is God’s will. All of us are sinners, of course, but let’s just say that some are better at it than others. You probably know someone like that. The Bible calls them fools. I don’t mean it in a judgmental way, but rather a biblical way. A fool is someone who follows their physical instincts rather than the will of God. They know what they should do, but follow their selfish desires instead.

It is especially challenging if you’re trying to serve the Lord and must correct a fool because of your position, rank, or general military authority. I have to remind myself of Proverbs 26:4-5. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will seem wise in his own eyes.” In other words, show him his fault, but do not use his methods.

The ungodly will lie, gossip, yell, be sarcastic, kiss-up, and anything else to be one up on the other person. The godly must honor their Lord to guard His reputation. Our Lord has no reason to guard his image. But we, on the other hand, are constantly in danger of misrepresenting him. And there is probably no greater chance of that than when we are in the presence of those who try to “get your goat”.

In the Old Testament, the goat was used to symbolize a rebel – hence the “scapegoat” for our sin in Leviticus 16. In the Gospels, Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats when He refers to believers and non-believers respectively. Maybe the next time someone tries to “get your goat”, the metaphor will help you remember the source and danger of selfish anger. God’s commands do restrict us, but they are fences of love. They’re there to protect His sheep from harm, even from harming themselves.



Since 11 September 2001, the world has lived under a cloud of terrorism. Even since we've been in Kuwait, Marines have been shot while playing volleyball and unarmed civilians gunned down while sitting at a traffic light. Yet the Iraqis claim to be serving God. Americans claim the same thing, yet we've had our own Beltway Sniper, kidnappers, etc. So whose side is God on?



Joshua 5-6 makes it clear that the Lord does not wave a flag. Jesus is building His own Kingdom, and we need to place our confidence and pledge our allegiance to Him! Chapter 5:10-12 reveal God leading them powerfully out of Egypt into the promise land. We must remember that the battles in our spirits, the fears of combat, and the troubles at home can only be conquered by being faithful to Him.

We can stand firm, but only by His love. God is holy (verse 15), and sometimes we are tempted to focus on our sinful past, but He has removed our shame (verse 9). He strengthens us from within, as shown from placing the Ark of the Covenant in the middle of His people (verse 4). Remember that the Ark contained the original tablets of the 10 Commandments – God's perfect law, but the cloud of His presence appeared over the mercy seat of the Ark. We are undeserving, but our relationship is secure because of His merciful love.

We must move out in His truth. God guarantees victory, but He requires faith in Him (verses 1-5). We should be encouraged that His victory is not about a piece of land - He is building His Kingdom in our hearts. The end of the chapter shows God bringing His promised justice on the wicked and salvation to those who rest in Him (20-25).

Lastly, remember that Kings are not elected. Joshua bowed to the Commander of God's army and called Him 'Lord'. This was Jesus! Let us all bow our hearts and serve Him. The world belongs to Him; the battle belongs to Him; and only what is built for Him will last.

Have you ever heard the saying “familiarity breeds contempt”? When you live in close quarters for over 4 months with the same people you just saw at work, you begin to get on each other’s nerves. It’s easy to make comparisons, too. “I know more about the job than he does. Why is he the leader?” Or the opposite - “Everyone here is better than I am. What do I really have to contribute?” Both attitudes are destructive to team building.



Take a look at 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. It seems that everyone in the church was comparing themselves to each other. In chapter 13, Paul says that all of us have different abilities, but there will be no need for any of them when the Lord comes back – everything will be perfect then. There will be no maintenance – nothing will break, no teaching – all will be revealed, no re-supply – we will have everything we need. Three things will remain, Paul says –faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love. Why is love the greatest? Faith is our rest in **God** has done. Hope is our expectation of what He **will** do. Love is what He calls **us** to do **now**.

The very nature of love is at least two things. But first and foremost, it is action. Often we say, “I love you” when we really mean “I like the way I feel when you do nice things for me.” Biblical love means, “I will do good for you, because I am committed to you under God”. The other part of godly love is its focus. Love will bless the **other** person no matter what it costs the lover.

With that definition, is “love” too warm & fuzzy for soldiering? Absolutely not! We need to truly love in order to watch each other’s back, to go the extra mile when we’re tired, and to set each other up for mission success. God is love, and we need Him to help to love others.

This week, I tried to get my daughter on DEERS again, but without success. Just before we deployed, my wife and I had discovered that she still was not in the system, and we couldn't find her birth certificate to fix the problem. Lauren finally found it and mailed it to me. I immediately took it down to Doha to enroll her. Wouldn't you know it – the system was down. Again!

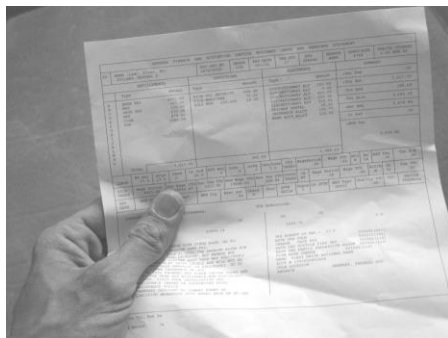
If she is not in DEERS, she will have no medical privileges, no access to an I.D. later, and no insurance benefits if something should happen to me. Her birth certificate is essential to securing her future. Even though she looks like an Army dependant, lives in housing; goes to the commissary and PX with my wife, she's not yet a legal member of the Army community.



In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says “Not every one that says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father Who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?’ And I will tell them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity.’”

I tell you the truth, there will be Sunday school teachers, T.V. evangelist, “Christian” singers, and yes – even Chaplains who will burn in hell. On the surface, they may have looked like they were part of the Body of Christ, but they never had a legitimate relationship with Jesus Christ. That means they spent a lifetime loving themselves - putting their desires above God's.

We could meet our Maker any day, so make sure you're a citizen of heaven. When you're born from above (John 3), the Holy Spirit places His certificate on your heart. If you want to know more, read John 1:12-13, Galatians 5:22-25, & Ephesians 2:1-10



Next month, my wife and I will make the last payment on our van and a set of china. I'm shifting the "extra" money to our DPP payment which will completely end our debt in only a few months. I can almost taste the financial freedom. Our obligations to debt have hindered us from making investments

in a house, giving more to charities, and even the simple pleasures of spending more fun money on my family. Maybe you know the feeling.

Money management is a great illustration of a basic, spiritual truth – everyday, we make choices that reveal our priorities. I can spend a dollar on myself or on my wife, but I have to decide. I can chew the fat with SGT Jones at 0900 or counsel SGT Smith at the same time, but not both. I can use my thoughts to talk with the Lord or to brood in selfish anger – I have to choose. But each time I choose one I have decided to pass on the other.

It's simply a question of investment – what will bring me the best return? Generally, sin appeals to short-term satisfaction. Ironically, the quick fix is always temporary and eventually destructive. Jesus only blesses deeds that are done for His glory.

Listen to His words in Matthew 6:19-21. "Don't store up treasures on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal. Rather store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Only when we shift our investments from selfish interests can we free ourselves to focus on things of lasting importance. Until then, we will be enslaved to rusting and deceptive treasures. We must break free of any destructive and foolish investments. It's never too early to drop a bad habit! Wouldn't you agree?

The final virtue printed on the rim of my Chaplain’s coin is ‘wisdom’. Wisdom is so central to godliness that the Lord inspired the entire book of Proverbs to the subject. Wisdom is more than being smart – it’s knowing what God wants and acting on it.

You may not have much use for psychologists, but God is the perfect counselor, because He knows exactly what makes us tick. He is the ideal listener and advisor, because He designed our souls for relationships. There is no better strategist, because He sees every move the enemy makes and even reads his thoughts.

The soldier who wants to be truly wise will sit at Jesus’ feet. He will meditate on Scriptures that teach us about human nature. The student of God’s Word will reflect on the passages that instruct us in communication, discipline, encouragement, leadership, motivation, goal setting, teamwork, hope, and recovery from failure.

James 1:5-8 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives to all liberally without finding fault and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith, without doubting. For the man who doubts is like a wave driven by the wind, tossed back and forth. That man should not think that he will receive anything of the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

A ‘double-minded’ person wants to have it both ways – to please their desires and still have God’s approval. It doesn’t work that way. Can you imagine ignoring an OPORD for your own plan and expecting a medal?

Wisdom comes from God’s Spirit. If we as Christians grieve His Spirit, we can expect God to withdraw our confidence and peace. If we commit our path to His wisdom, we will secure the success that He has planned for us. When we obey Him, we may stand alone among our peers at times. But we will be standing on a mountain of God’s wisdom and therefore His help.





Our troops knew when we arrived at Ali Al Saleem Air Base that it would be a temporary arrangement. Now we're getting ready to make the jump north to Udairi. Some are apprehensive, and some are excited. Both have their reasons. Moving farther north is another sign that we are

getting ready for battle, but the jump is also one step closer to going home.

We've been in different states of limbo since we got into Kuwait. Almost 2 weeks at Doha began to feel like home. Even before we got to Ali Al Saleem, our leaders were already sending messages of "be ready to jump soon" and at the same time "we could be staying longer". Now, even Udairi could be temporary if we leapfrog behind the Apaches into Iraq. All of us long for the permanence of home.

In 1 Peter 1:1, the Apostle calls Christians "strangers and aliens in the world". As lovers of Christ, we can't make ourselves too comfortable in this world – it's not our home. That doesn't mean that we can't make friends, buy cool stuff, and build a great family. But it does mean that our true family, eternal safety and infinite hope is only with God. As visitors here, we must live with loose hands on our earthly possessions and always be preparing "to jump".

We should look forward to the time when we will be with the One Who truly loves us. I don't have the space to go into all the details here, but I encourage you to take a look at the Scriptures about "the new heavens and new earth." Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we will be floating on a cloud playing harps for eternity. When Jesus returns, He will destroy this world in judgment and recreate a literal paradise on earth. The Lord wants the best home for you, even more than you want it for yourself. Read John 14 if you want to hear more.

The morning we left Al Saleem Airbase, I stopped to make good on a promise. I picked up a small piece of a bunker that had been bombed during Desert Storm. When the Iraqis took over Kuwait and tried to hide their troops and equipment in these bunkers, the British



destroyed them as part of the liberation. My boys collect unique rocks and this was a little like a piece of the Berlin Wall. Every time they look at it, I hope they see a memorial to the danger of earthly hopes and why Dad had to leave them for 6 months to go to the desert.

Memorials remind us of important past events and lessons we learned from the experience. In Romans 12, Paul describes Christians as a different type of memorial. He says we are to be **living** sacrifices for God. A memorial only speaks of what happened in the past. When Paul says, “Therefore, brothers, in light of God’s mercy”, he is certainly calling us to remember what God did for us in the past, but more than that, he is motivating us to daily action.

As a ‘living sacrifices’, Christians are to forfeit their selfish desires to do good for God and others. Then, when others look at us they will see the miracle of God’s changing power in us. We are memorials to the Lord Who is destroying sin and building His kingdom in us.

Are you a living sacrifice to Him? I fail quite often. We must stay in His word and pray for strength, discernment, mercy, and courage. He will create opportunities for us to talk about the God Who changes, directs, and loves us. Even our failures can be a living memorial to the humility, repentance, and commitment that His power is working in us. Statues and monuments are witness of times gone by. Christians are memorials to the living God Who brings hope today. Get to know Him better so that you can make Him known.



In my experience, there are two times when our true colors show most clearly – when things are really going our way and when they’re really not. Hardships can lead to temper or prayer, selfishness or teamwork, lies or confession. Blessings may reveal a spirit of gratitude or greed, humility or boasting, service or complacency.

When our unit prepared to move to from Ali Al Saleem, I saw some colors that concerned me. We had broken down our equipment and loaded it in our vehicles. But it was still pretty cold at night, and one of the teams chose to pack their heater at the last minute to warm their sleep tent one last time. That was fine, except that the only people who slept in the tent were the teams’ highest-ranking soldiers. The junior soldiers slept in the cold. One leader who slept in the tent didn’t even work there, but had no qualms about getting in on the warmth.

I suppose it’s possible that these green-tabbers had asked all of their soldiers if anyone wanted to join them, but I doubt it. They saw an opportunity for comfort and took it. After all, they couldn’t fit the whole unit in the one tent. And doesn’t it come down to the quick and the dead? I don’t think so!

But that is our natural mentality – it’s dog eat dog, a rat race, climbing the ladder of success, every man for himself. You’ve heard all the clichés, but there is a better alternative. Jesus said, “No man has any greater love than this - that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Jesus gave His life to rescue us from the impulse of selfishness and its consequences. If you’re one of His followers, He’s given you a new spirit. Thank Him. If you’re still living for self, go to Him for salvation. The new life that He gives will bless your soul and your team.



Our unit was one of the first units in theater. As such, we were also one of the first units to move into the brand new, northern-most Tactical Assembly Area – Udairi. We had been told that there would be lots of advantages to the new location – a PX on sight, a fast food section of the chow hall, more physical security, and a better arrangement of work and living conditions. Well, that was partially true.

If fact, all of it would be completely true – eventually. When we approached TAA Udairi, I couldn’t see anything because of the 15-foot berm around it, but my expectations were high. I hadn’t had a shower in days, and the thought of a



hamburger was almost overwhelming. As we cleared the ECP, my heart sank. There was nothing here! Hangars were still being built; some were ready to receive the helicopters; and our tents were set up; but that was it.

Had the Command lied to us? No. It just wasn’t ready yet. The blueprints had been drawn; money was already appropriated; contracts had been signed; and the septic tank for our showers had even been dug. Everything was in process. We just couldn’t see much of it. That’s how it often is with the Kingdom of God.

In 1Peter 1:3-5, the Apostle tells us that the price has been paid, but the product is not yet fully revealed. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has given us new birth unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance that can not perish, spoil or fade, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready ***to be revealed in the last time***” (emphasis mine). Hang in there and praise the Lord. He is building His Kingdom in the spirits of His people!



Our unit is still facing the question of whether we're going to be used in the war or not. All of us want to go home, but no one wants to feel that our time here was wasted. Either way, we could have a more basic challenge. Whether we blow the Iraqi army out of the sand or

completely avoid a war, we could still go home disillusioned & divided having lost a more significant battle - bitterness among ourselves.

Our greatest victory will not be decided by what we do, but by how we do it. Some General somewhere will give the order to go to war or to go home, and we will have no say in it. “How”, on the other hand, is where we can make all the difference. If we act as a team, support each other, and persevere through hardship, our communications will improve, going to work will become more enjoyable, teams will get better results, and mere acquaintances will become closer friends. By COB, the little shop of horrors will have become a place of personal victories! Mark my words - how we act under pressure will shape us. And when the Middle East is a distant memory, our awards, DD 214s, and war stories will have little influence on a marriage, children, or peace of mind. But character (good or bad) will have lasting power.

Shape your future, here & now. Listen to others – wisdom will guide you. Give 100% when you're tired – self-discipline will protect you. Do the right thing when no one's looking – integrity will honor you. Encourage each other – compassion will bless you. Work as a team – trust will strengthen you. Voice your concerns – courage will serve us all. Whatever comes, God always honors good character. Whatever comes, we will still face the daily temptation to battle with each other. But if we humble ourselves before God and call on Him for good character, He will greatly bless us – whatever comes our way!



I can already hear my wife when I hug her for the first time in months. “When was the last time you took a shower?!” Ha! When we get back to the house, I’ll probably have to strip at the front door (as much as possible for a Chaplain who lives in stairwell housing). She’s proud of her house, and she wants me there – but she wants me to smell good!

That’s a good picture of the work God has for Christians – wherever we are. The world is God’s house, and

He wants us to be a sweet aroma to the neighbors (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). For example, take a look at Genesis 14:13-24, when Abram came to Lot’s rescue. Abram served God where He led him, and he served Him when he was needed.

Wherever you are, God has placed you with specific talents, for specific people, and in a specific place. There are people with whom you work everyday who need the aroma of your godliness. Or if you are not a Christian, it may be that God has placed you close enough to “smell” a true believer.

Abram also blessed others by living his faith. He trusted God by using what He had given (verses 13-14), and he fought for justice (15-16) not for personal gain or pride. When others see you doing the right thing (especially when you think no one is looking) they will see real integrity. You will bless them through God’s character in you.

Thirdly, Abram honored God by being aware of temptations (17, 21), but praising His Name instead (22-24). He modeled a real, give-and-take relationship with God through a mediator (18-19) - a picture of our salvation in Christ. By His Spirit, you can do the same.

Christians must be a blessing to the neighbors. As a temple of the Holy Spirit, we are literally God’s house, and they are watching His construction. If they like your interior Re-designer’s work, make sure you give them His phone number!

Desert Storm was a breeze (pardon the pun), and this operation is predicted to be equally smooth. Such attitudes can lead to two extremes of confidence. As a Chaplain, both worry me.

A few of our young soldiers have almost no confidence. That is to be expected prior to any war. Fear is natural, particularly when it involves the unknown. But fear can paralyze you, if it goes unchecked. On the other hand, at our BUB tonight, I asked some over-confident soldiers to ensure that their subordinates were preparing for worst-case scenarios. Not that I think the worst will happen, it is simply prudent to be prepared. Over-confidence can get you killed.

It's easy to look at our superior firepower – Apaches, Paladins, Abrams, and Bradleys – and think that this will be a cakewalk. It may be, but Psalm 20:7 reminds us “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” God sets up kingdoms, and He topples them just as easily. There's more at stake here than our own fears or fame. If Hussein tries to hide his weapon systems in urban areas, non-combatants will be killed. If he uses W.O.M.D., we may suffer losses as well.

Our soldiers must remain humble, seek justice for the oppressed, and pray for His mercy. Except for the grace of God, any one of us could have been born in Iraq and be facing the wrath of the United States. We should commit our plans and our hearts to God. I invite you to pray with me:

“Father God, for many of us, this is our first time in battle. You, however, are *the* Veteran in the war on evil. We have the right equipment and the right training, but this is Your cause, Lord. Give us the right attitude. Give us confidence in Your passion for justice; help our troops to rest in Your care; and give us hope in Your strength for victory. Warm our hearts with courage, and let us see Your hand at work so there would be no doubt that You bless those who rest in Your Son, Jesus. I ask this in His Name. Amen!”



Good intelligence is essential to any military operation. Our leaders need to know the facts about our enemies’ strength, location, and potential strategies in order to plan a good defense and attack. This week, an intelligence source prompted a real-world alert.



A report came down that a convoy of approximately 150 vehicles in Southern Iraq was headed toward the Kuwaiti border. Apparently, a fixed-wing pilot had spotted the convoy and relayed its position, speed, and present route to one of our intelligence analysts on the ground. The analyst,

however, projected when and where the convoy **would** present a real threat to our forces, **if** they continued their current speed and route. Somehow, the forecasted potential was relayed as the present situation.

Our Alpha Troop was providing QRF for any threats in Northern Kuwait. They were alerted and ready to go in record time. But before they took off, a new message came down: the convoy was not actually in our area, it could be in our area in several hours if they continued present speed and course. And, by the way, it wasn’t a convoy of vehicles. It was a caravan of camels.

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7, several times He says, “you have heard it was **said** that . . . but **I** tell you . . .” The teachers in Israel had misrepresented God’s Word - intentionally or not, so the people didn’t have the facts about God and His will. What should have been a clear report turned out to be bad intelligence.

What do you **think** you know about God? Someone once tried to blast a Christian with “I don’t believe in God”. The wise believer answered with “Tell me about your god. Maybe I don’t believe in him either.” We mustn’t live our lives based on bad intelligence. Let’s encourage each other to go to the Source. Don’t even take the Chaplain’s word for it. Read it for yourself. God has nothing to hide!



When we were at Ali Al Saleem, we had a few windstorms, but nothing like we've experienced at Udairi. Here we only have cotton tents and a few concrete slabs to block the blowing sand. Even the 15-foot berm that protects us is

*made* of sand. Everything suffers. In the last squall, the computers were in danger of getting clogged; one of the 100-foot Dining Facilities blew down; and our civilians' satellite dish was cargo-strapped to an ISU, but still had to be taken down. It was a powerful reminder of how frail we are and where true strength lies.

Matthew 14:22-31 makes it clear – only Jesus' power is sufficient. “Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on to the other side while He dismissed the crowd. After He dismissed them He went up on a mountain side to pray. The boat was already a considerable distance from shore and began to be buffeted by waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came out to them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It's a ghost!”, they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, ‘Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.’ ‘Lord, if it is You’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’ ‘Come’ He said. Then Peter got down from the boat, walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith’, He said ‘Why did you doubt?’”

Three times, Jesus acted ‘immediately’. He was orchestrating opportunities for his disciples to take action. The person of faith recognizes that he needs help; he sees that help is found in Jesus; and turns to Jesus. See your storms as opportunities. God is able to help.

Because we’ve been in country so long, we are the best-trained, most-knowledgeable, and well-supplied unit around. We’ve faced all the problems of adapting to the desert and found the solutions. We fought for the resources we have, but when other units hear about our MWR tent, abundant water supply, and phone system, we get one of two reactions. Either they are angry and say we have it easy (not realizing how long we’ve been here and how hard our guys worked to get it), or they get really friendly and want to use our stuff.

Our LTC had a great attitude and told us that we should help our fellow soldiers. The Apostle Paul put it this way. “Let’s not grow weary of doing good, for at the proper time, you will reap a harvest, if you do not give up. So then as we have opportunity, let’s continue to do good toward all men, especially toward those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:9-10

It’s so easy to grow weary of doing good, particularly when the pattern seems to be that you are always giving and rarely on the receiving end. Paul reminds us, however, that we will be on the receiving end – at the proper time. My Dad is an avid gardener in SC. He has all kinds of vegetables, flowers, and exotic fruits. He told me once that his Kiwi plant does not bloom until the third year after it’s been cross-pollinated. There’s a lesson in that.

God will bless the spiritual seeds that we plant – in His way and in His timing. 1 Corinthians 3 tells us that some plant, some water, but it is God who makes it grow. Isaiah 55:11 confirms that His word will not fail, but accomplish *His* purpose. Praise the Lord for His work through you! He will bless you for it and use your obedience to bless others. Pass this good news to someone who needs it.





## ***“Beef Enchilada or Bean Burrito?”***

***1 Feb***

If you're a connoisseur of MREs, you know that some are favorites and some never seem to make it out of the box. I was talking with a fellow soldier the other day (who apparently doesn't partake in the festive MRE experience) and he asked me about the difference between the beef enchilada and the bean burrito. I was shocked!

The bean burrito is dry, bland, never heats all the way through, and doesn't even have any goodies to compensate. The main course of the beef enchilada is down right tasty! It also comes with jalapeno cheese and crackers, Mexican rice, *and* a decent dessert. You wouldn't know this, of course, unless you had tried them. The same is true of the joy and peace that Jesus brings. All of us have tried the sinful life. If we're honest, the satisfaction is little and temporary at best. Often it's packaged nicely or is very popular, but it never delivers as advertised. One of the reasons there are so few fired-up 'christians' is that they only know the bean burrito. When born-again Christians pursue a daily relationship with God through faith and obedience, they will taste the good stuff!

Jesus says that when we come to Him that He will give us an *abundant* life. But, of course, you don't know how good the life is until you “taste and know that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8). In John 7:17, the Lord said, “If any man *does* the will of God, he will *know* if My teaching is from God or if I speak of My own authority.” In other words – taste. Sink your teeth in. The proof is in the pudding!

Most of us don't like change. It's more comfortable to avoid the stress of the unknown. But if the life we're living is stealing our joy, strength, and wisdom, wouldn't it be wise to try something different? Let's take that daily step of faith. Let's trust and obey Him today. Believe it or not, leaving your old life to follow Jesus is even smarter than putting back the bean burrito and picking up the beef enchilada!



Our Commander held a formation this week to announce what most of us had already guessed: we're here for the duration of the fight. That will probably mean at least seven months for 2-6 proper. Our slice elements (AVIM, signal, medivac, ATC, etc.) could be here even longer. I'm not the only one who was



hoping to make a birthday, family vacation, or just to be home by the six month mark. But what can we do? The powers that be have decided that they need us too much to send us home.

At times we may feel like giving up because God decides to have His way. Actually, God's control should bring hope, not frustration. Proverbs 16:1-3 reminds that we don't have control over our mouths at times. "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; But the Lord weighs the heart. Commit your works unto The Lord, and your purposes shall be established." Because we lack self control, can you imagine what life would be like if we always had our way? Verses 4-6 encourage us that God will work justice for the wicked and salvation for the humble. "The Lord has made everything for its own end; even the wicked for the day of evil. The Lord detests the proud in heart. Rest assured, they shall not go unpunished. By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for; And by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil."

In the mean time, we can rest and rejoice in His control over matters. Look for His miracles and be content with what He gives. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness, than much gain with injustice. A man's heart devises his way, but the Lord directs his steps." (verses 7-9) Focus on your godliness and your responsibilities. Leave control to God. It's His lane anyway, and He's fully qualified!



Before the Stop/Loss took effect, some soldiers returned early for PCS, schools, etc. On the other extreme, many of our slice elements have now discovered that they may be staying here for up to a year. It's caused some unnecessary jealousy. Listen to Jesus' teaching on humility & submission to authority.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a land owner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. When he had agreed with

the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them to work. He went out about 0900, and saw others standing in the marketplace and said, ‘Go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ And they went. Again he went out about 1200 and 1500, and did the same. About an hour before COB, he went out, and found others standing. He said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day?’ They said, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘Go into the vineyard’. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers, and pay them their wages, starting from the last to the first’. When those who were hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a shilling. And when the first came, they thought that they would receive more; but they too received a shilling each. And when they received it, they complained against the owner, saying, ‘These men spent only one hour, and you gave them the same as us who bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he answered and said, ‘Friend, I have not wronged you. Didn't you agree to work for a shilling? Take what is yours and go. If I want to give the last the same as first, isn't my right, since it is my vineyard and my money? Or are you jealous, because I am being good to them?’ So the last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:1-16)

When God sets up circumstances that are beyond our control, we should not only trust Him. We should be happy for each other.

For me, one of the most painful parts of this deployment has been confronting unethical soldiers. I prefer to be the good guy. Of course, “the good guy” is a myth in a sense. Jesus clearly taught that sin must be addressed. But He also said that we should be humble and serve those around us.

The pressures of being in the desert have made me very aware of my pride, temper, and moral cowardice. Some might say that sins of attitude are not so bad, but sin is sin. Jesus said that we are to be holy, because what starts in the heart eventually wants to come out.

For example, yesterday I walked into the little shower trailer. As I was getting all my hygiene items ready, I realized that a soldier from a new unit had been running the water for over 5 minutes. We’re authorized one shower every 72 hours, and there are signs all over the walls instructing us to “get wet, turn the water off, lather up, rinse off, get out” to conserve water. These guys had been in



country for mere days; they stand in front of us in the phone line ‘needing’ to talk to their spouses; and now this. I fumed in my soul, but began to pray.

I could have said nothing (and sinned quietly in my anger). I could have blown up at the guy and just sinned right in his face. Or I could tactfully remind him to do the right thing and risk him thinking that I was a “goody, goody”. I took the latter risk. I know that my response is my responsibility. Ephesians 4:21-26 reminds us “. . . you know the truth that was taught to you in Christ Jesus, that you must put off the old man, which is being corrupted by the lusts of the flesh and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on the new man, created by God in righteousness and holiness. Stop lying and speak truthfully to each other, for we are all members of one Body. In your anger do not sin, and do not let the sun go down on your anger.”



The sand here is unreal. It’s as fine as flour and feels almost silky, especially when the wind blows the lighter sand in from the desert. It would be an awesome sight – if I could just watch it on TV. But that sand and wind invades our tents, our cots, even closed footlockers.

We breathe it all day and all night and cough it up in the morning. Everyone one of us wakes up coated in it. It’s terrible.

Jesus often warned His disciples about another spreading horror. He called it the “yeast of the Pharisees”. If you’re not familiar with breads, yeast is that stuff that makes the dough rise. It’s powerful and only takes a little to completely invade the bread, much like the desert sand in our tents. The yeast that Jesus was referring to was the Pharisee’s pride and hypocritical teaching.

When a person insist that they are always right, focus on their desires, criticize others’ mistakes, and yet doesn’t ‘walk the talk’, it’s like that sand or yeast. It infects everything. They become angry when they don’t get their way. They spend so much time worrying about what will make them look good, that they do not see the needs of those around them. I know - I’ve been there. If you know that self-righteousness is invading your spirit, let the following prayer guide you.

“Lord, You know my heart even better than I do. I want to trust You more than I trust myself, but I am struggling with pride. God, my anger, bitterness, and fears are eating at my spirit, and I need Your help. Change my heart, O God. Take my pride and give me Your Spirit. Please forgive me for what I have said, done, and even thought. Your Word says that Jesus died to take the punishment that sinners like me deserve. Open my heart to rest in what He did, so I can live for You. I ask in Jesus’ Name - Amen.”



One of the ministries I provide in the field is to bring candy around to the soldiers. I have a moral theme that matches each piece to encourage them or give them something to think about. When I give out M & Ms, for example, the thought for the day is, “remember to take care of your *Mission* & your *Men*”; little 3 Musketeers bars are “all for one and one for all”; sticks of gum stand for “be flexible”; blow pops are “when life gives you a lickin’, it’s

what’s inside that counts”. You get the picture. It usually brings a laugh and helps them think about what’s important.

Scripture is full of references to God’s truth reflected in nature. One of my favorites is Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:25-33. “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. Consider the birds of the air. They do not sow, reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you much more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add to his life? And why are you worried about clothes? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not work or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of them. If God clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is gone tomorrow, won’t He much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘Where shall we get clothes?’ For the Gentiles go chasing after all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Do you see the birds & grass in the desert? God values you much more than them. Take care of your duties today, and God will get you what you need for tomorrow. Just remember that His mission is godliness, not necessarily comfort - and that’s your thought for the day!



This week, the Chaplains and Assistants in our Regiment trained on CED (Critical Event Debriefs) - a group technique for soldiers who have experienced a traumatic loss. It is designed to help them gently lance emotional or psychological infections.

One of the assumptions behind CED is that soldiers often will not talk about traumatic events. They may believe that it's not manly to express themselves; they may be so busy taking care of others that they do not take care of themselves; but most probably, they just don't know how to grieve.

Psychological studies show that people who internalize anger, fear, and depression are more likely to succumb to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder later. In other words, if they don't deal with it now, it could paralyze them later. God has a simple answer – get it out. Voicing our emotions and thoughts are basic to reflecting the image of God. In Genesis, we read that God “spoke” the world into existence; in the Gospels, Jesus is called the “Word” of God; the entire book of Psalms are the saints praises and cries to God; throughout the Scriptures, God instructs us in how to communicate with Him and each other. Talking to each other is essential in order to have healthy relationships.

Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 4: Eph 4:25-30. “Therefore, stop lying and speak truthfully to each other, for we are members one Body. Be angry, but do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. And do not give the devil a foothold . . . Let no corrupt speech come out of your mouth, but only what as is helpful, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit, in Whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption.”

Don't hold it in. Talk to a friend. Write your thoughts down in a journal. See the Chaplain. Or better yet, go straight to the Lord. You won't find a more compassionate person, and He's *the* great Listener!

As I made my rounds the other day, I heard one of our guys say, “Brown boony cap and BDUs. There’s # 24.” I wasn’t sure what they were talking about until they asked me, “Chaplain, do you want to see our list of how to recognize the new guys?” Some of the things were pretty hilarious: “they’re still afraid of scorpions”; “they’re willing to stand in line to brush their teeth (we just spit in the sand)”; “they complain that the forks break when eating their lobster”; and “they practice bound and overwatch while wearing full battle rattle” even though there is virtually no threat here. These are all things we went through months ago. Wisdom and growth come by experience and change. If we keep the same habits and do not learn as we go, we stunt that growth.



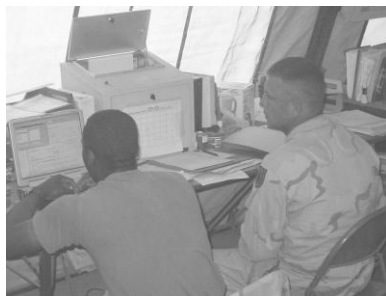
New Christians have a different set of traits that make them easy to spot. They’re open about their passion for God, and they have undergone obvious changes from bad habits to glad habits. But why do so many lose those traits? If a Christian can’t see the changes in their life, they should to take a close look in the mirror.

In 2 Peter 1:5-9, the Apostle says, “For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. If you have these things in increasing measure, you will not be idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who lacks these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins.”

If you are growing in the character of God, praise Him for the work that He is doing in you. If you’re not, are you sure that you trust Him? Orange trees bear oranges; apple trees bear apples; Christians bear Christ-like character. What fruit are you bearing? You may need to look at Galatians 5:19-25 and talk to God about it.



My last few days have been a mad rush of memos, signatures, and tearing through the desert in search of a working fax. Last October, the Regimental Chaplain notified me that I was coming up for V.I. When Army Chaplains approach the 5<sup>th</sup> year of their commission, they must request Voluntary Indefinite status. In short, their chain of Command (all the way to the MACOM level) must agree to keep them on active duty. This was important, and I was running out of time.



Often, it is difficult – even impossible – to tell if a hardship is from God or from Satan. The former might be to test our faith, and the latter would be to derail it. In fact, it could even be both.

“One day when the angels of God presented themselves before the Lord, that Satan also came among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, ‘From where have you come? Then Satan answered the Lord, ‘From going back and forth in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and turns away from evil.’ Then Satan answered the Lord, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Haven’t You put a hedge around him, his house, and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his prospers in the land. But stretch forth Your hand now and touch all that he has, and he will renounce You to Your face’. And the Lord said, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not touch the man himself.’ So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.” Job 1:6-12

The question shouldn’t be, ‘who is doing this?’ The real question is, ‘how am I going to respond – with faith and obedience or with anger and fear? Even when the Father sent His Son to the cross, Jesus trusted and obeyed. God is good in all that He does – even when we do not understand His ways. Trust & obey.

You know the old saying “you never know how much you miss something until it’s gone”. That has definitely been true about my feelings for my wife. Today marks 4 months since I’ve talked with her face-to-face. My Lauren is the best woman I know. All the things that originally attracted me to her are still there, times ten.



Her heart is full of compassion for those who hurt; she laughs so easily with those who laugh; and her mind races for ways to tell others about the goodness of God’s truth. She is constantly thinking of ways to raise our kids more wisely, make our house run more smoothly, and meet the needs in our community more efficiently. She is a beautiful, funny, affectionate, intelligent, and godly woman.

Genesis 2:23-25 says, “And the man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore, a man will leave his father and his mother, and will cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’ And they were both naked and were not ashamed.”

It is wonderful to be married to someone who wants to please the Lord more than she wants to please me. But by God’s grace, as we grow closer to Him, we are also growing closer to each other. I have full confidence in her because of her spirit. I know that she will try to do her best toward our children, our finances, our house, our friends, and our marriage.

If you’re married, give thanks for your spouse. If the two of you need some work, put your efforts toward pleasing God first. Then you will value and serve each other as He commands, even when you don’t feel like it. If you’re single and thinking about marrying, make sure their priorities are straight. If you’re dating someone who doesn’t love the Lord, it’s probably because they love themselves more than anyone else. Take your time and choose wisely. Read His Word for guidance.



I’ve never been a great fan of the media, although I’ve enjoyed getting to know our embedded reporter, Steve. Generally, magazines, papers, T.V. and radio stations are funded by investors. That biases their reporting. The fight for the best ratings naturally influences them to focus on the sensational news – sometimes, even reporting an event out of

context to make it more appealing.

A well-known broadcaster from one of the big three television networks was at Udairi today. Please understand that, although our helicopters have logged a lot of hours in maintenance and orientation flights lately, they haven’t flown a training mission (much less fired live ammo) in weeks. But to give the reporter something to talk about, a display was arranged so his crew could film us “training”. It wasn’t newsworthy to report repairs on our birds, load plans for our vehicles, and maintenance on our weapons and masks. Life’s been pretty dull here for about a month. But that doesn’t sell airtime.

In Paul’s letter to his student of the faith, the Apostle urges him to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – no matter what they want to hear. “Preach the word, in season and out. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but, wanting to have their ears tickled, will turn to teachers who tell them what they want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and turn aside unto fables. But be sober in all things; be willing to suffer hardship; do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:2-5)

The Bible pulls no punches. In it, God tells us the good news as well as the bad. He isn’t trying to win friends or boost His ego, so we can trust Him to be straight with us. He has nothing to loose, but we have everything to gain. Let’s start reading the good news again!

I was reminiscing about the comforts of Ali Al Saleem today, particularly the shower facilities we used to have. There were no facilities to begin with, but since we knew we could be there for months, most of our guys built their own. They found scrap wood at a local dump, scrounged some nails, and up went “hobo village”, as we called it later. Soldiers got pretty creative with some of them. They constructed floors out of wooden pallets so the water could drain through. A few soldiers added extensions onto their showers so they could change clothes. One even had a long, wooden boardwalk that joined it to a gazebo with wooden chairs and a round table, under a camouflage net. It was pretty impressive.



After about a few weeks, however, winter began to set in. It wasn't unbearable, but the desert winds made it pretty cold to take a shower. Not too long after that, the showers started to stink. There was no drainage system, and the ooze we were washing off of our bodies simply collected under the floors. It became less and less pleasant to take a shower.

The hobo village was a great illustration of the imperfect nature of anything this world has to offer. Anyone who has tried to find total fulfillment in a human relationship, a career, a hobby, etc. knows that disappointment is around every corner. This world was never meant to give us personal value, inner strength, satisfaction, or purpose.

In Matthew 6:20-21, Jesus said, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” We must choose wisely. Our decisions will have lasting impacts and should be right in God's eyes. It's more than a matter of personal peace - it's matter of spiritual life and death.

You remember the hobo village. Just before we moved from Al Saleem to Camp Udairi, we were told that our custom-built showers either had to come down, or they would be bulldozed. A lot of soldiers were confused and even angry. The Marines were coming in right behind us. We figured that they would appreciate having them.

In fact, long before we had even heard of Ali Al Saleem, the piece of land TF 2-6 had been using was promised to about 5,000 Marines. The land was theirs, and they had already designed blueprints for a long-term camp, and our shaky, stinking showers stalls were not part of their plan.

Again, the hobo village teaches us an important spiritual truth. It's entirely possible to invest a lot of time, energy, and passion in a project that God will not honor. If we want our efforts to count, we need to ask ourselves, “what is ***God's*** grand design?”



After all, He owns everything, and He's going to do ***His*** good will in the end!

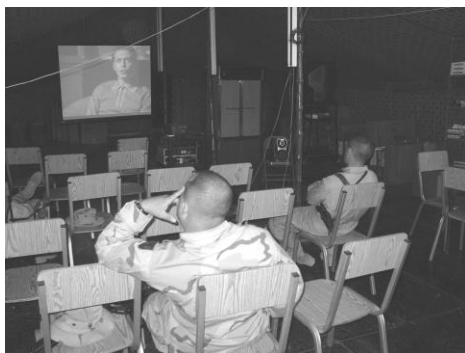
In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them shall be like a wise man, who built his house on the rock. The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall. For it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them shall be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

What can you do or say that will have a lasting, godly impact today? Remember His grand design. Look into the blueprint of His Word. By His wisdom and power you can be a part of His work.

There are a lot of things that stir our passions. I love good Mexican food. I love to sit on my porch at home on a cold night with a cup of hot coffee and stare at the stars. I love to tickle my children and chase them through the grass in my bare feet. I love to gaze into my wife’s eyes and talk with her about anything – big or small.

At times, depending on how I feel, each of these passions fight for the # 1 position in my heart. That should tell us something about the fickleness of love, shouldn’t it? In fact, that’s more “like” than love. True love is defined more by action than feelings. When we have to choose between two things, then we reveal where our treasure lies.

It may not seem that we choose other things and other people over the Lord, but we do it all the time. If I stuff my face with burritos to the point that I am almost sick, I have loved myself more than God’s command to be self-controlled. If I ignore my wife’s calls to help her in the house, and



I sit in front of the TV for another hour anyway, I have loved myself more than God’s command to bless my spouse. You get the picture.

In Matthew 10:34-39, Jesus said, “Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. A man’s enemies shall be in his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me. And he that does not take his cross and follow after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that finds his life shall lose it; and he that loses his life for My sake shall find it.”

The Lord didn’t come to necessarily make our lives easy. He came to make us holy. We need to help each other to make the right choice.

‘Getting light’ has been the theme for the past couple of weeks. I was truly surprised at how much I had accumulated in my sleep tent. Of course, I’ve already put my cold weather gear in my ISU. It’s already getting warm now. I also mailed home pounds and pounds of books, gadgets, extra clothes, snack foods, souvenirs, and more.

SPC Antone and I loaded our HMMWV with our tent, religious re-supply kits, and 5 days of water and MREs for 4 people, per Command guidance. That took a lot of space. Then we had to decide what we were going to take in our ruck and A bag. I thought the SCO was gracious and wise to not dictate a packing list. Our TACSOP has one, and it’s well disseminated, but he left the decision to us. If a soldier wanted to sacrifice a few pairs of underwear to take some extra poagie bait, that was his choice – but he would have to live with his decision.

The packing process reminded me that life is a series of decisions and consequences. There are only so many hours in a day, and we can’t do everything. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-13 Paul says, “According to the grace of God that was given to me, I laid a foundation as a wise, master builder, and another has built on it. But let each man be careful how he builds on it. For no other foundation can be laid than what has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man’s work will be revealed. For the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test each man’s work for what it is.”

Life is full of decisions. Let’s make sure that ours are ones that will please the Lord and have lasting value. None of us needs to carry unwanted baggage. It just slows us down in the race of life. Maybe you & a buddy can talk about spiritual priorities and readiness. A smart packing list of spiritual priorities can make all the difference.



A lot of us have had what we call the Kuwaiti Crud - chills, aches, congestion, etc. At first, I thought it was from the smallpox vaccine, but some soldiers came down with it before the shot. Others got it weeks afterward. The symptoms vary, but it's been going around pretty well, and it seems to be



contagious. Almost everyone in our tent has had it.

Habits can be as contagious as a virus. If you're a Christian, you must be kind to everyone, but you have to choose your close friends carefully. Paul calls it being “yoked together”. A yoke is a device that farmers use to bind together two oxen, mules, etc. so that they pull in the same direction. Listen to his words in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers: for what do righteousness and iniquity have in common? What fellowship is there between light and darkness? And what does Christ share with Belial? Or what does a believer and an unbeliever share? And what agreement does a temple of God have with idols? We are temples of the living God. As He said, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk in them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate’, says the Lord, ‘Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’”

It's good to be friendly with others at work & your community. But when we're looking for someone to refresh our souls, guide us with their wisdom, and share in our families, we must choose wisely. There are only three kinds of relationships: either we are sharing as equals, leading, or being led. We should lead our unbelieving friends as much as they're open to the gospel, but guard our hearts against catching any spiritual “crud”.



I’ve seen a few strange sights on Udairi lately. As I was walking over to another LSA yesterday, I saw some soldiers getting out of their HMMWVs after a mission, and they took the whip antennas with them. On the way back to my area, I noticed that two water buffalos from another unit had triple-stranded concertina wire around them. Later, I discovered why. In our BUB that night, the S4 advised securing our stuff because of several recent thefts – antennas, mounts, water, MREs, and other supplies.



It’s a practical measure, but it’s a sad reality that we have to protect our equipment from being stolen by other American soldiers. This is just one example of why it is so important to understand human nature. The Bible is clear that all mankind is prone to sin. Christians need to be cautious of putting our precious spiritual “resources” out there for just anyone to abuse. The Lord said, “Do not give holy things to dogs, and do not cast your pearls before pigs. Otherwise, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6)

The vulnerable parts of your heart, time with your family, and careless confessions of your sin are just some of the “pearls”. These types of things should not be entrusted to someone who does not love your Lord. You don’t need to put up concertina or guards, but a guarded mind will wisely choose Spirit-filled friends as confidants.

Whenever I find myself choosing to spend a lot of your personal time and family time with non-believers, I know that I’m at risk. Ask God to show you a Christian who can meet those needs, and start watching for them now. Choose wisely. Remember, when it comes to your spirit, you’re dealing with pearls!

I experienced something strangely wonderful tonight. I went out to my HMMWV to get a pair of poly pros from my footlocker, and a guard stopped me to ask “Is that your vehicle?” It’s good to know that someone out there is guarding my stuff. I can’t be there all the time, and we’ve had some thefts. I sleep better at night, knowing that my go-to-war gear is safe and sound.

There used to be times in my life that I worried about my spirit’s safety. I couldn’t sleep at night, wondering, ‘if I lose my temper, will God love me less?’ and ‘what if I never get control of complaining?’ Paul gives us a great comfort in 2 Timothy 1:12 “ . . . I am not ashamed; for I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him until that day.” It’s not our strength, our love, or our wisdom that guards our spirits. It is Jesus Himself. That doesn’t mean that we have no responsibility to avoid temptation or to grow in our knowledge of Jesus and obedience to Him. We simply don’t rest in our abilities. We rest in God’s.

Think of it this way. When God calls me to serve at another post through my next PCS orders, I still have to make appointments with transportation, enroll my children in the new school, get my family in the car, and drive there. But only He can guard the opening for my next job, give my children the teachers they need, and hold my van together while I’m driving my wife to our new house.

In fact, I can act confidently only because I know that He has built a wall of protection around me. Nothing can touch me unless it is His good will. Through blessing and hardship, He guards my path. He daily forms my soul through teaching, blessing, and discipline to mold me into His image. Praise the Lord that the Guardian of our hearts works night and day!



God does have a sense of humor. I had prepared a message on the sovereignty of God for tonight’s service. Little did I know how much the devil was going to try to preach against me! For almost three weeks, the third Dining Facility tent had been used only for religious services. Last night, however, the cooks started using all three to feed soldiers. That was fine – it’s the main purpose of the building – but it made me wonder about the status of the Sunday night service.

My supervisory Chaplain looked into it, and we had to push the service time back from 2030 to 2130 – pretty late for church, but better than having no service at all. My assistant put up multiple signs in every dining tent Saturday night, but about 1500 on Sunday we found out that another Chaplain had arranged to secure the original 2030 time slot for us. In the meantime, everyone who had come to breakfast saw the conflicting signs. Attendance was down by about 60% that night. Even while I was preaching, TCNs (third country nationals) were pushing chairs and tables around, trying to sweep. And the helicopters and artillery sounded like they were on top of the tent. It was a mess.

I had to laugh when I announced the subject of the message. Psalm 46:1-4 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear - though the earth shakes and the mountains tumble into the heart of the seas, though the oceans roar and foam from the mountain’s quaking. There is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God - the holy place of His temple.”

The D-Fac settled down after a few minutes, and the people He led there heard His gospel. Even when everything looks crazy around us, open your arms & face the ‘chaos’ with a smile. God is always on the throne!



Our sister Squadron had a “Sing around the Flagpole” recently. Chaplain Celeste Robb hosted the event, in which about a dozen soldiers led us in patriotic songs, Christian hymns and praise songs. It was a great night of fun and worship. One of the soldiers, CW3 McGee



sang a song he had written, entitled ‘A Soldier’s Mind’. The music and lyrics powerfully communicated soldiers’ dilemmas of duty and pain, strength for war and prayers for peace. It was a truly moving piece.

In the last stanza, Mr. McGee began to sing about another Soldier on a battlefield – Jesus warring for our souls. The strength He displayed on the cross, the prayers for our peace, and the blood He shed on our behalf were those of a fighting man. As a recent booklet describes, He really is ‘the world’s greatest Soldier.’

Paul, too, describes our spiritual struggle as that of a warrior. In 1 Timothy 6:12-13, he calls his young student of the faith to “Fight the good fight of the faith and take hold on eternal life, to which you were called. You made your good confession in the sight of many witnesses. I charge you in the sight of God, Who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, Who, while testifying before Pontius Pilate, made the good confession.”

There is good reason that God’s word talks about the Christian’s armor, the battles within our soul, and our flesh and spirit warring against each other. We are at war! But the greater truth is that Jesus is not only our Commander, He is our Champion. We need to sharpen our minds out of love for your Savior, and when our weapons of spiritual warfare seem dull, we need to cry out for His help. He is always there to defend and strengthen those Who trust in Him.

I REALLY miss my wife. It's been over 4 months since I've seen her beautiful smile or enjoyed her silly laugh. She is refreshment to my soul. Our FRG sent a videotape of several families talking to their soldiers. I watched my family nine times! I miss them so much, and at the end of her video, I could tell by a quiver in Lauren's lip that she missed me, too.

Some commentators say that Song of Songs is a symbolic story of Jesus' love for the Church. That sounds very spiritual, but equally insane. Parts of the book have such strong sexual innuendoes that many Jewish traditions did not allow them to read it until they were 30 years old!

In 2:1-5, we hear part of the lovers' passion. "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am sick from love."

It grieves me to hear soldiers say things like, "what happens on TDY, stays on TDY". Of course, what they mean is, 'I won't tell your spouse if you don't tell mine'. A Christian should be single minded in his or her love for their spouse.

If you struggle with faithfulness, find another believer to encourage you and hold you accountable. Pour your energies into writing letters to them. Express your love and ask how they're doing. Pray for strength – your marriage and family should reflect the purity and unity of Christ and His Church. Read Ephesians 5 for more on what God expects from you and how you can build your marriage.



This week, we learned that a Blackhawk went down in a tragic accident that claimed the lives of the entire crew. Some were married and had children. The parents of the others will bury their children – a mother and father’s worst nightmare. Most of us expect casualties in battle, but we’re never ready for four deaths during training.

In situations like these, soldiers often ask ‘how could God have allowed such a thing?’ or ‘if God really cares, why didn’t He stop this?’ I’ve never even tried to answer those questions. We simply do not know all of God’s ways. I tend to think that even if He explained everything to us, our feeble brains could not begin to understand. That does not mean that there are no answers, however.

Although we cannot understand all of God’s ways, I find peace and understanding in the life of His Son. I know that God does not play games with Jesus, yet we see Him experience the conflict of good and evil, too. In John 11, Jesus is told that His good friend, Lazarus was dying in a nearby town. The Lord deliberately delayed going, so that the people would witness an even greater miracle when Jesus raised a man who had been dead for four days. Jesus also KNEW that He was going to raise Lazarus, yet He wept when He saw his grave. At the end of the same Gospel, Jesus KNEW that His Father would raise Him from the dead, but He still sweat blood and asked His Father if there was another way. God doesn’t play games with His Son.

But the greatest proof is in Jesus’ persecution, death and resurrection. If He could have done it a better way, He would have. God submitted His Son to this world, knowing that He would be beaten, rejected and killed – to take ***my place***. That helps me. Even when I can’t understand all of His ways, I know that He is still good.



Is an 8 oz glass with 4 ounces of water half empty or half full? Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Chances are, you just answered, “I’m a realist.” All of us tend to think that our way of thinking is the right way. The fact is, however, we simply look for ‘facts’ to feed the beliefs that we’re already chosen. Some find the silver lining in every cloud, while others can find imperfections in anything.

It is said that there are two kinds of birds over the California desert – the vulture and the hummingbird. The vulture searches the desert floor for a stinking, maggot-infested carcass. Then he settles on it and enjoys a rancid lunch. The hummingbird flies over the same land, but looks for a beautiful cactus flower. When he locates the blossom, he lingers in the front of the flower and drinks its sweet nectar. The two are very different types of birds in search of two very different meals, but both find exactly what they are looking for.



So it is with each of us. This world is full of sin and salvation, ugliness and beauty. Of course, Christian must deal with the sin around us, but we are not to focus on it, much less make a meal out of it. Paul has some great counsel for us in his letter to the Philippians. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, if anything is noble, if anything is right, pure, lovely, or of good report, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think on such things.” (4:8)

There is a lot of truth in the statement, ‘happiness is a choice.’ When we’re looking for something to feed on, we must shop carefully. There is plenty to complain about here in the desert, but even more to praise God for, pray about, or give thanks for. Have your fill, but watch what you feast on. Typically, it’s ‘garbage in, garbage out.’

Five weeks ago, I sent in a big bag of laundry through “the system”. I’m coming to understand the stigma of that phrase. Every time our supply guys brought the bags back, I went through them looking for my clothes. Nothing. After three weeks, I gave up. We have a claims process, so I can get most of the stuff I lost through military clothing. The only thing I was sweating was the fact that I lost about 10 pairs of briefs. If we go to battle, water will have to be used for drinking first, personal hygiene second, and washing clothes dead last. I had a real problem and needed to fix it – soon.

We’ve had a PX set up for a couple of weeks now, so I thought they might have underwear. Today, I waited in line for over an hour to get inside (not too bad, considering some have waited for 5 hours). When I got to the clothing section, they only had three packs of briefs, and they were too big. I had a decision to make – get what I need, or pass because it wasn’t to my standard. Have you ever been deployed and short of underwear? You know that I got them!

In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul writes to a church, “I am not asking you for anything. For I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. I know how to deal with poverty, and I know how to deal with

blessing. In every situation, I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I am filled or hungry, blessed or poor. I can do all things in Christ Who strengthens me.”

God does not promise to fill our wants. But He will give us what we need to accomplish our spiritual mission - do His good will. We should be content with that, because there is truly nothing more rewarding. What does He have for you to do today? Discern between what you want and what you need. Then work with what He has given.





Comparing our workloads to other soldiers' duties is natural. It's natural, but it's not realistic. Sure, soldiers of the same rank and same MOS should usually pull the same weight. But even that is not always true. Soldiers are rarely exactly the same. One may have an additional duty or another may be off that day. Comparing each other is not even “apples and oranges”. It's closer to Apaches and Dump Trucks – we have a completely different mission, responsibility, training, risk, etc.



I think it would be helpful if we all tried getting up at 0300 every morning to prepare a meal for 400 soldiers – most of whom rarely say ‘please’ or ‘thank you’. Or how would it feel to be a wheel mechanic in a unit when rotor stables are always given precedence? Put yourself in the shoes of the pilots, who are the only soldiers in the Task Force whose job necessarily puts them face-to-face with the enemy. How would you counsel a family that was being investigated after their baby died of SIDS? Think how it must be for senior NCOs to prepare young soldiers who have never been to combat. Or imagine working the night shift all alone for 26 weeks.

Galatians 6:3-5 says “If anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one should test his own work, and then he will take pride in himself, not comparing himself to his neighbor. For each man should bear his own burden.” God has assigned each of us our lot in life. Some must lead. Some have long hours. Some jobs are monotonous, and some are technical.

You may be familiar with the concept of ‘synergy’. One horse may be able to pull 8,000 lbs; another can pull 9,000; but together they can pull over 30,000 lbs. So it is with teams. No matter who's working beside you, when each of us pulls our own weight, great things happen. Let's not compare. Let's cooperate!

As our squadron waits to LD, there are many who look forward to the glory of battle. We may define it differently – working together through impossible times, “x” number of kills, or simply getting through it – but most would agree that war is strangely energizing. The question that Christians should ask themselves is, “what is glory and to whom should it go?”



‘Glory’ is not a word that most of us use outside the Sunday school classroom, so maybe we should define it. In Hebrew (the language in which the Old Testament was originally written), the word means ‘weight’. At times our culture still uses the idea of giving someone weight. ‘He’s a B.M.O.C.’ (big man on campus) ‘Homes is fat!’ ‘That’s heavy!’ etc. All of these describe something great, powerful, or important enough to deserve our attention.

God reminds us that only He deserves our full attention. Only He should receive all glory. ‘Weight’ should be assigned to Him, and to Him alone. Battle is simply one more part of life that belongs to Him. The Lord is not an ego-maniac - He simply knows that the best thing He can give us is Himself. Like any good parent, He loves His children enough to make them do things the right way. After all, what kind of parent lets a 10 year-old struggle in his limited wisdom and strength?

The Lord will go to great lengths to ensure that He gets the glory, too. “And the Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many people for Me to defeat the Midianites. Israel might boast that their own strength has saved them.’” (Judges 7:2) How did God ensure that He would get the glory in Gideon’s battle? He weeded the troops from 32,000 down to 300 who trusted Him. And why did He do such a strange thing? So that Israel would rest and rejoice in Him alone. When we trust in God, we go to Him for wisdom, for strength, for hope, and we are not disappointed. Because He should get the glory, He will help you to live for Him. He wants to set you up for godliness for His Name’s sake.

Exactly one week ago, I preached a message on the sovereignty of God. Ironically, to help me study for the message a fellow Chaplain had given me a book in which the author made a thought-provoking statement: “If all the gambling joints, porn shops, and bars burned down tonight, many Christian would praise God on the spot. What if every church burned down? Is God truly in control, or does He only take credit for the good times?”



Ironically, this morning between the Protestant and Catholic services, all five of our Dining Facilities/Chapels actually burned to the ground. Thankfully, no one was hurt. Was God in charge? Absolutely. We know that Job’s hardships and Paul’s thorn in the flesh were part of God’s good plan. He is the

King, although we tend to think that we have it all under control.

What are we supposed to get out of this recent setback? He may be telling us to slow down and re-evaluate the true source of security and success. In Psalm 46:6-11, God gets the attention of people who were racing around in self-confidence. “The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved, then He uttered His voice and the earth melted. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Come. Behold the works of the Lord. What desolations He has made in the earth. **He** makes wars to cease. **He** breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two. **He** burns the chariots with fire. ***‘Be still!’*** Know that I am God! **I** will be exalted among the nations. **I** will be exalted in the earth.’ The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.”

It’s significant, too, that the author twice refers to the Lord as ‘the God of Jacob’. Jacob was an undeserving man, whom God changed into a godly leader. Our hope is not in our abilities, our wisdom, or our goodness. It is God Who changes us, leads us, and protects us. When we’re still, it’s much easier to listen and know that He is God.

One of the reasons I support this war is so my children might not have to fight here in 10 or 20 years. I’ve heard others say the same thing. As a Christian, I know that God calls us to seek peace, and that He also works through the military (Romans 13). But I also know that wars will continue in this world until Jesus comes again. Until then,



the only thing that will improve is our efficiency at killing each other.

In Micah 4:1-3, we read “In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house will be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and peoples shall flow unto it. Many nations will go and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord - to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion, the law of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem, and He will judge between many peoples and strong nations that are far away. And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. No more will a nation lift up sword against another nation. Neither will there be any more war.”

While I am in Kuwait, I will pray for peace and support our soldiers if we go to war. But ultimately, my hope is not in diplomacy or a military victory - both of those are temporary solutions. Our hope should be in the fact that even this world is temporary. The Lord is coming to destroy it and recreate a new heaven and earth, a perfect world for the people whom He will also recreate as perfect.

The God of the universe is holy and can accept nothing less than perfection - perfection that only Jesus can achieve on our behalf. If your heart doesn’t belong to Jesus, it’s never too late to submit your spirit to His. Surrender to the King of heaven. No more games - He will make everything new and equip you with a new attitude.

## ***“When to Disobey a Direct Order”***

***1 Mar***

Last week, I read something in the newspaper regarding a pro-life protest on the Golden Gate Bridge. Apparently, it is illegal to hold political rallies on the bridge. Most of the people were from Christian churches and complained that the law violated their right to free speech. In fact, there was a simpler solution. The group just needed to take the protest elsewhere. They could’ve accomplished the same thing on either side of the bridge and not broken the law.

There are only two times that we should disobey the authorities: when a law commands us to do something that God has forbidden, or when the law forbids us to do something that God has commanded.

In Daniel 6:7-10, King Nebuchadnezzar commanded everyone to pray only to his god. As soon as the decree was signed, Daniel began to pray 3 times a day, facing toward Jerusalem (where God had established His temple), in a window so everyone could see him. In Act 4:17-20, the Pharisees forbid Peter and John to teach others about Jesus. “But Peter and John answered and said, ‘You judge whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you or God, for we must speak about the things we have seen and heard.’”

God’s law does not command Christians to protest on the Golden Gate Bridge. Nor does He forbid them from protest elsewhere. They didn’t have to break the law. Daniel, Peter and John did.



What’s the bottom line for soldiers? If an order is not against God’s law, we must obey it. That means following the rules, even if we think they’re silly. A soldier of integrity, gentleness, self-control, perseverance, and wisdom will be a great witness for Christ. Fighting for personal

preferences is not only morally wrong, it’s destructive to the team. We must serve in godliness. There is more at stake than our comfort.

I think every soldier would agree – there can be a big difference between leaders who depend on their authority and leaders who serve through their influence. We’ve probably all worked for the former, and we’d all like to work for the latter. Almost anyone can get promoted to sergeant or captain, but it takes much more to get your people to **want** to listen to you.

The books of 1 & 2 Kings trace the gradual corruption of Israel’s leaders as they moved further away from God. When the kings continued to reject God, the people followed suit, and the Lord began to extend His grace to their enemies. In doing so, He showed Israel that their position was no guarantee of His favor. Relationship with Him is influenced by faith, not by nationality, race, or cultural background.

In 2 Kings 5 & 7, we see God treating two military leaders (probably similar to CSMs) according to their faith. In chapter 5, Namaan (a Syrian, and therefore an enemy of Israel) came to trust God and is granted His peace through the prophet Elijah. In chapter 7, however, God judged an Israelite for his lack of faith. Ironically, this man had held the same military authority as Namaan, but for God’s army! Can you imagine the surprise in either’s mind? The enemy of God’s people received grace, while the Lord condemned Israel’s CSM!

We need to remember what gives us influence with God & men. It’s not our rank. It’s not the reputation we have among ‘important’ people. It’s not even how close to the front we sit in the chapel. His heart is influenced through our faith and love for Him. Isn’t the same true of any power that we have with people? Authority is nothing without faith and love - the real power is influence. Let’s build our reputations through our love for soldiers.



Have you ever noticed the different reactions that Christians get when they walk into a tent or work area? Many fellow believers may want to share their heart and encourage you; some ‘seekers’ will simply watch to see if you really walk what you talk; the average rebel will go on sinning whether you’re there or not; then there are just a couple who seem to have an open hatred or fear.

This week, I think I surprised one of our single males, who seemed to be flirting with a single female. He quickly blurted, “Chaplain’s here - time to go!” and left with a nervous smile. He has a reputation of being a bit of a ‘wolf’.

Shepherds often get that reaction from wolves.

In John 10:11-15, Jesus describes Himself as a Shepherd over His sheep. “I am the good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep. Hired hands (speaking of the Pharisees), do not own the sheep. They see the wolf coming, leave the sheep and run. Then the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He runs because he is a hired man and does not care for the sheep. I am the good Shepherd. I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep.”



Christians have to watch out for each other, but we’re definitely limited in our ability to protect each other from temptation and foolish situations. With Jesus as our Shepherd, however, we have around-the-clock care. Have you asked the good Shepherd to lead & care for you? Are you following Him and trusting in His protection? If so, praise Him that your spirit has an ever-present, all-powerful, perfectly good and wise Protector. He will strengthen, guide, convict, & bless you all the way to safety!



Field Manual 22-100 teaches a truth that the Bible has been teaching for years – it’s important to understand human nature. That is especially important if you’re a leader. In the book of 1 Kings, we see King Solomon’s god-given wisdom in action. Two women had come to him, arguing over a baby boy. One of the women had rolled over at night and accidentally smothered her son. When she woke up and realized what had happened, she switched

her son with the other woman’s living son. When the first mother discovered what had happened, they went to the king for help.

“The king said, ‘Fetch me a sword.’ And they brought a sword before the king. And he said, ‘Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.’ Then the mother of the living child cried out to the king, for her heart broke for her son, ‘Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and do not kill him.’ But the other said, ‘Neither of us shall have him. Cut him in two!’ Then the king said, ‘Give her the living child, and do not kill it. She is his mother.’” (3:24-27)

Sounds simple enough, doesn’t it? Of course the real mother would stand up for her son’s life. Yet, how often do we overlook human nature when attempting to influence other people? We all know that others respond to criticism better when it is done constructively, respectfully, and privately. We know that positive feedback, symbols of recognition, and public praise encourages a soldier to continue do things well. So why don’t we act on what we know?

Wise leadership is more than just knowing. Desire & commitment come only from a heart of love. We need the changing power of God’s spirit for that. Each of us fails daily, but when our styles & techniques aren’t working, we need to resubmit our hearts to ***His*** leadership.



The answer is far above the unit level, but I have often thought that many of the Army’s problems could be avoided if we simply changed the criteria for retention and promotion. God had a unique approach to retaining His fighting men and for promoting their leaders. Notice His methods & priority.

“When you go to battle against your enemies and see horses, chariots, and are outnumbered, do not be afraid. For the Lord your God, Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt is with you. When you prepare for battle, the priest shall approach and speak to the people, saying, ‘Hear, O Israel. Today, you are about to do battle against your enemies. Do not be afraid of them. For the Lord your God goes with you to fight for you against your enemies.’ And the officers shall say to the people, ‘Who has built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And who has planted a vineyard and not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go home, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And who is engaged to be married, but not yet married her? Let him go home, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.’ And the officers shall speak to the people again, saying, ‘Who is afraid? Let him go home, so that his fear does not become contagious.’ And *after* the officers have finished speaking to the people, have them appoint Captains over the armies.”  
(Deuteronomy 20:1-9, emphasis mine)

God valued family and faith, not numbers. There are still great truths for us in this passage. 1) the Lord isn’t concerned with numbers. He works through the faithful, whether they are many or few, 2) He values family life and will not demand your military service if it would destroy your family, and 3) as military leaders, we need to believe and act on 1 & 2 for ourselves and our people.





My eyesight is so bad that I consider it a miracle that I ever got into the military. When I tried to come into the Army back in 1985, the Army doctor told me that my vision was not to the Army standard. Eight years later, I tried to enlist again. My vision had not changed, but the doctor said

I was “good to go”. My night vision, however, is still particularly poor.

A few nights ago, I was half-stepping my way through the LSA and tripped on a wooden pallet, falling headlong into the gravel. Last night, I left our well-lit tent to go to the latrine, and my eyes were having a hard time adjusting when I walked squarely into a 4 by 4 post that holds the liquid-free soap dispenser - it sprung me backward like a diving board! Almost every night, I hang myself on tent ropes, trip over sandbags, and pass people that I can’t recognize in the dark. I have to laugh at myself sometimes. It’s not funny, though, that many people are just as blind to more important things.

In John, chapter 9, we read about Jesus confronting one of Israel’s religious teachers (who claimed to be right with God). “Jesus told him, ‘I came to judge the people of this world. I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see.’ When the Pharisees heard Jesus say this, they asked, ‘Are we blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty. But now that you claim to see, you will keep on being guilty.’” (39-41)

It’s easy to tell that my physical eyesight is poor – just watch what I do in the dark. It’s just as easy to see if your spiritual fitness is poor – just watch what you do in the dark. How does your spirit measure up? You probably fall short – just like me. If you’re spiritually blind, Jesus is your hope. He still gives sight to the blind by His mercy and power. When we call on Him for forgiveness, He opens the eyes of our hearts!



Recently, I was talking with some other soldiers about how much extra money we’re making for a relatively easy deployment (so far). I almost feel guilty about it – my wife is alone with our four children, getting them off to school, coaching their basketball team, leading worship in

chapel, helping with the FRG and PWOC, changing diapers and chasing toddlers around the house. She’s the one who deserves the hazard pay! Then I joked, “Wait. She IS getting my hazard pay!”

In the latest set of pictures that my wife sent, I noticed new carpets on the floor, new decorations on the walls, new clothes on the kids, etc. – and that’s fine. My wife and I have a pretty good understanding about our money. My job draws the only income for our family, but it is our money. God has called her to do a lot of things that she doesn’t get paid for – at least, not with money. But her contribution to our family and community are just as important.

God blesses all of His people, even through the work of only some. After a military victory over an enemy, the Lord said, “Take all of the goods that were taken, men and animals. Then you, Eleazar the priest, and the heads of each of the clans shall divide the spoils into two parts - between the men who went to war, AND the rest of the congregation.” (Numbers 31:26-27 – emphasis mine)

I’m sure there were guards, farmers, carpenters, musicians, homemakers, and others who had to stay at home. Yet, the Lord took care of them through the fruit of the soldiers’ pay. That’s something for all of us to think about, before we get too tight with “our” money. It’s true that the worker is worthy of his wages (1 Timothy 5:18). In fact, the last time I had to stay home to play Mr. Mom for my four kids, I thought Lauren should get *all* of my pay!



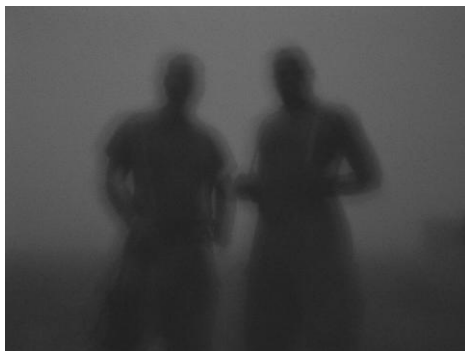
We have several effective leaders in our squadron. They are confident, well informed, and tactically sound, often because they listen to their subordinate leaders' ideas & concerns. That kind of practical wisdom greatly assists mission success and soldier morale.

We're all familiar with the old adage, 'two heads are better than one.' It's probably taken from Proverbs 24:6, which applies the truth specifically to military leaders. "By wise guidance you shall make war. In many counselors there is safety." Businesses, personal relationships, and sports teams benefit when the leaders listen to their people. Can you imagine any organization – personal or professional – succeeding under a desk jockey who locks himself in his office, or a dictator who assassinates all who disagree with him?

It can be difficult to ask for or accept advice, however. It takes humility, which is not a common trait of the human race. Have you ever thought about the practicality of the Holy Spirit's work in a Christian's heart? Consider how often we need to take advice from someone. My wife is often a wiser parent than I am, and she has great ideas about how to encourage or guide our children. My senior Chaplain's counseling skills are far superior to mine, and I am grateful for the many times he shares techniques and perspectives. My parents' financial sense has saved me from making more mistakes than I care to count.

Friends and co-workers offer advice to us everyday, but it's up to us to take it. "Don't be stubborn like horses and mules that must be led with ropes to make them obey." (Psalm 32:9) Great advice is nothing if the recipient will not act on it. Only the Holy Spirit can humble us and cause us to love wisdom more than reputation or comfort.

We had another super sand storm tonight. The haze was so thick that I couldn't see the port-a-johns just outside our tent. It was pretty bad inside, too. When one of our guys tried to take a picture with his digital camera, the flash picked up so much dust that you couldn't make out another soldier standing 20 feet away!



We've all developed a strong dislike for dust. In Isaiah 40, God says that, compared to His love for His people, He considers the nations of the world to be like fine dust. "See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power and His arm rules for Him. See, His reward is with Him and His recompense accompanies Him. He tends His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, or with the breadth of His hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed Him as His counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? Who was it that taught Him knowledge, or showed Him the path of understanding? Surely, the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust."

Soon, the U.S. Army will probably attack Iraq - a country with formidable financial and military resources, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist tactics. If the size of the enemy alarms you, consider the size of your God. If you're a Christian but feel as insignificant as dust, remember the cost that Jesus paid for you on the cross. He loves you, and you are not insignificant to Him!

We're about to start our sixth month in Kuwait. The projected beginning of the war and our estimated return have been announced and pushed back more times than I care to count. Our living conditions have declined every time we've moved. Access to morale phones is almost gone, and our esprit de corps is getting harder to maintain.

It is “natural” (in the Biblical sense of the word) for people to complain when life gets hard, but true Christians are not just “natural”. We have His Spirit in us and are called to holiness. Listen to Paul's words in Philippians 2. "Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even died on a cross. Then God gave Him the highest place and honored His name above all others. So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, "Jesus Christ is Lord!" My dear friends, you always obeyed when I was with you. Now that I am away, you should obey even more. So work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved. God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him. Do everything without grumbling or arguing. Then you will be the pure and innocent children of God. You live among people who are crooked and evil, but you must not do anything that they can say is wrong. Try to shine as lights among the people of this world, as you hold firmly to the message that gives life. Then on the day when Christ returns, I can take pride in you. I can also know that my work and efforts were not useless.”



God, the Father, calls us to have Jesus' attitude, but we need His Spirit to make that possible. If complaints, fits of anger, and personal boasts are the norm for us, we need to re-examine our hearts. How can we shine if our hearts are so dark? If God created the stars in the sky, He can recreate you, too.



In wartime counseling, I often encounter a Rambo or a Gentle Giant. Rambos make great ‘steely-eyed killers’, but typically don’t make great lovers in their families or with their soldiers. Gentle Giants are great family people, but seem to have a hard time

giving their whole heart to war. Can a soldier do both and have peace before God? Absolutely – in fact, we must.

Romans 13:3-7 clearly teaches God has given the governing rulers (police, armies, etc.) legitimate authority to keep the peace – by force if necessary. “Rulers are a threat to evil people, not to good people. There is no need to be afraid of the authorities. Just do right, and they will praise you for it. After all, they are God’s servants, and it is their duty to help you. If you do something wrong, you ought to be afraid – they don’t wield the sword for nothing! They are God’s servants who punish criminals to demonstrate God’s wrath. But you should obey the rulers because you know it is the right thing to do, and not just because of God’s anger.”

In the previous chapter (Romans 12), Paul says that we should live at peace with all men – as far as it is possible with us. But individuals should not seek personal revenge – that is the job of the police, army, etc. That’s why it’s not only okay, it is GOOD to call the police if your spouse is beating you, or to recommend a guilty soldier for UCMJ. The Lord created our world with order. But enforcing peace is second best. We need more than God’s authority to make others do right.

Even after we brought justice to the Middle East in Desert Storm, there were still riots among Muslims in Iraq & domestic disputes in America in soldiers’ families. Rambos do well in war, but they don’t do as well at home. We need more than justice - we need to learn how to love. Read tomorrow’s part of this series to get the complete picture.

You may remember the song *Ebony and Ivory*, by Michael Jackson and Paul McCartney. They’re singing about competing for a girl’s affections, and one of them says, “You know I’m a lover, not a fighter.” Soldiers can be both. We should love goodness just as quickly as we should attack evil. God’s Word gives us the authority to enforce justice AND it is our FM on love.

“Let love be your only debt! If you love others, you have done all that the Law demands. In the Law there are many commands, such as, ‘Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not be jealous.’ But all of these are summed up in the command that says, “Love others as much as you love yourself.”

No one who loves others will harm them. So love is all that the Law demands.”

(Romans 13:8-10)

We are created in God’s image and are to seek unity in our relationships just as He is perfectly united in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



The problem is that our selfish natures don’t seek unity naturally. We are prone to cheating, hating, stealing, and jealousy. Even if we are only guilty in our minds, the attitudes are still sinful and eventually come out in selfish, destructive behavior.

In counseling, I often compare a husband-wife relationship to a CO-1SG relationship. Both are equally valuable, with different roles, but the same goal. Still, they need Army Regulations to guide their unity. Appealing to anything less is just an opinionated tug-of-war.

All of our soldiers will go home to personal wars over finances, kids, communications, sex, etc. We, too, need a higher guide to show us how to be united. We need God’s perfect Word - but that’s tomorrow’s subject in this series.



Knowing what to do is not enough to bring peace. Suspicion, hatred, etc. are not head problems – they’re heart problems. “You know the times we live in, and so you should live properly. It is time to wake up. You know that the day when we will be saved is nearer now than when we first put our faith in the Lord. Night is almost over, and day will soon appear. We must stop behaving as people do in the dark and put on the armor of light. So behave properly, as people do in the day. Don't go to wild parties or get drunk or be vulgar or indecent. Don't quarrel or be jealous. Clothe yourselves in the Lord Jesus. Then you won't try to satisfy selfish desires.” (Romans 13:11-14)



In this passage, we see that Jesus will return in justice and love. He will judge the wicked and rescue those who follow Him. If you’re honest, however, you see a real dilemma – all of us are wicked compared to His perfection! That’s why we’re told to ‘put on Christ’. When Jesus died on the cross, He satisfied God’s justice AND love by taking His followers’ punishment and giving them His Spirit. When we rest in Him, He is like a JSLST and flak vest.

Like a JSLST, He takes away the impurities. The key difference here is that our pollutants are not outside, they’re inside. When we follow Jesus, He begins to take the anger, the selfishness, and the fear. Like a flak vest, He protects us from attacks, guarding out hearts.

But unlike either, Jesus is not passive or reactive. His Spirit can strengthen us to resist temptations, give wisdom to handle tough decisions, and put a love for His law in our hearts. In God’s Son, soldiers can enforce justice, learn to love, and have true peace in their souls – souls that are being cleansed and empowered by His Spirit. Anything less is mental anguish in this life and eternal punishment in the next. We can only find true peace in Jesus Christ.

Soldiers often talk about war as the ‘Big Game’ - not in a trivial sense, but as something to be attacked and won as a team. As in any sport, however, one of the greatest enemies is selfish pride. Pride can lead to individual agendas, complacency, and often defeat. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminds Israel (and us) that life is God’s ball field, and playing for Him requires humility, not personal pride.

“Israel, do you want to go into the land the Lord promised your ancestors? Do you want to capture it, live there, and become a powerful nation? Then be sure to obey every command I am giving you. Don’t forget how the Lord your God has led you through the desert for the past forty years. He wanted to find out if you were truly willing to obey him and depend on him, so he made you go hungry. Then He gave you manna, a kind of food that you and your ancestors had never even heard about. The Lord was teaching you that people need more than food to live--they need every word that the Lord has spoken. Over the past forty years, your clothing hasn’t worn out, and your feet haven’t swollen. Keep in mind that the Lord has been correcting you, just as parents correct their children.” (verses 1-5)

God was their personal Trainer. He took them to Basic, taught them the ropes, & made sure they graduated. As such, learning from Him was always their key to victory.



My Dad understands that. When he played AAA baseball, he was successful to a point, but his batting style had a flaw in it. When his AAA swing met a Major League pitch the following year, he had to humbly ask his coach for help. Pride would have led to defeat.

Victory requires humility. We need to listen to others’ ideas. Ask for your team’s help or wisdom. Trust in God and lose your pride - it’s not just a matter of military victory. Humility will help your marriage, your career, your parenting - your everything!

As Deuteronomy 8 points out, God is our personal Trainer, preparing us for life’s spiritual battles. He’s the One Who has readied us to this point, but He doesn’t abandon us here. He is also acting as our Agent, looking out for our future. Look at verses 6-9.

“Obey the commands the Lord your God has given you and worship Him with fear and trembling. The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land with streams that flow from springs in the valleys and hills. You can dig for copper in those hills, and the stones are made of iron ore. And you won’t go hungry. Wheat and barley fields are everywhere, and so are vineyards and orchards full of fig, pomegranate, and olive trees, and there is plenty of honey.”

God has the inside scoop on everything that life has to offer, so His counsel is the key to our future happiness. Throughout our lives, He teaches, advises, disciplines, and blesses us to earn our trust and obedience. Look at verses 16 & 18. “He also gave you manna, a kind of food your ancestors had never even heard about. The Lord was testing you to make you trust Him, so that later on He could be good to you . . . Instead, remember that the Lord gives you the strength to make a living and keeps the promise He made to your ancestors.”

The Lord wants your future to be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The hardships we consider as curses are really finishing touches – detail work to

cover our damaged or weak spots. To enjoy that future, however, we have to act on the opportunities and counsel that He gives. As our Agent, His ‘cut’ is the glory that He gets when your life proves His goodness & power. Trust Him - He’s got a great deal lined up!



It's wonderful to reflect on the fact that God is our personal Trainer and Agent - both of those roles focus on what God does for *us*. We mustn't forget that He is also the Owner. We owe him our best simply because He owns us.

“After you eat and are full, give praise to the Lord your God for the good land he gave you. Make sure that you never forget the Lord or disobey His laws and teachings that I am giving you today. If you always obey them, you will have plenty to eat, and you will build good houses to live in. You will get more and more cattle, sheep, silver, gold, and other possessions. But when all this happens, don't be proud! Don't forget that you were once slaves in Egypt and that it was the Lord who set you free. Remember how He led you in that huge and frightening desert where poisonous snakes and scorpions live. There was no water, but the Lord split open a rock, and water poured out so you could drink. He also gave you manna, a kind of food your ancestors had never even heard about. The Lord was testing you to make you trust Him, so that later on He could be good to you. When you become successful, don't say, 'I'm rich, and I've earned it all myself.'" (verses 10-17)

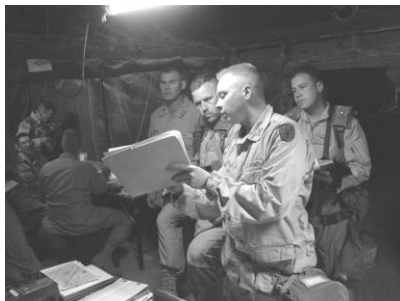
In the 1994 NBA playoffs, the Chicago Bulls were down by 1, and Toni Kukoc had been playing an outstanding game. When Coach Phil Jackson called a timeout before the last play, he told the team that the ball was to go to Kukoc. Scotty Pippen (who wanted the ball) was so angry, he refused to take the floor. Jackson benched Pippen; Kukoc made the shot; and the Bulls won the game.

Ironically, Christians can learn a lot from Pippen's poor choice. 1) We can't act like a free agent on God's team; 2) God will always win, whether we decide to play or not; and 3) rebel are the only ones who misses out on the glory.



We finally received our WARNO. We go to war in 72 hours. You can feel the nervous energy in the air. I’ve already had men asking me if I would ‘say one of those good prayers’ for them. I was a little amused.

Some soldiers see Chaplains (and therefore God) as a rabbit’s foot - they cling to us in times of danger and toss us in a drawer when things are better. The power is not in the one praying or even in the prayer.



One of my favorite passages on prayer is James 5:17-18. “Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain for three and a half years. Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced crops.” ‘A man just like us’ doesn’t mean that Elijah read Maxim magazine, used God’s name carelessly, or bragged about himself. James is simply telling us that the power of prayer is not in the person.

Why did God answer such a prayer from Elijah? If you look back to the event in 1 Kings 18, Elijah was praying for God’s glory to be revealed. The Israelites had begun to follow another ‘god’, who they thought made the rain fall on the crops. Only God Almighty controls the weather. The true Lord told Elijah to lead the Israelites back to Him, and the prophet’s prayer was inspired by faith in His command.

God doesn’t command us to do prove His existence by doing miracles, as in Elijah’s day. Jesus has already come as God’s perfect revelation. God simply commands us to glorify Him by our faith and obedience. The hope of prayer is not that God would answer our dream sheets, but that He would reveal Himself. The power of prayer is not who we are, but in the promises and character of God.

When we pray for His glory, He always reveals Himself to His people. What is He revealing to you? His wisdom? Justice? Mercy? Goodness? Power? He typically brings you exactly what you need to trust and serve Him, in whatever circumstance you find yourself.

The air war on Baghdad started last night, but our mission's been cancelled because of severe weather. The time is not being wasted, however - our leaders are already tweaking future missions. We are disappointed though - it's limbo time again, and the waiting is driving us a little nuts. The military is full of control freaks (including me) who want things to go exactly as planned. But plans often do not turn out as we would like. In fact, God never called us to control. He called us to serve. Control centers on 'me'. Service focuses on others' needs and God's glory.



In Proverbs 16:1-2, Solomon says “To man belong then plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed the Lord.” Ironically, in Hebrew (the language in which the Old Testament was originally written), the word “plans” was most often used to describe military battle plans – detailed preparations for success, plan ‘A’s, and plan ‘B’s. But Solomon says we have such a sinful preoccupation with control that we can't even control our own mouths.

When my second son was about 3, I tried to help him clean his room. I thought I had it all under control. Big toys in the big box, little toys in the little box, dirty clothes in the hamper, and trash in the trash can. But my 3 year old wasn't getting it. I kept repeating the system to my son (who wasn't very motivated to clean) until my brain locked up. “I told you, put the trash in the toy box and your toys in the trash.” My son freaked out. I tried to defend myself to my wife. “Bradley won't put his toys in the trash!” How little control I really had.

Verse 3 continues, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” The word commit is a Hebrew idiomatic expression which means to “roll away”. We use the same concept when we say, let it roll off like water off a duck's back. God is truly in control. Roll away your control issues to Him. He will take care of what you can't, and you'll rest easier.



Lately, we’ve had a lot of time on our hands to plan, to train, and to think. Of course, we think about going north and going home. We also think about deeper issues – “What about the plans I had before this deployment? How is this going to change my future, my family, and me? Is there any

method to this madness, or is life just one chaos after another?” It’s easy to think that no one will look after our lives but us. That’s not true. God rules over hardship and blessing. He uses it all to accomplish His priority – our faith and character. Our faith and character bring Him glory before the world.

In Jeremiah 29:10-14, we read God’s words to the Jews as they are about to be taken captive by the Babylonians (ironically, present day Iraq) because of Israel’s years of rebelling against the Lord. “After Babylon has been the strongest nation for seventy years, I will be kind and bring you back to Jerusalem, as I have promised. I will bless you with a future filled with hope - a future of success, not of suffering. You will turn back to Me and ask for help, and I will answer your prayers. You will worship Me with all your heart, and I will be with you and accept your worship. Then I will gather you from all the nations where I scattered you, and you will return to Jerusalem.”

Notice several things. Hardship for God’s people is temporary (verse 10); He uses hardship as discipline (verse 11); it is not neglect or punishment; His goal is for us to be close to His heart (verses 12-14a); and most importantly, He - not the devil, nor even our enemies - is in control of the situation (verse 14b).

Believers have every reason to look forward to His personal touch, especially when we’re under pressure. War, for example, is full of opportunities to grow in faith, love, and hope. Remember, He is on the throne, orchestrating His followers’ godliness. Look for the good that He may be working, and act on what you find. Think about *that!*

We began our convoy into Iraq today. It shouldn't have surprised me that we were surrounded by Iraqis in the very first town. Most of them were very friendly, but several looked like soldiers in civies. Just a few miles from that friendly town, we had to hunker down for the night in our vehicles while a BCT took care of a fire fight up the road. I felt a little helpless.



A major theme in the book of Esther is God's sovereignty in times of danger. As the prophet Jeremiah had predicted, the Lord was sending Israel into captivity to rekindle their faith and obedience. He used the situation to call the faithful and to demonstrate His goodness and power through them by placing them in positions of influence.

In Esther 1 & 2, we read that King Xerxes was looking for a new wife, and Mordecai (Esther's uncle) 'just happened' to be in the right place, at the right time to hear of it. So he enrolled his niece in the beauty contest. Of course, Esther won, and God placed her directly into the King's court. Soon after that, Mordecai 'circumstantially' heard about an assassination attempt on the King and informed the guards. His good deed was immediately recorded in the royal history books. As we'll see in a later devotion, God was working to place Esther and Mordecai in key positions so they could help their people, the Jews.

God is always working in, for, or around His people, even when things seem bleak. Where has He placed you? What are the needs around you? If you're following the Lord, I guarantee you that He's placed you near others who need your humility, love, or service. Remember that knowing and loving God is His ultimate goal for believers. When we trust and live for Him, the significant things fall into place. The insignificant will eventually fall away and be forgotten. But a godly response to either is always a stepping stone to His glory.



If I was a little nervous that the Iraqis might kill us on the first night of the convoy, tonight I thought we'd kill ourselves. Our catch up speed in our convoy was almost 40 mph (actual, not briefed) in 20 feet of visibility! I was pretty tired, but I was even more afraid. Still, I knew that it was too dangerous to stop – the .50 cal's and MK19s on the 5 tons were our best security – and if we slowed down, we might lose sight of the rest of the convoy in the clouds of dust.

Danger tests your faith. Knowing that the only right decision might put you in harm's way is most uncomfortable. Take Queen Esther, for good example. When Mordecai discovered that a man named Hamaan had plotted to have all the Jews killed, Mordecai asked his niece to go to the King. But there was a great risk.

“(Esther told Mordecai) Anyone who goes in to see the king without being invited by him will be put to death. The only way that anyone can be saved is for the king to hold out the gold scepter to that person. And it's been thirty days since he has asked for me.’ When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, he sent back this reply, ‘Don't think that you will escape being killed with the rest of the Jews, just because you live in the king's palace. If you don't speak up now, we will somehow get help, but you and your family will be killed. It could be that you were made queen for a time like this!’ Esther 4:9-14

God had placed Esther in a specific place and time so that she could serve His people. There were risks involved, but her uncle pointed out the obligation to do the right thing and the opportunity to experience God working through her – if she would obey. God puts His people just where He wants them (Acts 17:26). There may be some risks, but there is also great obligation and great opportunity. Where has He put you, and what work has He set before you? Ask yourself how He has gifted you. What are your passions? Who is receptive to you? He will bless you when you serve by faith.



Last night, I watched the distant explosions light up the sky through NVGs. I would have been very nervous if I had not known that God was in charge. That doesn't mean that bad things can't happen to good people, just that God's plan will always be accomplished for the greater good. We are on our way to ensure peace and protection to this region and the world by disarming Hussein and effecting regime change. I believe that God supports our mission, because justice is part of His character and His plan.



God will always bless His people and judge the wicked. We see this in chapters 6 and 7 of Esther, under circumstances that clearly reveal God's rule (and sometimes His sense of humor). Israel's captor, King Xerxes just happened to have a hard time sleeping and had his royal history books read to him – ‘circumstantially’ the same section that told of Mordecai's good deed. The King, who had been saved from assassination by Mordecai's actions, then ordered Hamaan, who just happened to be standing in the King's court that night, to publicly honor him. When Esther later revealed Hamaan's plan to kill all the Jews, he was judged and executed on the very gallows that he had built to hang Mordecai. There is no such thing as bad luck or good fortune. God is on the throne, affecting spiritual growth for His people and preparing judgment for those who reject Him.

A couple of weeks before we left Al Saleem, I couldn't sleep late one night, so I went to the D-Fac about 0100 to get some milk. A fellow Christian, who had been struggling with his faith, just happened to be the only person there. I sat down a few tables away and munched on some cereal until it was too awkward to continue eating alone. I asked if he wanted some company. After shooting the breeze for a while and about two hours of deep conversation about the Lord, he said, “It was funny that you came in here at this hour, but I'm glad that you did.” God is on the throne!

We finally arrived at Objective Rams/TAA Vicksburg. Over the 72 hour convoy, I probably got about 2-3 hours sleep each day. My 6’ 3” body doesn’t rest well in a HMMWV with sand-bagged floors and loads of gear between the seats. When we got to our location, we were all looking forward to a good night’s rest, but the area was still not considered secure. In fact, our pilots had arrived 14 hours prior with no ground security at all! Obviously, that wasn’t the plan, but the G2 hadn’t anticipated the BCTs meeting so much resistance on the MSR ahead of us. We were a little nervous again. When we finally assessed the threat and posted guards on the perimeter, the rest of us lay down for the first time in almost four days.

We all need a sense of security to sleep. My wife sleeps much better when I am at home. Many people sleep facing the door to their rooms, especially when they’re alone. Children sleep with woobies and teddies because those things help them feel loved. No padlock, however, can keep out all prowlers. No guard can protect you from everything.

Psalm 121:1-3 says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – He Who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, He Who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” It’s been 4 days since we crossed the border into enemy territory, and we’ll probably be here for about another month. Convoys have already been ambushed; American soldiers have been captured and executed; civilians with weapons and squad-sized elements continue to roam the country side. Yet, we have to get our rest.

Nothing but God’s good will comes to His followers. Nothing slips by His eyes. His hand can stop any foe. He watches over those who trust in Him, as a Shepherd over His tender lambs. Put your life into His Hands. You will work and sleep in confidence, resting in His care.



It's hard to believe, but bad weather cancelled our mission again. We had a sandstorm today, unlike anything I've ever seen. The wind began to kick up violently about 1400. By 1500, most of the gusting had stopped, but there was so much dust in the air our world was a dull shade of yellow. By 1530, it was a glowing orange. 30 minutes later, it turned blood red. It looked more like Mars than the Middle East! At 1700, when we would have normally had 1 ½ hours of light left, it was as black as midnight. To make matters worse, the weather forecast called for more of the same for the next 2-3 days.



In situations like these, it's easy to wonder if God sees, cares, or is able to do anything about the circumstances. We tend to forget His priority of work – 1) reveal His power, goodness, wisdom, etc. so that we would trust and obey Him, 2) bless those who follow Him, and 3) judge those who reject Him. Actually, He works all three all the time. Proverbs 16:4 teaches us that “The Lord works everything out for His own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster.”

The weather has been one of the most limiting factors for us so far, but Who is responsible for it? The Lord! His plans may not be what we would prefer, but He certainly knows what He is doing. We may be sitting in our tents, but our pilots are safe, coalition forces are pushing forward; and justice will prevail.

It was a great shock to many when our sister squadrons were shot up by small arms fire on their first mission. I have prayed several times that God would keep our pilots safe and give them such an amazing victory that everyone would have to acknowledge His hand. Although the wind has kept our helicopters down, those same winds have given our planners time to readjust. God is still good.

The war is going slowly, and our Regiment has suffered some losses. One of our tankers was in an accident during our convoy to TAA Vicksburg. When we noticed they were missing in the sandstorm, a team immediately went back to look for them, but the fueler was flipped and they were gone. The 227<sup>th</sup> had an aircraft shot down, and the crew was captured. Iraqis have already displayed their prizes on television. Meanwhile the weather is keeping us grounded with too much time to think about our situation.

It's harder to trust God when things go badly. We have to remember that His plan, understanding, and wisdom are greater than ours. When the prophet, Habakkuk, heard that Israel was about to be overrun by enemies, he questioned God. In the end, he rested in the fact that God – not circumstances – must be his hope. Wherever God took him, He would give him what he needed to handle it with godliness.

Habakkuk 3:17-2 “Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vine. Though the olive crops fails, and the fields produce no food. Though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to stand go on the heights.”

This afternoon, my assistant and I drove over to our sister unit's location to ask the other Chaplain about her pilots' morale, especially after all the fire they took during the last fight. Most of their birds are riddled with 7.62 holes. At least one helicopter lost an engine to an RPG, but the crew flew it all the way home. She said they were not only motivated, they were giving God the praise for getting them back alive. God is truly on the throne, even when it looks like He is not working. We're still praying for our 2 MIAs.



After waiting for 5 days to hear about our 2 fuelers, we finally got word from a 3<sup>rd</sup> ID unit that we could pick them up just down the road from us. One has only a bruised shin and slightly twisted ankle, and the other's neck is a bit stiff.

Praise the Lord! As if that were not enough, this is our second

straight day of good weather, and we even got mail, not just letters - actual packages! Our morale was lost, but it's very much been found. I joked with several of the guys, “Today has been so good, it's almost enough to make you want to live here!”



I was so glad to see our two lost soldiers. One of them told me that they were picked up by a BCT unit that came under immediate mortar fire, so they had to load up in an APC and move out quickly. That's why there was no one in their vehicle when we went back.

I've been sharing the praises of God's care with the other soldiers. Since we've been in Iraq, our convoy has had BCTs clear fire fights ahead of us; we've raced through blinding conditions with only one accident; there have been mortar attacks behind us, but when our guys went back to check on the flipped vehicle, the attack was over; our pilots were alone, in an unsecured area for 14 hours without incident; and the dust and wind have kept our pilots down (and safe) until our planners can tweak new missions and TTPs. I see every reason to praise the Lord. The following verses are especially appropriate.

“O Lord You have searched me and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue You know is completely, O Lord. ***You hem me in behind and before. You have laid Your hand upon me.*** Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.” Psalm 139:1-5 (emphasis mine)

The last couple of nights have been so peaceful – no wind, no dust, and no chattering in the tent since my assistant and I set up our own SICUPS. It’s been so quiet - at least until our guys started shooting ATACMS & MLRS over our heads and sending EOD to low up weapons caches in the town next to us. The biggest explosion was about 1700Z last night. I felt the ‘thump’ in my chest!



After the initial scare, the man-made thunder actually began to soothe me. They were the sounds of power – our military protecting us and making progress toward victory and justice. I wasn’t really consoled by the armor and air support. Artillery is great, but through my faith in Jesus Christ, God is my Dad - the Ruler of the universe. The explosions served as audible reminders that His power guards me, and nothing can touch me unless it is my Father’s perfect will.

“The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You and writhed. The oceans saw You and convulsed. The clouds poured down water. The skies resounded with thunder; Your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind; Your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, Your way through the mighty waters, though Your footprints were not seen. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” Psalm 77:16-20

In what do we really rest? Missiles can miss; soldiers can fall asleep on duty; and a simple Class 3 leak can deadline a multi-million dollar weapons system. When we’re following the Lord as our Shepherd, we rest in the knowledge that He cares for us day & night. Start counting His blessings, especially the things He has done to bring you closer to Him. Consider how H has molded your spirit. He is watching over His own, and He will honor your faith and obedience.

As my assistant and I were making the long drive over to the Regiment today, I picked up a pilot who was walking. We only had a few minutes before I dropped him at his destination, so I asked him how his unit was doing (he and his buddies had received a lot of fire on their mission). He said something to the affect of “We’re ready to get some revenge.” I acknowledged his frustration, pain, and anger, but tweaked the thought a bit by saying “Justice is a good thing.” I wish I had time to follow up with him, because



I’m not sure if he caught the subtlety. I made sure I briefed his Chaplain though. Revenge not only paralyzes the mind, it’s not our place. No matter how grave the situation, God will not honor it.

You may remember an earlier devotional series from Romans 13 on ‘A Soldier’s Peace’. Listen to the verses which precede that chapter. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends. Leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written “It is mine to avenge; I will repay”, says the Lord. On the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:17-21

God wants Christians to live in peace. The first and best way to accomplish that is outlined in verses 1-16, by living in fellowship with believers. Second best is to be kind to non-believers in the hopes that your goodness to influence them favorably. The third (and last) option is to enforce justice through the authorities (police, military, etc.).

War is justified in such situations, but we must fight for godly justice, not revenge. The former is for God and out of love. The second is personal and waged in hate. There’s a big difference.





The FARP pulled out to relocate 40 K north last night. They took extra JSLSTs with them, due a possible increased chemical threat. Still, the Lord has blessed us so much already that I believe He will grant them even more success stories to share with their loved ones, to the praise of His glory.

In Part I of this series I said that God’s priority is revealing His glory through our holiness among the nations. If you’ve read the rest of Esther and Mordecai’s story, you know that is how their situation ended. Look at the result of their service in 9:1-4.

“The first law the king had made was to be followed on the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month. This was the very day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to do away with them, but the Jews turned things around. In the cities of every province they came together to attack their enemies. Everyone was afraid of the Jews, and no one could do anything to oppose them. The leaders of the provinces, the rulers, the governors, and the court officials were afraid of Mordecai and took sides with the Jews. Everyone in the provinces knew the king had promoted him and made him powerful.” God granted them a powerful testimony among the nations.

Christians in the military are like missionaries, literally traveling all over the world. Through this war and His victory in our spirits, He’s given us powerful testimonies among the nations. But we must speak His praises if we are to help our neighbors.

The world and our flesh search for joy and security in many things: political peace, economic booms, or simply the freedom to do what makes us feel good. But there is no substitute for His glory. When our eyes are on Him, we have first-hand knowledge of perfect wisdom, strength, and goodness. Anything less is just a cheap imitation – destined to break and fail. Praise the Lord that He is on the throne!

Before the LD, we were told that letters from home would come to us in Iraq, but probably no packages. Praise the Lord, we’re getting both! My morale really went up this week when I got a care package from Lauren.

I can not say enough good things about my wife. While we were still in Kuwait, I had sent her a CD of short digital videos to try to encourage her, but I guess I let my depression show. So she sent another box of goodies & a letter to build me up.



She knows that I’ve been working hard to build a rapport with the soldiers, to fight for what’s right, and to bring the good news of Jesus to those who are open. She encouraged me that I should not give up. “If it’s the right thing to do” she said, “God will bless it!!” That was all I needed to hear to confront some gossip the next day (which I’d been putting off for months). I also held three services, which only 4 people attended. If it’s the right thing to do, God will bless it – even if only a few attend!

For months now, I’ve been putting off speaking to a group of soldiers who have the habit of bad-mouthing their leaders’ decisions behind their backs. I think I had forgotten that confrontation is part of love, but I also needed to remember that God’s spirit is gentle, helpful, and humble in the confrontation.

Listen to Galatians 6:1-10. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each others’ burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

When the Lord gives you an opportunity to do the right thing, His Spirit will go with you. Remember, you are not responsible for their response, only to speak the truth in love. He will bless your obedience, even if the other person does not respond. He will bless your spirit.

Since we’ve been at TAA Vicksburg, I’ve learned to identify most of the booms. EOD is generally close, loud, singular, and (best of all) announced ahead of time. Air Force bombings are much farther away and generally occur at night. But we heard something different today: three, sequential explosions about 5 kilometers away. In less than a minute, our ALOC sounded “Gas! Gas! Gas!” - a patriot had shot down a scud. We donned our masks and went to MOPP 4 for the very first time – and on April Fools’ Day!

Very soon after the all clear was given, I saw 2 soldiers coming back from the latrine with no weapons, flak vests, Kevlars, JSLST tops, or masks. An attack had just been attempted, and they were completely unprepared for another! When I spoke to one of them about the right uniform, they indicated that their priority was comfort, not readiness.

Listen to the exhortation Paul gave to Timothy when his young apprentice was in hardship. “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, Who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing, I give you this charge. Preach the Word in and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction, for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of to tell them what they want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you - keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

1 Timothy 4:1-5

A Christian’s priority must always be readiness and obedience. Part of living by faith is the understanding that God’s wisdom is more trustworthy than our feelings. According to the book of Proverbs, only a ‘fool’ ignores God to please themselves.



The war is still going well, but it's going very slowly, too! After 9 days of bad weather or waiting for “911” missions, our pilots launched on what looks to be their best opportunity so far to see some action. We're presently OPCON to 3<sup>rd</sup> I.D. and are on call to help secure the Karbala Gap,



about 80 kilometers south by southwest of Baghdad. We've heard the reports on American casualties, and we're eager to get it done and get home. The days of waiting have been a mixed blessing – our guys haven't been shot, but they haven't been able to contribute to the war effort either. They're frustrated.

My assistant and I went out to see the pilots off this morning, and – wouldn't you know it – one of our birds had a warning light and couldn't take off with the rest of the troop! One of the crew was especially furious, pacing back and forth in the desert. Apaches always work in teams, and he was supposed to be somebody's wingman.

I didn't try to talk to him – he obviously wanted some space. But I guessed that part of his frustration was 1) the thought of not being able to help his friends, and 2) being grounded once again while the war for justice raged on without him. None of us are warmongers, but we believe in the cause and want to be part of it.

Sometimes, it looks as if evil is going unchecked. But God's Word assures us that no evil-doer gets away with it in the end. “The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this – they will not go unpunished.” (Proverbs 16:5) If, by the providence of God, Hussein should escape our capture or Iraqi assassination, he will not escape the Lord's justice. In fact, the years of security and prosperity that he may enjoy now will only make him more accountable for not bowing before the King of kings. The battle does belong to the Lord!

You may remember the old Wendy’s commercial in which a short, elderly lady is sitting in a burger joint, takes off the top bun and finds a tiny patty. “Where’s the Beef?” she says. It was very popular for almost a year. Everyone used some variation of the commercial to advertise or to make a joke. It was so effective because it made an important point – ‘the main thing should always get the credit as the main thing.’ When we go to a burger place, we expect to get a lot of hamburger, not a lot of bun. When God blesses us with miraculous safety and success, we should expect Him to get the praise, not us.

The Lord granted us a successful mission today, but with several close calls including AK-47 rounds ricocheting in the cockpit and an RPG hitting a rocket pod. Most of our pilots credited God with their safety and were very professional. I was extremely proud of their accomplishments & their



attitudes. There was one, however, who came back bragging, cursing, and full of self-pride. Oddly, that was the first time I’ve ever heard him talk like that. He may have been venting and masking the fear that he had felt during the battle. Fear can have that affect. God’s Spirit produces a very different reaction.

His Spirit is focused on His commands - not human opinion, obeys His calling - not our desires, and is thankful for His promises - not our achievements. “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction must share all good things with his instructor.” (Galatians 4:4-6)

The main thing must always be God’s glory. Be faithful in your duty. Trust Him with your safety. Honor Him with your character. He’ll bless you for it, because you’ll be bringing Him glory.

Each of us deployed leaving less-than-perfect relationships. We all spend a lot of time thinking – hoping or believing that it will be better when we get back, that they will trust us, respect us, and love us more, etc. But feelings are like the petals of a flower. They grow ***after*** we act. If we wait for nice feelings to come ***before*** we decide to water & weed, real love will never grow.

Lots of things can powerfully affect the way we feel – being in good shape, last night’s chili-cheese dog with onions, or even a strange dream. John 7:17 says that confidence in our relationships comes after ***action***. Habakkuk 3:17-18 & Matthew 21:28-31 also agree that love is more action than feeling. We have to do the right thing, no matter how we feel.

This principle is true throughout God’s creation - fitness comes after you’ve exercised. Technical proficiency comes after you’ve completed the training. Confidence in your loved ones comes after you’ve weathered the hard times as a team. Each of the above, however, requires ***work***. I find it significant that some of God’s flowers, trees, and plants do not bloom until the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year, but they would never grow without someone to water and weed them.

What is at the root of those around you? How can you water their needs? What is their soul crying out for? – to be cared for? to know you’re committed? What weeds are choking out potential healthy growth? Anyway you look at it, real love is work. We’d all admit that it takes some work to love the Iraqis, but we’ve done it. Get your hands dirty planting seeds that have lasting value. Then step back and watch your loved ones’ feelings bloom in God’s timing.



I enjoy most of the MREs. With 24 varieties to choose from and new items like milkshakes, cappuccinos, crushed red pepper, fig bars, etc. they're not too bad. However, after you've had only MREs everyday for a month, it's time for some variety.

Today, our log run brought back some new meal packs for us. I don't know where they came from or if we'll ever get them again, but I was very thankful. Mine had tuna salad, fruit punch, lasagna, and Oreo cookies. They even had a breakfast pack for us: orange juice, a fruit cup, milk, frosted flakes, a Pop-tart, and an apple-cinnamon granola bar. It wasn't heaven, but it was pretty nice. Variety is truly a spice of life. It brings us joy, allows us to use our creativity, and adds beauty to the world - as it should. Variety is a reflection of God's character.

In Exodus 28:33 and 39:24, the Lord instructs Moses to decorate the hems of the priests' robes and tents with red, blue, and purple pomegranates. I read an article on God's creativity once, and the author noted that pomegranates do not naturally occur in those three colors (two of them, yes, but I can't remember which two). Why would God command that Moses ornament His place of worship with something that doesn't even exist? The answer - God loves variety and creativity, especially as expressed by His people.

I have a hard time telling two blue birds apart and oak trees look much the same to me, but God has given *people* different faces, personalities, abilities, and needs. I believe that one of the reasons the Bible doesn't go into every detail about finances, sex, parenting, and communications is that

God allows great freedom in these areas. Within His limits, we should use our imaginations to bring beauty into His world - just like the items in the temple. Love God and those around you - and be creative at it!



My supervisory Chaplain gave me some good news this morning. The Army approved me for Voluntary Indefinite. In October, I had lost the correct request form, then obtained the wrong form (without realizing it), sent it in, and relaxed. The day we moved from Al Saleem - moments before our lines were disconnected - I got an email saying that I had sent the wrong form. It also said that I had to fix it ASAP. But I had no time or way to send it, and there wouldn't be a commo link at Udairi for weeks. It looked like my military ministry was over.

A month later, our Regiment deployed to join us and Chaplain Smith arrived, carrying the correct form. The Corps deadline had passed, but we had a few days until it was due to DA. We redid the form, got the SCO to sign it, drove 20 miles through the desert for the Corps Chaplain's signature, and faxed it. We got it this time. Not!

In a day or two, Heidelberg emailed us. Evidently, the fax didn't go through. It was now the day before the DA deadline. Again, we made the trek down Log Road to fax it. The fax went through, but it still had to be signed by a Chaplain whom I offended last year. Would he approve me? He did. I wrote my wife, "If this isn't a sign that God wants me to stay in the Chaplaincy (at least for a little while longer), I don't know what is!" If I know Lauren, she will give public praise to God in the very next chapel service back in Germany.

Jesus rebuked those who demanded to be shown signs before they would believe (Matthew 12, Mark 8, Luke 11). But God freely gave signs to believers (Noah's rainbow, Gideon's fleece, Moses' staff, Lazarus' resurrection, etc.) to strengthen the faith they already had.

We mustn't test God by demanding signs. We serve Him, not vice versa. However, He does strengthen the faith of His children by giving traffic signals to us. Watch for them - especially the ones that direct your path into the heart of His kingdom!



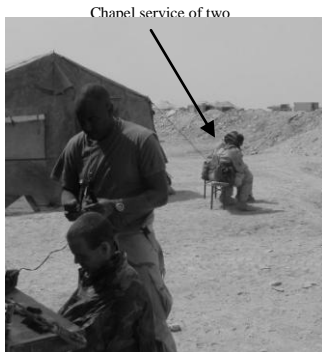


Scud alerts, bullet-ridden Apaches, and a car bombing down the road have made this week anything but dull. Yet relatively few soldiers seem to show an interest in coming to chapel. It's human nature to want to quantify successful service, but God is more interested in quality. I should know that by now.

At a previous assignment, my wife and I had a terrible time finding a house to suit our family and financial concerns. While I was still in the Basic Course at Fort Jackson, we took two 4-day weekends to drive to Virginia and look for a place. The first weekend was a complete bomb. We went the second time just a couple of weeks before we had to PCS. Just hours before we had to drive back, our realtor saw something in a newspaper. Realtors never use as a source. We soon found out that this was *literally* a God-send!

My three years of ministry on post yielded little fruit, but off-post we were surrounded by three, spiritually hungry families. We led Bible studies for them and became good friends with all but one husband. He would not come to any of the meetings or even talk to me. Later, I learned of his former bad experiences with 'christians'. Over time and by watching our friendship develop with his wife and kids, he began to open up. After we PCSed, his wife emailed us of his salvation. He now leads worship in their church and evangelism in their community.

I should have had more faith in God's Spirit. Galatians 6:7-10 testifies that our work will be rewarded and encourages us to endure. "Do not be deceived, God can not be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction. The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us continue to do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."



There are a lot of reasons I’m glad to be an American, but near the top of the list is how the Iraqi civilians have responded to us. Yes, some may have been faking it because of the tanks in their front yards. Some were probably Iraqi soldiers hiding in civilian clothes. But the kids can’t fake joy.



They knew that we had food and candy, and that we would soon liberate them from a 20-year dictatorship. During the convoy northward, they tried to approach our vehicles smiling and motioning for MREs. We’re well into the war now, and a farmer and his children wave to our guards everyday, just 50 meters south of our perimeter. We are living at peace with our enemies.

For almost a century, the United States has been strong enough to conquer most nations but has used its power to help the less fortunate. That is because we still live the Judeo-Christian belief that people are valuable, and the world is being blessed because of it. Beliefs lead to actions; actions to reputation; and reputation to relationships.

Proverbs 16:7 says, “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” Many adopt biblical values because the principles work in their relationships. No joke! Does it surprise you when the TM for an M16 tells you the proper way to perform S.P.O.R.T.S.? Of course not, it’s the owner’s manual! Living God’s truths and commands always leads to blessing. Some are simply more amazing and visible than others.

When we taste the goodness of God’s ways, we naturally want to surrender more of ourselves to Him. His salvation penetrates our relationships and brings a cease fire in our souls. Praise the Lord!

Earlier this week, a pilot was showing a couple of engineers around one of our Apaches. When one of them asked about the difference between the Alpha and Delta models, he told him that the upgrade was actually completely different aircraft. The latter model is not simply new and improved – it’s been changed to enable it to meet the mission.



That is a good description of a Christian. The Lord enables Christians to meet the mission – to live for Him. He has stripped away the old and installed ‘new equipment’. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says it well. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!” That’s twice good news for Christians. First, He has removed our selfish-centered hearts (see Ezekiel 36:26-27). That is the starting place. It’s impossible to achieve much unity in a relationship when those involved think of themselves first. Second, Jesus has installed the new. His Holy Spirit lives in each person whom He saves so that we begin to desire His ways, trust His Word, care for His people, and even serve our enemies.

It’s not automatic or easy, though. Because our bodies tempt us to desire pleasure over purity, we must daily look to His Spirit for strength and His Word for guidance. It is an uphill battle. A person living for the Lord is also surrounded by people who do not understand them or love His ways. But victory is entirely hopeful through Christ.

Children grow up to look and act like their parents because of their genes and their upbringing. You might say that His Spirit is our new gene and His Word is the guide for our new upbringing. If you don’t like what you see in the mirror, don’t despair. God loves to adopt new kids. Take a look at Romans 8:15-23 and Ephesians 1:3-8 if you want to learn more about God’s hope for the hopeless.

It's been almost a week since our pilots felt like they had a meaningful mission. A few days ago, they reconned an area northwest of a lake to confirm G2 reports, but we were so sure that there were no targets out there that many of our HHT and D pilots took the air time. Circumstantially, due to assigned positions they are the least trained of our lot. The line troop aviators were glad to get the break, and the staff guys were equally happy to be behind the stick, but a lot of us took it as a sign. Why are we still out here?



We all want to feel that our lives have meaning and purpose. We also need to know how to contribute to those ends – how to make our actions significant. Feelings of boredom and wasted time are morale killers. But if you think about it, the only way a human being could be absolutely certain about what's significant in the universe is if God Himself came down from heaven and laid it out on the table. Okay . . .

In John 1:1-4, we read “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

A few times lately, I've wished I could talk with the CG, face-to-face, to understand his intent and 2-6's piece in this war. The CG is the one with the knowledge, the authority, and the power to make things happen. But I couldn't see him, even if I wanted to. Jesus, on the other hand, has *all* knowledge, authority and power, and *He* came to *us*.

A loving, obedient, and joyful relationship with God is the meaning of life. We can't assign another meaning anymore than we can give ourselves permission to redeploy. Let God be God; serve and enjoy Him on His terms; and accept no substitutes!

God is perfect and can not tolerate evil. That should illicit a sense of fear and desire for mercy in all of us. My counseling experiences confirm that soldiers (like everyone else) have good reasons to want God’s mercy. I advise, counsel, teach, console, encourage, warn, and pray for them everyday. Yet, God is also a God of justice, and in the end, each of us must stand before God alone – unless there is Someone to stand between us and His judgment.



In Genesis chapter 18, God allows us to be a fly on the wall for a conversation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, just before the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah. When the Lord brings Abraham in the loop, he immediately begins to petition God for mercy. ‘If You find 50 righteous people, will You spare it?’ ‘What if You find 40?’ ‘Finally, Abraham said, ‘Please don’t get angry, Lord, if I speak just once more. Suppose you find only ten good people there.’ ‘For the sake of ten good people,’ the

Lord told him, ‘I still won’t destroy the city.’” (verse 32)

I need Someone like that to stand between me and God. I’ve had 6 months to soul search. Still, my faults are not as clear to me as they could be, but they’re clear enough to make me uncomfortable. There’s a good reason that Abraham doesn’t sit at God’s right hand praying for us. He was a sinner, just like us. Jesus is God Himself, so His prayers do more than spare our lives.

Because God can not tolerate sin, Jesus died in our place and satisfied God’s just punishment for sin. That entitles us to God’s mercy. When He rose from the dead, He sent His Spirit to change the hearts of those who belong to Him. That enables us to love and follow Him. He is truly the author and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2)

Proverbs 16:8 calls us to rest in the fact that **God** controls our prosperity. “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.” I learned that lesson the hard way about 8 years ago. Before I asked Lauren to marry me, I told her I would be a Chaplain in 6 months. Never tell God how or when He is going to something!

Because we had so few churches in upstate NY and they had never ordained a Chaplain, it took a full year for church leaders to decide how to begin. I could’ve looked for a different church, but I wanted to serve God in the denomination in which He had called me.

After I passed my initial exams, I had only 3 weeks to complete my Army packet for the semi-annual board. I couldn’t get all the paperwork together in time. The second time, DA lost a key piece of my packet - 6 more months. The third time, I was rejected. It seems that the O6 Chaplain with whom I had interviewed didn’t like some of my answers. I could’ve told him what he wanted to hear, but I had to keep my conscience clean.

The fourth time, I gave the same answers to a different O6, and I was accepted. I immediately took my final church tests and was approved, but the officials wanted me to stay under a sponsor’s care for **another** year. I was still a newlywed, and they wanted to be sure that I could manage my house well before I tried managing God’s house, according to 1Timothy 3:5. I could’ve argued with them, but God calls us to submit to our elders’ godly decisions.

I walked to the window of that 2<sup>nd</sup> story building to tell my wife, who was waiting in our van. On the dash, cover up and facing me was a book she had been reading: “God is not in Hurry”. I had to laugh. Once I got her attention, I gave her the good news and relaxed in God’s sovereignty. My battle plan had fallen through, but not God’s. He rules over life (even our promotions) in **His** timing.



When our HHT Commander asked if my assistant and I wanted to go to a weapons range, we jumped at the chance. They were firing pistols, rifles, machine guns, anti-tank weapons, and claymore mines – all at the same time in a relatively small area. It was going to be cool!

After we arrived, the NCOIC organized some field-expedient targets, briefed us on safety, and the soldiers went at it. It was quite a display for fire power. I’d never seen a live AT-4 before. The firers and a few coaches walked about 100 meters further up, and we watched from an elevated mesa. When



first one went off, **‘WHOOM!!’**, everyone roared with cheers, nervous laughter, and ‘hoohah!’s – even though the guy missed by a mile. Still, all the way home he couldn’t stop talking about how much he enjoyed it and how powerful he felt shooting it.

Power brings a sense of security and peace in the middle of chaos. That makes me wonder why anyone would settle for less than the perfect security of God Almighty. But so many do. “Who is like You, O Lord among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them. In your loving kindness, You have led the people that You have redeemed. You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy place. The peoples have heard and tremble. Pangs have taken hold on the Philistines; the chiefs of Edom were dismayed. The mighty men of Moab tremble. All the Canaanites melt away. Terror and dread falls on them. By the greatness of Your arm they are as still as a stone until Your people pass over, Lord, until the people pass over whom You have purchased. You shall bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance. The place You have made for Yourself, the sanctuary which Your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever.” (Exodus 15:11-18)

In a few days, our Quartering Party is going to jump north about 30 miles above Baghdad for a few last missions. The Main Body follows in 24 to 48 hours. Before we deployed, we thought we'd be back in 6 months at the latest. Now that we're already at that mark, we're being told to move north for battle - not south for redeployment.

Needless to say, morale is a little low. It shouldn't stay that way though, at least not for Christians. Jesus' followers should know that God's will for their lives is not wrapped around easy circumstances, but rather opportunities to please God and enjoy His plan through their faith and obedience. It's human nature to demand what we want. But Jesus taught His followers that love means meeting others' needs rather than our wants.

For example, we tend to demand an 'eye for an eye' - maximum justice. Actually, that is a misinterpretation of the verse. God is saying that justice should be fair, not extreme. In other words, it shouldn't be a *leg* for an eye. The Lord calls us to maximum *love*. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you." (Matthew 5:38-42)

What do those around you need? How can you serve them? If God has ordained your circumstances such that you can't change them, praise the Lord! He has set you up to honor Him exactly where you are! Going the extra mile is only a burden if you're striving for mediocrity. For the humble, it's an opportunity to do something great!





Today’s the day we thought we’d be at home, or at least headed in that direction. A mild gloom was over the Squadron all morning. By lunch, I’d heard tens of soldiers moaning about another day in Iraq. With little more than time on the horizon, all we can see is home - in our rearview mirror.

This afternoon, I was in my tent working on a redeployment brief (just to be proactive) when my 1SG came by. “There’s a Squadron formation in about 30 minutes, Chaplain.” I joked with him, “Is this the redeployment formation?” I asked him to repeat his answer about three times. I couldn’t believe it - we’re going home! I donned my gear to get out and see how many other soldiers had received the word early. Silly grins were everywhere. The cat was out of the bag.



Psalm 126 was written shortly after the Lord brought Israel back from exile. You can almost hear the same kind of excitement. “When the Lord brought back those who returned to Zion, We were like those who dream. Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with singing. Then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad. Restore our fortunes again, Lord, like the streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing, will assuredly come again with joy, carrying his sheaves.”

What’s so special about home? Sure, the absence of gunfire, dust, and MREs will be nice. Going back to Burger King and the smell of grass in our front lawns will be good, too. But the reunion with our loved ones is what we look forward to most of all. Christians can experience an even greater homecoming every day! Through Jesus Christ, we can enjoy being adopted into the family of God!



The devotional series in Proverbs 16:1-9 has been dealing with our ‘battle plans’ for control. Hopefully, I’ve shown you through the Scriptures and personal experience that human beings never have total control. In fact, God doesn’t even call us to control. Yes, we should plan responsibly, do our

best to bring order to the chaos, and persevere through difficult times, but our primary task is not to control. It’s to love. Listen to verse 6. “Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for, through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.”

You may remember that verse 3 instructs us to roll off the burdens that belong only to God - namely the future, justice, peace, and our prosperity. Our only task is to love and obey the Lord. Do you see a problem with that? I do – a big one!

Yesterday, I walked in on two NCOs who were talking about how to motivate soldiers. One of them insisted that it was an impossible task. The other disagreed. At the risk of sticking my nose in a private conversation, I told them, “You can’t *make* someone want to do the right thing. You can only make him fear doing the wrong thing.”

We don’t have power over others’ hearts. We really don’t even have complete power over our own. Don’t believe me? Try to make yourself love Saddam Hussein. Decide to hate your baby girl right now. It can’t be done. Your heart is who you are. That’s fine when it comes to loving those who make us happy. It’s a problem when we have to do something that we don’t enjoy.

Our hope is *Jesus*’ love and faithfulness. He gives a new heart so that we can have a proper fear of God. His heart is powerful and faithful. If you know that there is huge gap between you and the holy God, go to the One Who stands in the gap – Jesus Christ!



My oldest son is 12 today. I remember telling him that I would be back the week before his birthday. That was my mistake. I’ve not been the best father to my two oldest children. For over 2 years, I didn’t give them the time they deserved, and I had unrealistic expectations of Christopher. I’m an oldest child, too, and I remember the high expectations my parents had of me. I don’t know why I didn’t cut him some slack. Yes I do. My human nature

wants what’s easy for me, not necessarily what’s good for him.

Thankfully, my heavenly Father continually makes good on His promise to change His children. Over the years, my wife and I have grown in patience, kindness, wisdom, unity, and conviction. It’s started to pay off in our children, too. I love all my kids, and I’m proud of their different strengths.

I really enjoy watching Christopher play with his friends. He’s tries to be a good host to them. Lauren tells me that she and he talk more now – and he listens. He’s been helping with a community youth group while I’ve been gone, and he’s a lot of help around the house, too. I really miss him and I’m looking forward to seeing him.

Proverbs 15:20 says, “A wise son makes his father glad, but a foolish son despises his mother.” I used to think of my children as extensions of my reputation. I suppose they are to some extent, but now I focus more on the great possibilities for their lives. I am so glad for the direction Christopher seems to be choosing for his life. His Mom is proud of him, too. I miss you, son!

All children want their parents to be proud of them, but God’s opinion is the only one that ultimately counts. The writer of Proverbs calls us to wisdom by pointing us to God. When we submit our lives to Him, He guides and blesses us so that our reputation becomes one that reflects His character. You could say that it’s His ‘new birth’ day present to us!

The desert can be a harsh environment. We sweat in the afternoon and shiver after midnight. Living in this miserable climate has made me appreciate how much God cared for the Israelites - particularly during their 40 year trip to the promise land.

When the Lord led them through the desert, He manifested His presence in a cloud by day & a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Imagine standing in the middle of a field of sand, as far as the eye can see. Now imagine that it's the middle of the day – 125 degrees Fahrenheit – or the middle of the night – 60 degrees cooler just a few hours later. What would a moving cloud or pillar of fire do for you? God was their point Man to fight for them, their compass Man to guide them, and their shelter from the heat of the day and the cold at night. More than that, He proved His presence – 24/7, for 40 years!

God does much more than save His followers from hell. He fills their hearts with warmth – even when others give you the cold shoulder. By the power of His Spirit living in us, He cools our tempers when those around us are burning with anger. He proves His presence by guiding our hearts to desire His will and shedding the light of His wisdom on the many dilemmas we face. Every true Christian can tell you specific ways that God has changed their hearts and worked in their lives.

He is there 24/7, and He's more than a god – He's made Himself to be 'Father' to those who follow Him. Have you noticed, too, that God likes to parade His children in front of others? Don't you know that the surrounding countries saw God's miracles, too? He wants the world to see the blessings that come to the faithful. When you feel like you're living in a desert, do more than survive the extremes of life. Flourish under God's presence, guidance, and comfort. If you trust and obey Him, He will make you an eager testimony to His glory!



Today is Good Friday – the anniversary of Jesus’ crucifixion. That’s appropriate. We’ve come through hard times, but Sunday is right around the corner – we’re finally going home. The hardest thing about deployments is feeling cut off – cut



off from home, loved ones, friends, news, blue jeans, ice, and ‘freedom’ fries. We had everything we need to accomplish the mission, but we’ve had very few things to make us smile - until now.

Ezekiel 37 is a vivid picture of how Israel felt during their captivity – cut off from their God, land, and joy. “The hand of the Lord was on me, and He brought me out by His Spirit and set me down in the midst of a valley full of bones. He led me back and forth among them and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and they were very dry . . . He said to me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, ‘our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are completely cut off.’” (1-2 & 11)

I love Ezekiel’s response when the Lord asks him ‘can these bones live’ – ‘You alone know, O Lord.’ What a safe answer! God was presenting him with an impossible situation. I guess Ezekiel had forgotten that God is in the business of the impossible. The hope was not determined by the circumstances, but by the reliability of God’s Word. He simply asked the prophet to have faith and obey.

We’ve been waiting for a word from CG for weeks. What’s so special about the Corps Commander? He’s the one with the authority and power to send us home. That’s exactly why we put our faith in God’s Word. The Lord has ***all*** authority and power. Whatever He promises - in the words of the V Corps motto - “it will be done!”

When we were in Al Salemm, we had a bout of the ‘Kuwaiti Crud’. I guess the Iraqi version is going around now. About 30 of our soldiers have been hit hard – stomach cramps, fever & chills, vomiting, and diarrhea. They’re usually down for at least 24 hours, when it strikes. I’ve seen it turn some of our hardest leaders into sweaty, napping babes. The only relief they’ve been able to find is an I.V. A few of the soldiers were so weak, our medics had to bring the I.V. to them.



That power and compassion is similar to what we see in God’s Spirit in Ezekiel 37. He was their hope from start to finish - they were hopeless until He took the initiative to come to them (as we saw in yesterday’s devotional). His Spirit gave them life. (verse 14)

“Thus says the Sovereign Lord to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and, behold, an earthquake; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I saw, and, behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. Then said He to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and tell the wind, Thus says the Sovereign Lord: Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army.” (Ezekiel 37:5-10)

When your heart feels dry, when you are cut off from patience, joy, or self-control - call on the Lord. Listen to His Word, even when His commands and promises seem impossible. He will be your hope!

Easter in Iraq – sounds strange, doesn’t it? It’s as strange as finding a watering hole and lush, green palm trees in the middle of a desert. It’s strangely wonderful! We had a great service. Because we’ll be packing all day tomorrow, we had a Saturday service to afford more soldiers an opportunity to come. We



were also in the middle of 48 hour dust storm, so we had to hold it in the tent. That didn’t dampen our mood, though.

1SG Miller opened us with Scripture and prayer; SGT Schwalb and SSG Kyne read the passage I later preached; SPC Snyder, CPT Magsig and I sang ‘Great is Thy Faithfulness’ while SGT Adams accompanied us on guitar; and SPC Moyer closed us in prayer. The whole service was a nice testimony to the Body of Christ – different ranks, races, and genders, coming together to worship. Such a diverse group forces other to ask, ‘what do they have in common?’

Faithful Christians are vibrant witnesses to their Lord’s power and grace. The other soldiers watch them. That’s exactly what God wants. In Ezekiel 37:12-14, the Lord reminds us of this truth. “Prophecy, and tell them, ‘Thus says the Sovereign Lord, Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, God Almighty, have said it and done it’, says the Lord.”

The Lord brings the humble to life (12a) so others can see what He has done. He selected the country of Israel for the same reason (12b). It was bridge between Europe, Asian, & Africa – literally, the center of the world. And when He works in us, we have no doubt that He is the One Who has done it (13-14). He is the only hope for dry bones.

My daughter, Hannah, is 2 today, and it's our first day back in Camp Udairi, Kuwait. My return from Iraq is the only present I can give her. Before she was born, my wife and I knew that boys and girls were different, but I had no idea how much. In her most recent letter, Lauren



said that after she disciplines her, Hannah runs to her 3 year old brother for a hug. If he's not around, she goes to one of her older brothers for comfort. We never had to train her to be 'girly' – she just came that way. She is more vulnerable than her brothers in every way, and that just draws us to protect and care for her all the more (being careful not to spoil her, of course). That's a glimpse into God's plan for marriage.

Ephesians 5 clearly states that matrimony should be like the relationship between Jesus and the Church. The husband is to care for his wife as Christ cared for the Church. 1 Peter 3:7 is more specific. "Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with understanding, giving honor to her as the weaker vessel, who is your fellow heir in the grace of life; ***in order that your prayers may not be hindered.***" (emphasis mine) It's not chauvinism to give extra care to our wives. It's biblical. That is how God calls husbands to love.

We should be back in Germany in about 3 weeks (give or take, based on port operations). Many marriages will have some struggle with readjustment, and much of it will be about 'who has control'. The ladies have done it by themselves for almost 7 months, and some men will try to take it back with a passion. Be careful. Be gentle.

Male leadership in marriage is a responsibility, not a privilege. If there is any privilege, it should be in the knowledge that God has entrusted us with one of His daughters. We must take care not to upset our wives' Dad! Remember the part about hindered prayers in verse 7? Again, loving leadership is no option. It's our Lord's command.



Months ago, my assistant and I were driving through the desert from Al Saleem Air Base to give religious support to another Brigade when I noticed a strangely wonderful sight. We’d just had a couple of days’ rain and right there in the middle of the sand was a patch of green grass. I couldn’t believe it!

It was such a stark contrast between life and death. Typically, we wouldn’t see anything on that long trip. Now a lush, green carpet was ornamenting the brown, desert floor. There were even a few birds on the grass, looking for seeds or insects. About 3 days later we made the same trip, but I couldn’t find the grass. I watched for it on the way up and on the way back – nothing.

That’s how temporary and vulnerable life is. Psalm 90:5-6 says of God “You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning - though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.” Most of us live about 75 years. The first 25 are spent learning how to live; the last 25 are times of reflection and breaking down; and the middle are often wasted on pursuing things that do not last

You may remember verse 12 of the Psalm. “Teach us to number our days rightly, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Wise soldiers invest in the battles that outlive them. Someone once said, “I would rather fail at a cause that will one day succeed than succeed at a cause that will one day fail.”

Like desert grass, even fortified military structures come and go, as our soldiers can attest. Spiritual growth is not like that, however. The Bible describes the building of God’s people as a kingdom that will last forever. Jesus told His disciples that even a cup of cold water given in His name would not be forgotten. How can you bring life into your corner of the world today? Ornament a life with God’s beauty and feel God smile on you!



One of the things I’ve enjoyed about the desert is watching soldiers take care of each other. The Army talks about having Battle Buddies. It’s a concept from the Infantry in which we watch each other’s back so we can patrol, eat, sleep, etc. It’s essential for our safety. It also builds a great sense of trust and friendship.

In John 15:15-17, Jesus gave a whole new meaning to ‘Battle Buddy’ when He said, “Greater love has no one than this - than he lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You didn't choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in My name, he may give it to you. I command these things to you, that you may love one another.”

The greater context of chapters 14-16 is possibly the Bible’s most personal conversation between God and man. Read the whole conversation. You’ll be touched by Jesus’ affection, confidence, strength, and determination. Everything you’d want in a battle buddy is there in the Savior. These chapters contain His last opportunity to talk to His friends before He went to die, to take the punishment they (and we) deserved. He wanted to leave them with the most important thoughts from their best Friend.

We turn to people for comfort, wisdom, acceptance, and strength. My wife helps me everyday; my parents are always supportive; and I have other friends whose affection seems to be never-ending. But only the Lord offers me a Friendship with perfect power, wisdom, and love. He is the ultimate Friend. When I’m not following Him, He’s not the one who has walked away. Do you need to turn around and follow Him? He will be your Point Man, Rear Security, and best Friend.





When we pulled out of TAA Vicksburg a few days ago, the weather was great, and we all hoped that it would hold. A month earlier, it had been pretty challenging. We went through a lot of desert, and the visibility was terrible. At times, we felt like we were driving blind.

Occasionally, we had to run with blackout drive or parking lights and NVGs. We weren't as concerned about someone seeing us – we were just trying to see each other, and our driving lights only amplified the dust. Sometimes, keeping up meant that we had to go a little faster than we wanted to, but we made it – all 400 kilometers. All we had to do was watch the tail lights of the vehicle in front of us and keep up.

Genesis 12:1-3 says, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and **go to the land that I will show you**. I will make you into great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed.’” (emphasis mine) The Lord didn't even tell Abe where He was taking him. But Exodus 13:21-22 is clear – all they had to do was watch Him and keep up. “The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not leave the people.”

Life is no different for us. We don't have to know what tomorrow holds. If I follow Jesus' example one step at a time, I'll get to where He wants me to go. Faith may be near-sighted, but it's certainly not blind. And when it comes to reaching your destination, what's more important – how far I can see or that I'm looking in the right direction? Follow Jesus. He knows where He's going, and He can get you there.

Have you ever watched the credits roll at the end of the movie and wondered what a ‘grip’ and ‘gaffer’ are? Apparently, they work with props backstage. They’re not the stars of the film, but they’re essential to making things flow smoothly. Some Christians are like backstage workers. The other day, one of our soldiers told me that I had the hardest job out here. I’m not sure about that. I couldn’t fly into the face of the enemy like the pilots, and I know I’m not smart enough to work on the birds. He was paying me a compliment for doing ministry, but he may have been underestimating the significance of his spiritual gifts. That’s easy to do in a culture that emphasizes upfront people.

In Exodus 17:8-15, we find a ‘grip and gaffer’ in action. “Choose men for us, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with God’s rod in my hand.” So Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. It happened, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side. His hands were steady until sunset. Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky.’ Moses built an altar, and called it ‘the Lord, our Banner.’”

If Aaron and Hur had not been there to serve as needed, Moses could not have done his part. Of course, the Lord played the starring role, but their part is recorded in Scripture to their credit. Serve where you are, with whatever you have to give. Your work is important to Him and His plan.



Proverbs 16:18 says “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” It was one of the first Scriptures I ever memorized because of its practicality. It’s especially true in situations where the stakes are high. My greatest concern going into this conflict was arrogance. I didn’t want to instill doubt by sounding like a prophet of doom, but I was afraid the war could go badly because of ungodly pride among some soldiers. I spoke discretely to as many Christians as I could find and asked them to pray.

Over and over, the Scriptures teach us that God humbles the proud, but exalts the humble. (Proverbs 3:34, Luke 18:14, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, etc.) Praise the Lord that He was merciful. I’ve already mentioned some of the dangers from which He spared us. Those were great testimonies to His mercy. The clearest call to humility, however, may have come from a commentator who said, ‘The most disappointing weapon of the entire war was the Apache helicopter. A good example was the 11<sup>th</sup> AHR, whose aircraft took heavy fire during its first mission and sat out for the rest of the war.’ (Fox News, 18 April, 2003)

That’s not entirely accurate. 2-6 Cav helped destroy Iraq’s Medina Division, securing a key land bridge across the Euphrates. One of our Apaches was even the first American aircraft to land at Baghdad International. 6-6 and 227 also flew their share of combat missions. Still, compared to the part we thought we’d play, the war was won without us.

No soldier, equipment, or training is great enough to take center stage. The highest glory is God’s, and He will not share it. But the servant who bends his knee to the King gains a Friend in high places. Chaplains often have a word for the day. If there is a word for this war, I’d say it’s ‘humility’.



Before we left Kuwait, I mailed several souvenirs back to my wife and children – a blanket, a handmade model ship, etc. I have a little more shopping I’d like to do before we leave, just to be sure that I get everyone something. Many of the soldiers bought American flags before the war. They can give them to loved ones and say ‘This flag flew in Iraq during the war.’ That’s pretty cool. Still, even a great souvenir like that can lose its meaning if the recipient doesn’t continue to give it proper respect. I think the Lord has already a gift to me – the lessons I’m learning from hardship.

In Romans 5:3-5, the Apostle Paul writes to believers who have suffered under the persecuting Roman government. They had also heard of Paul’s suffering for the gospel. He writes to encourage them that God uses even the hard times to bless believers. “We also rejoice in the midst of suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Whom He has given us.”

At our Easter service last week, one soldier prayed that we would remember the spiritual lessons we’ve learned here. It does seem that lessons learned in the valleys of life are often forgotten on the mountain tops. Notice, however, that the foundation of the Christian’s hope is based on our intellect, perseverance, or emotions, but His gift of salvation.

Our hope for remembering and applying the lessons is based in His mercy and commitment to us. When we trust and follow Jesus Christ, He constantly takes the initiative to work in our lives. He has graciously taken us through one of life’s boot camps, and – just as those memories of Basic Training are indelibly etched in our minds - we’ll never be the same again.



I definitely won't miss the sand of Iraq and Kuwait, but I have been fascinated by it. It's really more like dust than sand. I don't know how many times I've heard soldiers say that it looks like we're living on the surface of the moon, particularly the way the dust mushrooms with



every step you take. Everyday, I think about how worthless that dust is. Then I remember that God says I'm made of the same stuff.

The only thing that separated Adam from the rest of God's creation was the fact that God had breathed His Spirit into him. God does not love us because we are so lovable, but because He is so loving. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. He will not always accuse. Neither will He stay angry forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us for our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him, for He knows that we are only dust. As for man, his days are like grass. As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone. Its place remembers it no more. But the Lord's loving kindness is from everlasting to everlasting with those who fear Him, His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant, to those who remember to obey His precepts." (Psalm 103:8-18)

When a baby is ransomed by kidnappers, what is it that makes a weak, blubbering infant so valuable? Isn't it simply the parents' love? Unloved children are worthless to a thief. If sin has stolen your soul, rest in God's love. He has paid the ransom for your guilt at the cost of Jesus' life. Now, you are worth more to Him than the entire world!

All soldiers have war stories, and each one is uniquely shaped by what happened to them, who helped them through it, how the soldier responded, and why. War stories are more than a record of historical events. They’re a reflection of who we are. Chances are, the more the person talks about how great they were, the less reliable the story is. Generally, the more the soldier admits to some shortcomings and credits the victory to the team, the more you can trust their version.



Operation: Iraqi Freedom is largely over for us, but there’s a more significant war that rages everyday - the battle of good and evil in our spirits. The situations are just as unique, and our stories are just as much a reflection of who we are. In Psalm 107, the writer outlines four groups of people who were fully engaged in this conflict. Each group had a different need, and the Lord met them exactly where they were. Each time He gave them exactly what they needed and secured the victory for them. And each time the people responded with praise and thankful lives.

There are two key differences between the recent military conflict and the spiritual war. First, In the battle for godliness, we weren’t fighting – we had surrendered to the enemy. Some were like Bedouins, wandering in a desert (4-9); some were recipients of UCMJ, in prison for their rebellion (10-16); some were just foolish, wallowing in the private misery of their own selfishness (17-22); and some thought they were masters of their destiny, trusting in themselves (23-32). None of them had any real hope, until they cried out to the Lord.

Second, for the Christian, these war stories are not optional. “Give thanks to the Lord. His love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord *say* so – those He redeemed from the hand of the enemy, those He gathered from the lands, from the east and west, from the north and south.” (1-3 emphasis mine). What’s your story? Tell it to someone!



It’s hard to describe living in the desert. As I’m writing this at Camp Udairi, I can’t stop sweating. I’m sitting relatively still; I showered this morning; I’m wearing clean clothes, but I’m already beginning to stink. There’s almost nowhere to hide from the heat. Occasionally, strong winds bring some relief

from the heat, but they also bring sandstorms so thick that your lungs become heavy with dirt. And even if you manage to find something to shield you from the sun and wind, the flies still light all over you looking for water. It’s a miserable existence.

In Psalm 107:4-9, the writer says, “Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.”

Can you imagine a Bedouin’s life? I’m told that, when Kuwait became a nation years ago, many of the Arabs could not provide documentation to prove their citizenship through their ancestors’ history in the land. Allegedly, the government did not contest their claims, but would not grant them property either. Now they have to move place to place, with no where to call their own.

Maybe some of you can relate. Feelings of rejection and worthlessness, doubts about your significance and hope can drain your soul. Notice that, when they called out to the Lord, He met them at their level. He didn’t wait until they loved themselves or require a certain level of inner strength – just a call for help. Where is your home? Who do you look to for comfort, security, and acceptance? Only God Himself can fully meet those needs.



Psalm 107:10-16 says, “Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains because they had rebelled against the words of God and had despised the counsel of the Most High. So He subjected them to bitter labor. They stumbled and there was no one to help. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. For He broke down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.”

We have a few soldiers in the Task Force who will be receiving or have already received UCMJ. They knew the rules but did their own thing anyway. I know for a fact that (as in the verses above) their leaders specifically warned them beforehand, but they ‘despised the counsel’. I doubt they’ll receive any jail time – the offenses weren’t of that nature. I do hope they learn from it though. Otherwise, life is just going to get harder and harder for them.

There’s a reason Article 15s are called ‘non-judicial punishment’. They’re not meant to satisfy justice, they’re meant to get the soldier’s attention. The hope is that, after 14 days extra duty or having some money taken, they’ll make a better decision next time.

Before we attacked Iraq, the United States repeatedly called for the UN to enforce resolution 1441; we accepted extension after extension of deadlines for Hussein’s compliance; our PsyOps guys dropped thousands of fliers on Iraq telling their soldiers how to surrender. Still, the Iraqi army wouldn’t listen. Now life is a lot harder for them.

Peace comes with heeding wise counsel. If you’ve got a war story of how the truth of God’s Word rescued you from your own rebellion, share it with someone who’s struggling. Your testimony could be the beginning of their lasting peace. God will bless your faithfulness.



The fools in Psalm 107 are similar to the prisoners in the previous verses with one key difference. Everyone could see the former group sitting in jail. These people, however, are suffering in silence. It could be that no one knew their pain except them and God. “Some became fools because of their rebellious ways, suffering affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near to the gates of death.” (17-18)

As a Chaplain, I’ve counseled hundreds of soldiers of almost every color, age, rank, and profession. I can tell you truthfully that there’s a lot of suffering in the hearts of some who laugh the loudest and work the hardest. So many people in this world are surrounded by daily acquaintances but are lonely at heart. They’re prisoners.

I also know this to be the fact, because I was right there about 20 years ago. Working in my parents’ general store, I got a rude and regular dose to John Q. Public’s family on vacation. “Give it to me now, with a discount and a smile!” seemed to be the average customer’s motto. I used to blame them for my hatred and depression after a thankless day of work. Then God opened my heart to the truth of His Word. Life is not about me! I grieved my selfishness and asked Him to forgive me and lead me (19-20).



Now I work as a Chaplain, always hoping for the opportunity to explain how Jesus Christ is the answer to every question and every hurt. “Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of His works with songs of joy” (21-22). Don’t keep your spiritual war story to yourself. There’s enough suffering in the world already. There are other prisoners who need to know Who broke your chains.



We have a lot to write home about. God has spared us from danger after danger. We came to the fight as a mighty military Task Force. Now we're leaving, realizing that life's successes aren't as guaranteed as we thought. See if you notice any similarities to the soldiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the seamen of 1000 BC.

“Others went out on the sea in ships. They were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep, for He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths. In their peril, their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men – they were at their wits end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm and He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. Let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people and praise Him in the council of the elders.” (Psalm 107:23-32)

I just received a report date for my Advance Course in July, so my tour with this unit is almost over. Looking back over the last 2 ½ years, I've enjoyed getting to know many of the soldiers and their families. Apache communities are a breed apart. From E-1 to O6, they're extremely intelligent, have great senses of humor, and – because of the two-man crew dynamic, small corps, and frequent deployments – they tend to make friends for life.

I can't imagine a better pulpit for God's glory than a humble fighter pilot. From a human perspective, reality might look like you can 'give me a stick and hellfire, and I'll change the world', but godly veterans know better. If He's humbled and blessed you, take a look at your peers. Some of them may be searching for that peace, too.

How often could we have lost a soldier, but didn’t? How often were we scheduled for greatness, only to sit tight because of things beyond our control? God had definitely had His hand on us. The war is won; we’re all going home; and some are rethinking Life.

Like a wise Commander, God gets in the face of the hard-headed & puts His arm around the soft-hearted to win their loyalty. Some respond. Some don’t. But their choice is a reflection of the soldier, not on the Commander.

“He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. He turned the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into flowing springs. There He brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest. He blessed them, and their number greatly increased, and He did not let their herds diminish. Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity, and sorrow; He who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. But He lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. The upright weep and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.” (33-43)

Notice that the wicked ‘shut their mouths’. They didn’t want to listen, and they don’t want to comment. Psalm 107 opened with the statement that ‘The Lord is good. His love endures forever’. I think you’d agree that He’s proven that over and over. Now the question is, how are we going to respond to what He’s done? Read verses 1-3 again. When great things happen, God’s soldiers should say so!



About half of D Troop and a few HHT vehicles left Udairi at 1400 today and went straight to the wash racks in Doha. We were hoping to download our stuff at the bay and have a little time off, but we didn't complain too much. Every clean vehicle and ISU was just another step closer to going home.

I had forgotten how strict the inspectors are about dirt. SPC Antone and I cleaned our HMMWV for 7 hours. Actually, he did 90% of the cleaning (always give credit where credit is due). They checked us three times and found dirt each time. I was frustrated, but I know why they're so picky. The dirt can carry insects, bacteria, and other contaminants. Germany doesn't want us bring the Kuwaiti Crud home with us! Still, it doesn't make the process any less painful.

I'd been up since 0500, missed lunch, and had been enduring the 100+ heat for 4 hours when I heard a slow 'schlump, schlump, schlump' over my shoulder. It was a clean, but 'rickety' LMTV from another unit rolling by. It sounded like it wasn't going to make it to the end of the lane, but it was



boasting a brand new inspection sticker! Some of our vehicles had already failed but were in much better mechanical condition. I turned to someone and joked, “I wonder how that guy passed.”

We find a similar situation when Jesus was being crucified with a thief on either side of Him. At the base of the cross were religious teachers, governing officials, and Roman soldiers – the professionals of the day. But listen to Jesus' response to the thief who said, “Remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.” I can imagine that those in earshot asked, ‘I wonder how that guy passed?’ The Lord isn't interested in how well we perform. He's checking for cleanliness – a purity that only He can offer. A blessing that He freely gives.

Our piece of the war is done; we’re safe; we have a 24 hour gym, a PX, food court, and theatre in Doha; and we’re going home; but a few still aren’t satisfied. This time it’s about medals - ‘who’s getting what and why?’ or why not.



There are basically 3 types of wartime medals being awarded: Air Medals for pilots, ARCOMs, and Bronze Stars. The approval process for medals is not as black and white as a promotion. When an E5 has the required time in service and time in grade, promotion points, military schooling, and is not flagged, he *may* be promoted to E6 (even then, there could be other considerations). Medals are more fluid. Commanders may consider the soldier’s level of responsibility, the impact of their action, even comparisons to peers.

Every soldier in our unit will receive a slew of ribbons and a combat patch, and most also qualify for a combat stripe (which few units have earned during this war). In their heart, each person knows what they did, whether others witnessed their actions or not. So why are they grumbling? Generally, it comes back to pride in (or fear of) their self-worth. But there’s a big problem with basing our value in what we’ve done. The quest is never satisfied. There’s always a higher personal goal, someone who did it better, or an imperfection that tarnishes our silver star. God offers us real value – not in what we’ve done, but in what He’s paid for us. “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband’s will, but born of God.” John 1:1-13

Jesus’ perfect life has infinite value before the Father, so His death more than covers our failures. In the end, we will all cast our crowns at His feet (Revelation 4:10-11). Put your value in His sacrifice. When God looks at you, He simply looks for a qualification badge – Jesus!



I saw an old friend today. Back when 2-6 was still a Task Force, a few dozen soldiers from the 159<sup>th</sup> Medical Company were attached to us. SGT Boese had been scheduled to get out of the army, but came down with the understanding

that he would be able to ETS on time. Like most soldiers' plans on this deployment, it wasn't meant to be. First, his replacement fell through. Then his early return was delayed. Next, stop-move took effect, then stop-loss. When TF 2-6 became part of TF 11, his unit reassigned him. I hadn't seen him in months, but he had seen a lot.

My friend had helped some of the wounded from the 101<sup>st</sup> after one of their GIs threw a grenade into a Brigade TOC. As he performed CPR on one of the men, a Patriot shot down a British Tornado directly over their heads. In Iraq, his team air-lifted civilian amputees, whole families of wounded, and a toddler with 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns over 80% of her body. He tried to calm her, but she cried all the way. Homicide, fratricide, and the worst kinds of collateral damage - I hurt for him.

As he talked, I could hear the compassion and humility in his voice. I reflected back on the many conversations we'd had in Ali Al Saleem. Back then, we both wondered how we would do in the stress of battle, how our families would cope without us, and why God had led us to this place - so far from life as we knew it. One of the things we talked about was God's plan to mold us into Jesus' image - no matter where we were. His peace, love, strength, and wisdom are the greatest gifts that He can give. They are the building blocks of great servants, and great servants are the light of God in a dark world.

The Lord leads His children to the exact places where He wants to shape us (Romans 8:28). God had not forgotten about his young son, working wife, or job concerns. He simply had better plans for him. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7) Brother, I know that God will continue to do great things!



Redeployment is a joyful time, but it's also filled with challenges, especially where reunions are concerned. Some of our poor soldiers have had to sit through as many as 3 Chaplain's briefs. The Army is just trying to make sure their relationships go as smoothly as possible.

One of the foundations to any good relationship is communications. Ephesians

4:22-5:2 give us at least 7 keys for success, especially when the relationship is under stress. Being a military Chaplain, I love acronyms and have tried to make the principles easier to remember. I'll get into the specifics in the following devotions. For now, allow me to explain why I have chosen the image of 'pitching' to illustrate how to lovingly talk to each other.

Most parents with grade school children understand the difference between coach-pitch and kid-pitch baseball. In the first, your coach pitches the ball to the child - nice and slow. If he misses, he gives them a chance to calm down, throws them some pointers, and the next toss comes with even greater care. The object is to set them up for success, because they're both on the same team. In kid-pitch, a player from the other team tries to strike your child out. Too many of us talk to our loved ones like we're playing a game of kid-pitch - we try to strike them out. The only difference is that, in a relationship, everyone loses!

You probably know that Babe Ruth held the world record for homeruns for almost 40 years. What you may not realize is that he *still* holds the record for strikeouts. The point is two-fold. First, even if the other person is determined to strike you out, when you hang in there you'll eventually succeed. Secondly, if a man with Babe Ruth's reputation of drinking and womanizing gave his best for just a game, shouldn't we do even more for our family and friends?





Many of our soldiers have been sitting in line for hours to call home. If I were a betting man, I'd say that they're talking about communications, money, parenting, and sex - all good ways to score homeruns with our loved ones. If a relationship is stressed, however, these same things can be used as a curve or fastball to strike them out.

Ephesians 4:22-5:2 tells us to attack the present problem, not the person or the past. In verse 26, Paul says “Do not give the devil a foothold.” The term ‘devil’ means accuser. Saying “you always . . .” or “you never . . .” puts people on the defensive. It's better to start by voicing something positive. If I'm going to start with a negative, it's better to confess my fault. Second, we are to imitate God's investment of sacrifice (5:1-2). Time with my son in the gym, money spent on a date night, etc. can go a long way. Third, tell the truth (v. 25). Of course, timing is always wise, but exaggerations and lies are never appropriate. Fourth, keep calm and current (v. 26). It is possible to argue without being hurtful. Don't keep things bottled up until you're boiling – try to deal with issues as they come up. Fifth, hear each other's hearts and help them (vv. 28-29). What is your loved one's heart crying out for? Often, they're really upset about something that's gotten ‘under their skin’. Sixth, obey God's Spirit over your opinion (vv. 30-31). Nuf said. And last of all, forgive each other and free your hearts (v. 32). If I'm upset with my wife, it helps to put things in perspective – namely, that I'm not innocent either.

God gives His Spirit so we can follow Him, but He expects us to work, too. Verses 22-24 tell us our motivation. Notice that the old self is being corrupted. If we see the problems in our relationships but do nothing, something will happen - but it won't be good. Talking is a lot like a game, but if you're going to play, play so that everyone will win.

Lots of guys are trying to call or email their wives and moms today. It’s no wonder that it’s the busiest calling day of the year - generally, mothers take a great interest in our lives. They bandage cuts, attend practices, and listen when no one else understands.



Moms are special because they make us feel special – even if we’re 3,000 miles away and haven’t seen them in years.

Many psychologists say that adults even choose their spouses by comparing them to Mom or Dad. It’s the search for unconditional love in a different form. Ultimately, however, looking a perfect love in an imperfect person brings only disappointment, anger, and loneliness. Listen to Jesus’ words in Luke 11:9-13.

“So I say to you, ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son wants a fish will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks you for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? I tell you the truth, if you – though you are evil – give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

Why is His Holy Spirit the answer to our search? When God lives in us and begins to change us, we have a personal relationship with Someone Who *is* perfect. By resting in *His* commitment and love, feeling special becomes a daily reality, not desperate reach. Moms are great, but they are supposed to raise us to give us away. All of us eventually grow beyond their ability to care for our needs. But their example of unconditional love (as flawed as it was) should point us to the perfect care that we find in God. In Isaiah 49:15, the Lord says, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”



This afternoon, one hundred soldiers who were part of the original TF 2-6 left Udairi for the airport. Before we left though, COL Wolf and LTC Thompson came on the buses to thank us for our work and award each soldier a TF 11 coin and a TF 2-6 coin.

A coin is symbol of accomplishment, of being part of a team, and the Commander's thanks for a good job. Soldiers love coins. Coins appeal to our need to **belong** and to feel **appreciated**. But they're a statement about the past. They can't promise a future.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, as the Apostle Paul writes to encourage Christians with the same needs. Here is God's gift. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ. And so through Him, the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God Who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

Notice two things. First, when you belong to Christ, you're not just recognized when you exceed the standard. In fact, we can't even **meet** God's standard. Jesus has done that for us, so our confidence is because of **Christ**. His promises of forgiveness, love, spiritual growth, and guidance are always 'yes' because we belong to Him.

Second, He has given us more than a symbol to **remind** us. He has given His Spirit to **keep** us. It is **God** Who makes us stand. The seal on a coin may remind us of what **was** - an old unit motto or someone with whom we used to work. The Holy Spirit lives in us to remind us of Who **is**. God works in believers to guide, encourage, strengthen, convict, and calm us forever. He also reminds us of what **will** be. Believers belong to God because of His Spirit. So if you are in Christ, He's coming back for you. How's that for a promise!

Customs is always a pain, but we had to do it. They needed to be sure that nothing came into Germany that didn't belong. UXO, diseases, etc. that came from the Middle East had to stay there. We have to be absolutely clean – if you have any contraband, you can't go home. A civilian station would have even required us to prove our citizenship.

The whole process reminds me of Jesus and Nicodemus.

The Pharisee was either impressed with what he had seen in Jesus, or he was trying to butter him up (or both). The Lord quickly cut to the chase about going through God's 'customs' to get into the Kingdom. “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.’” (John 3:5-6)

Notice that God's requirements are identical to customs. To enter His Kingdom, we have to be clean and prove citizenship. Water refers to baptism, which symbolizes our trust in God to cleanse us of guilt. And the Spirit is His mark of ownership on believers – a living Passport, if you will. If we don't meet the standard, we can't come in.

But all of us are selfish by nature – so how could we love God? Again, there's great news in the face of the impossible. John 3 refers to being born again – born from above! Is being born something that you do, or something that happens to you? Clearly, it is the latter. If you know that you're not clean, and the only spirit that dwells in you is one of guilt and rebellion, you need a new birth. If you *do* want to follow the Lord, it's because He's *already* working in you. Listen to Jesus' promise. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I'll never drive away” (John 6:37). Go to Him. Declare your need and desire to be clean. He will never drive you away.



At 1530 we landed in Rome to pick up a new airline crew and were about to take off for Ramstein. I remember thinking that the right engine sounded funny when a soldier behind me said, ‘Did you see that? A bunch of sparks just flew out of that panel. That can’t be good!’ It wasn’t. We spent the next 18 hours waiting on a part to be flown in from Milan. Most of us thought it was funny – par for the course on a deployment filled with delays and last minute changes.

The airline crew couldn’t believe how patient and upbeat we were. True, we were eager to get home, but that wasn’t the biggest reason for our disposition. Our disappointments, hardships, and frustrations had strengthened us. We’d been there and done that. We even had our stinking T-shirts! We had run the emotional marathon. This was just a 2 mile jog to the house.



The Apostle James writes to a group of Christian who were also waiting to go home. “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes, scattered among the nations: Greetings! Consider it pure joy,

my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work, so you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:1-3

Read that passage again. Perseverance is not just a byproduct of accidental hardships. It’s one of God’s **goals** for us. He arranges our challenges. Like the training before a PT test, the hard times make us stronger, **if** we go through it with faith in God. Because of His trials, we can be wiser, humbler, and more patient to serve others. Don’t just endure trials, rejoice in them. He has not forgotten you. In fact, He’s right in the middle of your difficulty, preparing you for tomorrow.



The Rear Detachment and FRG threw us a great welcome home ceremony. They even met our high expectation of keeping it to 5 minutes max. We've been through a difficult deployment, and now we're ready for lots of TLC from family and friends. We just wanted to see our families and go home. Home is where we hope to be understood, accepted, cared for, and built up.

Would it strike you as strange if I said that God had been giving us tons of TLC for the last 7 months? I think He disciplined us with humbling circumstances to soften proud hearts. I believe that He also blessed us with miraculous safety to show us His power. Isn't that love? To a church in Laodicea, Jesus said, "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me." Revelation 3:19-20

Read those verses again and imagine verse 20 in your mind. Do you see the picture of home? Sitting down for supper with God Himself - what could be more awesome and personal? It's a metaphor, to be sure, but it's also meant to teach us something powerful and practical. There is no better home than a relationship with Jesus Christ.

He is wise enough to discipline us, merciful enough to love us, and strong enough to keep us. No other person can bring us that kind of security. If you've strayed, go home. He'll always welcome you back.

## ***“Peace”***

Have you ever wondered why we have to turn in our brass? Simple, we reuse it. It's only a matter of time before there's another war.

Peace is an elusive thing in this world. But there are two kinds of peace. One is the absence of conflict - your kids get along, the rich help the poor, and countries cooperate.

The other is a spirit of calm & confidence, no matter what's happening in your house, your neighborhood, or the world. The former never lasts in this world. The latter is available permanently in Christ.

Jesus said, “When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places and fearful events and great signs from heaven.” (Luke 21:9-11) In 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, we read, “For you yourselves know that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. For when they are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ then sudden destruction will come on them, like birth pains on a pregnant woman; and they will not escape.” Compare that with these verses.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think about these things. Do the things which you learned, received, heard, and saw in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:6-9)

Other deployments and hardships will come. If we wish peace for our loved ones, remember - we can only share what we possess. Walk with Jesus in faith - through all of your ‘lessons learning’.







*“Praise be to the Lord my Rock, Who trains my hands for war,  
my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my  
stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge,  
Who subdues peoples under me. O Lord, what is man that You  
care for him, the son of man that You think of him? Man is like  
a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow. Part Your  
heavens, O Lord, and come down; touch the mountains, so that  
they smoke!”*

*Psalm 144:1-5*