Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. —1 Timothy 6:12 (NIV)
Military Edition

Our Daily Bread®

For Personal and Family Devotions Since 1956

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How To Use This Booklet

Most appliances and electronic devices come with an owner’s manual that briefly explains the basics of how to get started and operate the equipment. Consider this page your manual for using this devotional guide. The format isn’t complicated, but here are some suggestions for getting the most out of your reading:

• Select a time and place. If possible, set aside a time and place each day for reading and thinking about what you’ve read. Your time will be more meaningful if you can concentrate and establish a regular practice.

• Read the Bible passage. Begin by reading the suggested verses from the Bible (listed under the title). Those words from God’s Book are the most important statements you will read each day.

• Note the key verse. It is printed in bold on the left side of each page, and relates to the theme of the day.

• Read the article thoughtfully. As you read, seek to learn more about God, your relationship with Him, and how He wants you to live each day.

• Personalize the words of the poem. Use the poetic lines to respond from your heart to God. The poem may be in the form of a prayer that expresses how you feel.

• Use the closing “thought” to help you remember. The last item on each page is what we call the “thought for the day.” The statement in bold type is intended to help you remember a key idea from the reading.

• Take time to pray. After you have read the article, talk with the Lord about what you’ve discovered in His Word and what your response will be to Him.

With those suggestions in mind, you’re ready to get started. It is our prayer that in these pages you will find encouragement, hope, challenge, and comfort as you draw closer to God and grow in your love for Him.
National Service (NS) is a new experience for many Christian youths. They face new challenges, temptations, and testing of their Christian faith. Spending time with God and reading the Bible during Basic Military Training or NS days is one of the commonly faced challenges. Yet it is important for a young man to read God’s Word so that he can keep his way pure (Ps. 119:9).

This special selection of *Our Daily Bread* devotionals is designed to help young NS men like you to continue to spend time in God’s Word even while serving the nation, and to encourage you to live out your Christian faith in a challenging environment. Because it is the Word of God that you should be reading and meditating upon, the Bible passage for the day is printed alongside the devotional article to enable you to read both the Bible and the articles in one self-contained and easy-to-carry booklet.

It is our desire that you can use this little booklet as a mini spiritual-survival kit to draw strength and guidance from God’s Word as you go through your NS days.
When my son Steve left home in the summer of 2006 to join the US Navy, he knew the gravity of his decision. He understood that once he walked onto that naval base for boot camp, he was giving up everything a teenager lives for. He was leaving behind his freedom, his guitars, his music, and his girlfriend. He surrendered the right to make his own choices and to do what he wanted to do. He said, in effect, “I am making myself a living sacrifice. I no longer do things for me; I do them for the service of my country.”

The sacrifice Steve and thousands of others make when they enter the military service reminds me of what the apostle Paul taught in Romans 12:1. In that passage, he urged us “to offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is [our] spiritual act of worship.” This means we are to give up our selfish ways and surrender ourselves completely to God. We are to seek to be “holy” in all we do—to have a godly character (1 Peter 1:16), which is acceptable to God.

It wasn’t easy for Steve, who cherished self-determination, to give it all up for the Navy. But he did it. And it isn’t easy for us to completely surrender our will to God. How can you and I be a living sacrifice for God today? —Dave Branon

*Here is my heart, Lord Jesus,*
*I have but one for Thee;*
*Oh, let my heart be Thine alone,*
*Thy will be done in me.* —Mick

A life given fully to God is at the heart of true sacrifice.
Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans can be divided into two parts—doctrine (Romans 1–11) and duty (Romans 12–15). The last four chapters (12–15) spell out how a believer ought to live out his Christian life—not living in conformity to the pattern of this world but living a life that is transformed. God does not require that we die for Him. Rather, we are to live for Him (vv.1-2a)—in His perfect will (v.2b), in humility (v.3), and in unity (vv.4-8).
In Forever Young: My Friendship with John F. Kennedy, Jr., Billy Noonan recalls the life experiences he shared with the son of President John Kennedy.

In 1980, as one of the stories goes, John Jr. and Billy were invited aboard the USS John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier. On a guided tour of the ship, the two young men and their guide inadvertently entered a restricted area. When an officer stopped them, the guide pointed to John and said, “This is his father’s ship.” Snapping to attention, the officer saluted John. He explained his understanding that when a US Navy ship is named for someone, it is considered that person’s ship. Thus, as the son of the man for whom the ship was named, John Jr. had unique privileges.

This illustrates a vital spiritual principle. As adopted children in God’s family, we who have been saved possess the position of sonship. Paul wrote that as believers God has “predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). By virtue of this sonship, we have the unique privileges that belong to the children of the King of kings.

In life’s challenging voyage, we can take courage that our “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6) owns the ship and shares all with us. Praise God, we are joint-heirs with Christ! —Dennis Fisher

_The wealth of God is ours to share
Through Jesus Christ the Lord,
Joint-heirs with Him we claim it, then,
According to His Word._ —Sherbert

A Christian’s inheritance is guaranteed forever!
What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

INSIGHT

The evidence that we are children of God is the presence of the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of his Son,” living in our hearts (v.6). The Holy Spirit is the seal and the deposit guaranteeing our salvation (Eph. 1:13-14) and our changed status from slaves to sons (Gal. 4:6). In testifying that we are God’s children, the Holy Spirit enables us to affectionately call out to God, “Abba, Father” (v.6). As “the Spirit of sonship” (Rom. 8:15), He gives to us the full privileges of sons as heirs (Gal. 4:5,7)—“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). We are entitled to claim our full rights as sons because God has sent His Son as a man into the world to redeem us (Gal. 4:4-5).
Herman Wouk’s thrilling World War II novel *The Caine Mutiny* contains an excellent illustration of what happens when someone becomes a follower of God.

In the novel, a young man from an influential family has enlisted in the Navy. On the day of his induction, his mother drops him off in her fancy car and then kisses him goodbye. He shakes hands with the guard as he enters the building, and the door closes behind him.

His mother, suddenly worried that he might not have enough money, rushes up to the door. But the guard politely stops her. When she demands entrance, he refuses to let her in. She can see her son standing inside the door, so she reaches for the doorknob. “He’s my son!” she cries. The guard gently removes her hand from the knob and says softly, “I know, Ma’am, but he belongs to the military now. He’s a sailor.”

When we believe in Jesus Christ and become His followers, we are under new authority. We are subject to new commands. Now we belong to Him. What was once important to us loses its significance. We evaluate things differently. Our new desire is to love and serve the Lord with all our heart (Deut. 6:5-6). Have you joined His ranks? —Dave Egner

*Jesus my Lord will love me forever,*
*From Him no power of evil can sever;*
*He gave His life to ransom my soul—*
*Now I belong to Him!* —Clayton

Followers of Christ get their marching orders from Him.
These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

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**INSIGHT**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, known as the Shema (from Hebrew for “hear,” v.4), is the basic Jewish confession of faith. Every devout Jew is to recite the Shema twice daily as a reminder of the first and second commandments (Ex. 20:2-5). After giving the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:1-21), Moses gave God’s people the one love-principle that undergirds the entire Law: *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength* (6:5). God demands exclusive, wholehearted, and undivided allegiance and devotion. Jesus says that this is “the first and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:36-38). In another situation, Jesus told a rich young man that obeying this love principle is the pathway to eternal life (Luke 10:25-28).
In the movie *Gladiator*, General Maximus Decimus Meridius seeks to stir his cavalry to fight well in the imminent battle against Germania. Addressing his troops, he challenges them to give their very best. He makes this profound statement: “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”

These words from a fictional military leader convey a powerful concept that is of particular significance to believers in Christ. We are not just taking up time and space on a rock that’s floating in the universe. We are here with the opportunity to make an eternal difference with our lives.

Jesus Himself said, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:20). Having the perspective of living for eternity can make all the difference in this world.

How can we learn to set our minds “on things above”? (Col. 3:2). A good way to begin is to discover what our eternal God values. Throughout the pages of the Bible, He reminds us that He values people above possessions and our character above our performance. Those are the truths that last forever. Embracing them can bring an eternal perspective to our daily living. —Bill Crowder

Teach me, Lord, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee! —Herbert

What we do in this life echoes in eternity.
1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

**INSIGHT**

When a person becomes a Christian, he is joined to Christ in His death and resurrection (v.1; see also Rom. 6:3-8; Col. 2:12-13). In today’s reading, Paul reminds the Colossian believers that the priority of their new life in Christ is to set their hearts and minds on things above (vv.1-2)—to consistently focus on the resurrected, ascended, and exalted Christ (v.1); to diligently pursue things that are eternal (v.2); and to continuously put to death whatever belongs to their earthly nature (v.5). We need to crucify, or nail to the cross, “our old self” (Rom. 6:6) with its sinful passions and desires (8:13; Gal. 2:20; 5:24). Paul lists the vices that should not be part of a Christian’s life (Col. 3:5-9), and then lists the Christlike virtues and motivations that must characterize the believer (vv.12-17).
In July 1969, I was at Fort Benning, Georgia, training to become a US Army officer. Infantry Officer Candidate School was intense and highly regimented with only rare moments of free time. Surprisingly, on the evening of July 20, we were ordered to our company Day Room, seated in front of a flickering television set, and told simply, “This is history.”

Amazed, we watched Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong become the first human to set foot on the moon as he said, “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.”

Our usual curfew was suspended and we talked late into the night—not only about what we had witnessed but about life, God, and eternity. Our demanding routine had been interrupted, and our attention was shifted to what truly matters.

All of us need to shift our focus on a daily basis. Maintaining a regular time alone with God allows us to step away from our demanding jobs, break the routine, and concentrate on Him through the Bible and prayer. Our thoughts and actions will change as we follow Paul’s urging to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:23 NKJV).

What may seem like a small step can be a giant leap each day in our life of faith in Christ. —David McCasland

A small step is a giant leap
In growth and faith each day
If this step is your time with God
To read His Word and pray. —Sper

Each small step of faith is a giant step of growth.
So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

In this passage, Paul commanded believers to no longer live as the unbelievers do (v.17). Those who do not know Christ are futile in their thinking, darkened in their understanding, hardened in their hearts, indulge in every kind of impurity, and still crave for more (vv.17-19). In contrast, the Christian is one who knows the truth about Christ (vv.20-21) and is “renewed in the spirit of [his] mind” (v.23 NKJV). The Christian will not conform to the pattern of this world if he puts to death his old sinful nature (v.22). And he will be transformed when he renews his mind with God’s Word (Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10). That’s why Jesus prayed for all believers: “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth” (John 17:17).
When I was a young man, a friend invited me to join him in establishing a “consistent quiet time,” as he put it. I knew that regular Bible reading, prayer, and worship were essential, and I wanted to spend time with God. But my friend’s plan never worked for me. I would stay with his routine for a week or two, rising early each morning to work my way through a regimen of reading and praying. It was a discipline I imposed on myself—like doing 50 push-ups every day. But I couldn’t sustain the effort. In time I gave up, not knowing how to satisfy my longings to spend time with God.

Then one day I stumbled across something Jesus said to the woman at the well. The Father seeks those who “will worship [Him] in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). That’s when I realized that God was taking the initiative, putting in my heart those longings for time with Him.

The psalmist said he responded to the Lord’s call to “seek His face!” (Ps. 27:8). It’s the idea of God longing for fellowship with me that now draws me into His presence. My quiet times with God are no longer a dreary duty, but a response to my Father who yearns to spend time with me.

Do you hear your Father calling to you? —David Roper

I sought the LORD, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Savior true,  
No, I was found of Thee. —Anon.

Talk with God—He longs to hear from you.
Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

After the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, most of the Jews were deported to Assyria. Other people groups were brought in to repopulate the cities of Samaria and they married the remaining Jews still in the land (2 Kings 17:22-24). This new race, the Samaritans, eventually adopted Judaism, albeit not fully. Because of their mixed genealogy and corrupted theology the Jews despised them (Ezra 4:1-3; Luke 9:52-54; John 4:9). A Jew traveling between Judea (in the south) and Galilee (in the north) would rather take a much longer route than travel through Samaria, which is sandwiched between the two. Jesus chose the less preferred road through Samaria (John 4:3-5) to seek out a woman who needed Him (vv.10-15). To those who thirst, He offers “living water” (v.10)—water that will become “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v.14).
Under General George Patton’s command in World War II, the Third Army had been driving back the Nazis until fog and rain forced the troops to stop. Patton telephoned a chaplain to ask, “Do you have a good prayer for weather?” Immediately the chaplain complied with the general’s request. He wrote a prayer, which Patton ordered to be printed and distributed to the 250,000 soldiers under his command, directing them to pray for clear weather.

The Scriptures teach us that God wants us to bring our requests to Him, and we can be confident that He cares and will answer (Phil. 4:6; 1 John 5:14-15). But He is never obligated to answer in the way we want or just because many people are praying.

When the Son of God was agonizing in Gethsemane, He made His request in humble submission to His Father by saying, “Your will be done” (Matt. 26:42). That Gethsemane principle ought to govern all our praying.

The Father’s will is always infused with infinite love and wisdom. So instead of trying to pressure God because we think He’s obligated to us, we as trustful children gladly commit to Him our desires. Whatever He grants will prove in the end to be the best of blessings. —Vernon Grounds

So lift up your heart to the heavens;
There’s a loving and kind Father there
Who offers release and comfort and peace
In the silent communion of prayer. —Anon.

Instead of trying to twist God’s arm,
put yourself in His hands.
36 Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.”

39 Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.”

40 Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with Me for one hour?” He asked Peter.

41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done.”

43 When He came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So He left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then He returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

**INSIGHT**

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation,” Jesus cautioned Peter (v.41). Peter ignored the warning. He failed and denied Christ. Years later, speaking from his own failure, Peter warns us: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
RUGGED AND READY

READ:
James 1:2-12

The testing of your faith develops perseverance.
—James 1:3

When computers are prepared for demanding environments such as the military, they undergo a process called “ruggedization.” They are subject to extreme testing so that they will function well in the harshest conditions. Tests are conducted for shock, vibration, exposure to extreme temperatures, and to dust and other particles. This testing ensures reliability and performance under the harsh conditions of the battlefield.

If that reminds you of the spiritual ruggedization you’re undergoing today, take heart. It is God Himself, our loving Father, who allows the times of testing to prepare us to serve Him. When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, the Bible offers the surprising instruction to “consider it pure joy . . . because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2-3).

Through it all, God invites us to ask Him for wisdom. Why? That we might know how to respond properly to our trials. He gives this wisdom “generously” to all who ask (v.5).

If life was like a clean, air-conditioned office, then off-the-shelf Christians would be adequate to meet the need. But we inhabit a world engulfed in a life-or-death spiritual battle. As we trust God through the difficult times, we’ll become rugged and ready, prepared for greater usefulness. —David McCasland

God has a purpose in our heartaches,
The Savior always knows what’s best;
We learn so many precious lessons
In each sorrow, trial, and test. —Jarvis

God allows adversity into our lives
not to break us but to better us.
2 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 that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

INSIGHT
This letter, one of the earliest New Testament writings (AD 44–47), was probably written by James, the oldest half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55). He was an unbeliever (John 7:5), but was converted when Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). He wrote this letter to encourage Jewish Christians—dispersed by persecution and undergoing severe hardships—to persevere and remain steadfast in the Lord (James 1:12).
Because our son Steve spent most of his teen years connected to a cell phone, it was a bit of a shock for us when we couldn’t talk with him for long periods of time after he joined the US Navy. First at boot camp and later while he trained as a hospital corpsman, we endured long periods of time without any communication. So it was a treat whenever we finally did hear from him.

After one of us would get his call, the first question from the other was always, “What did he say?” We hung on every word to hear how he was doing, what he was thinking, and what the Navy was planning for him.

It’s natural to respond like this to the words of those who are important to us. We eagerly anticipate hearing from them. Are we like that with the Word of God? Are we eager to communicate with Him—to look carefully into His Book to ask, “What did He say?” Unlike the infrequent calls from a son in the military, God’s words of encouragement and guidance are always available to us. We just have to listen.

The prophet Jeremiah prayed, “When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight.” (Jer. 15:16). Do you have that same longing to hear God speak to you through His Word? —Dave Branon

\[
\text{Give me, O Lord, a strong desire} \\
\text{To look within Your Word each day;} \\
\text{Help me to hide it in my heart,} \\
\text{Lest from its truth my feet would stray. —Branon}
\]

We cannot know the heart of God unless we have a heart for God.
7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. 14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

David, who wrote this psalm, reflects on how God has been revealing Himself to mankind so that we can know Him. God reveals Himself through His created works (vv.1-6), and through His spoken Word (vv.7-14). Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe says: “The heavens declare God’s glory, and the Scriptures declare His grace.” God’s Word is the perfect law, trustworthy statutes, right precepts, radiant commands, and sure ordinances. God’s Word revives the soul, gives wisdom and joy, and guides those who would obey it into holiness and righteousness (vv.7-9,11-13). God’s Word is valuable and nourishing (v.10) and will keep the believer from sinning (v.13; 119:9-11).
Cold terror gripped the heart of a soldier as mortar rounds whistled overhead, rifles cracked, and the enemy closed in. Suddenly he felt ripping pains as a bullet tore into his chest and arm. Yet it wasn’t the end for this soldier. According to an article in *The New York Times*, the bullet was slowed by a New Testament he was carrying in his shirt pocket. Years later, the young man still treasured the blood-stained book with the ragged hole through the middle. He believes it saved his life.

This is a nice story, but it says nothing about the life-saving spiritual help the Bible was designed to give. In Ezekiel 33, we read that the ancient Israelites used the words of the prophets to make them feel good but not to change their lives. They misused God’s promises to Abraham to support their own claim to the land (v.24). They found pleasure in listening to the words of the prophet (v.30), yet the Lord said to Ezekiel, “they hear your words but do not put them into practice” (v.32). The result? They came under divine judgment.

Then as now, God’s Word is not to be cherished as a good-luck charm or to soothe the mind by bringing temporary relief from anxiety. It was given to be obeyed so that its help would not be only for this life—but forever. —Mart De Haan

*God’s Word will change your life,*

*If you will do your part*

*To read, to study, and obey,*

*And hide it in your heart.* —Hess

*Let the Bible fill your mind,*

*rule your heart, and guide your life.*
“As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, ‘Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.’ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

“When all this comes true—and it surely will—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

The powerful Babylonians had been attacking Judah and besieging Jerusalem (605–597 BC). They had already sent the royal family, the aristocrats, and Jewish upper classes into exile (2 Kings 24:10-16; Dan. 1:1-5), including the prophet Ezekiel. From Babylon (593 BC), Ezekiel ministered to the Jews (Ezek. 1:1-3)—those already in exile (3:11) and those still remaining in Judea (12:10). He pleaded with all his countrymen to repent and to turn to God. He warned them that if they continued in their sinfulness, Jerusalem would be destroyed and the whole nation exiled. The Jews remained unrepentant, living a double life by pretending to be interested in God’s Word but not putting it in practice (33:31). As prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezek. 12:10-15), about 10 years later (586 BC) Jerusalem was burned to the ground, and the entire nation was exiled (2 Kings 24:18–25:21).
Several years ago, former American prisoners of war were interviewed to determine what methods used by the enemy had been most effective in breaking their spirit. Researchers learned that the prisoners didn’t break down from physical deprivation and torture as quickly as they did from solitary confinement or from being frequently moved around and separated from friends. It was further learned that the soldiers drew their greatest strength from the close attachments they had formed to the small military units to which they belonged.

These observations give us insight into why Christians need the group experience of fellowship with other believers to help them remain loyal to the Lord. Our own personal relationship to God, vital as that is, is not sufficient to produce spiritual maturity and endurance. Relationships within a unified, Spirit-filled body of believers are essential for growth and for maintaining our individual faithfulness to the Savior (Heb. 10:23-25).

Sometimes we would rather not be involved in church life, thinking it’s easier just to go it alone. But Christians who do that miss out on all the benefits. Let’s remember that God in His wisdom has grouped us for strength. —Mart De Haan

Fellowship with other Christians
Strengthens us when we are weak,
Comforts us when we are hurting,
Helps us when God’s will we seek. —Sper

Believers stand strong when they don’t stand alone.
Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2 describes the birth of the church of Jesus Christ on the Day of Pentecost, when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell those who believed in Jesus (2:1-4; John 14:16-17; 16:7). The first church was characterized by four activities: worship, teaching of God’s Word, fellowship, and evangelism (Acts 2:42-44). The Greek word for “fellowship” (koinonia, v.42) carries the meaning of “participation, sharing.” Christians belong to a community of believers who continue steadfastly in community life: in the breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper) and in prayer.
Of all Shakespeare’s great plays, *Henry V* may rank as the most heroic. In one stirring scene, the English army stands fearfully before superior French troops. King Henry challenges his men to take heart. Because the battle will be fought on “the feast of Crispian,” their victory will be remembered in its yearly celebration. The king tells his men, “This day is called the feast of Crispian . . . . We in it shall be remembered; we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.”

Today, the US Marine Corps refers to itself as a “band of brothers.” There is something about interdependence and personal sacrifice while under fire that binds people together for life.

Christians facing opposition can also have such a bond. Paul wrote, “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24).

Did Paul believe Christ’s suffering on the cross was insufficient? No, His atonement was completely adequate for all our sin. What Paul meant was that as we complete Christ’s work on earth amid painful opposition, we share in His sufferings. Jesus suffered for obeying the will of God, and so must we. But like Paul, we can find joy as we draw closer to our Lord and our band of brothers and sisters. —Dennis Fisher

> Lord, help us see how much we need each other
> As we walk along the Christian way;
> In fellowship with sister and with brother,
> You will keep us growing day by day. —Hess

**The warm fellowship of the church will keep your heart from growing cold.**
24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness—

26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

29 To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.

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**INSIGHT**

The Lord Jesus taught that all those who believe in Him would have to share in His sufferings (Matt. 5:10; 16:24; Mark 10:39; 13:9; John 15:20; 16:33). The New Testament writers also consistently wrote about this. Paul says, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). For the Christian, the pathway to glory is through suffering (Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10). That is why Peter tells us not to be surprised or ashamed if we have to suffer, but to rejoice because in suffering for Christ, we also share in His glory (1 Peter 4:12-16). This is also how Paul could say, “in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds” (2 Cor. 7:4).
On the southern shores of England is Slapton Sands. This beautiful beach area carries a tragic memory from its past.

On April 28, 1944, during World War II, Allied soldiers were engaged in Operation Tiger, a training exercise in amphibious beach landings in preparation for the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Suddenly, enemy gun-boats appeared and killed over 700 American servicemen in a surprise attack. Today, a monument stands on Slapton Sands to commemorate the sacrifice of those young men who died while training for battle but were never able to enter the conflict.

This tragedy is a metaphor that warns the believer in Christ. We too are involved in combat with an enemy who is powerful and deceptive. That is why the apostle Peter warned: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Like the soldiers on Slapton Sands, we face an enemy who desires our undoing. In the service of our King, we must be on the alert. The call to be effective in battle (2 Tim. 2:3-4) challenges us to be ready for the surprise attacks of our spiritual enemy—so that we can endure to serve another day. —Bill Crowder

The devil is clever, deceiving us all,
He cunningly causes the strongest to fall;
But we his sly methods are sure to discern
By making God’s warnings our daily concern. —D. De Haan

When Satan strikes, strike back with the Word of God.
5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”  
6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.  
7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.  
8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.  
9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.  
10 And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.  
11 To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

In this passage, Peter writes from his own deep personal experience of failure and defeat in the hands of the devil. Some 30 years before, Peter had boasted that he would never deny Christ (Matt. 26:33-35; Luke 22:31-34). In his pride, Peter overestimated his own strength and underestimated the devil’s prowess. Having learned from his failure, Peter now calls for humility (1 Peter 5:5-6), total dependence on God (v.7), and an honest assessment of one’s own strength (v.8). He calls for greater vigilance and watchfulness and to resist the devil, whom he acknowledges is like a roaring and devouring lion (vv.8-9). Indeed, we are to “watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41).
Last January, the police officers in Tijuana, Mexico, had their guns confiscated. It was suspected that some of them had been in collusion with drug traffickers. At first, fearing for their safety, the police stopped patrolling. But eventually, some of them returned to work—carrying slingshots. Three weeks passed before their more effective weapons were returned to them.

Although we all remember a shepherd boy who used a sling and a single smooth stone with great success in his encounter with a giant (1 Sam. 17), few of us would have the courage to face violent threats armed with such puny protection. But every day, although we are often ill-prepared, we do face a threat. As believers, we fight against an enemy we cannot see. Our struggle is not “against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). The outcome of this battle is sure, however. Jesus is the Victor. And using the armor and weapons He supplies, we are able “to stand” (v.13). We fight in His power and strength.

Each day we must put on the armor of God—the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, God’s Word (vv.13-17). Preparation and protection are the key to winning spiritual battles. —Cindy Hess Kasper

Help me to guard my troubled soul
By constant, active self-control.
Clean up my thought, my speech, my play;
Lord, keep me pure from day to day. —Thomas

Spiritual victory comes only to those who are prepared for battle.
Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

**INSIGHT**

Paul often uses military images to illustrate the Christian life (2 Cor. 10:3-4; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 4:7; 1 Peter 2:11). Paul reminds us that the believer is engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan and his demons (Eph. 6:11-12). Just as the physical armor protected the soldier in the battlefield, the armor of God protects us. Most of this armor is defensive, except for the sword of the Spirit (v.17). Just as Jesus used God’s Word to overcome the devil (Matt. 4:1-11), we too must use God’s Word to respond to an attack (Ps. 119:9-11,114; John 17:17; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 5:26; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
Nobody is temptation-proof. Even mature Christians have weaknesses in their spiritual armor that make them vulnerable to a wounding attack by the enemy of their souls. Our pride can provide the very opening needed for the sharp thrust of a satanic dart. So can the love of money, a quick temper, a critical tongue, or chronic impatience.

What, after all, is temptation? It’s any enticement to think, say, or do something contrary to God’s holy will. It may be a weak impulse or a powerful urge. It’s anything that’s against what God approves or desires for us.

The ancient Greeks told a story of a warrior named Achilles. His mother had been warned that he would die of a wound, so she dipped him as an infant in the river Styx. That was supposed to make him invincible. But she held him by one heel which the protective waters didn’t cover. And it was through that heel that he received his fatal wound.

Each of us must ask: What is my Achilles heel? We need to know our weaknesses, where we could easily be wounded spiritually. Then, as we rely on the Lord for His help, we will be protected from “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). —Vernon Grounds

When Satan launches his attack, 
We must take heart and pray; 
If we submit ourselves to God, 
He’ll be our strength each day. —Sper

Our greatest weakness may be our failure to ask for God’s strength.
13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers.

The key word in this passage is **peirasmos** and is translated “tempted,” “tempting,” and “tempt” (used four times in v.13). **Peirasmos** has two basic meanings. The first meaning is “testing the validity of one’s faith.” That is why James is encouraging believers who fall into **peirasmos** to rejoice, because “the testing of their faith” is something intended to help them grow into maturity (vv.1-4). **Peirasmos** can also mean “enticing to sin or to do evil.” This is the intended meaning in verses 13-14. That is why James could confidently say that God cannot and will not tempt us or entice us to sin or to do evil. His perfect holiness, His purity, and His goodness ensure this.
A man whose company provides data security for military space operations told me how vulnerable computers are to outside attack. During a training exercise, hackers shut down a highly protected system without stealing a password or cracking a code. They simply accessed the unsecured maintenance program for the building that housed the computers and turned off the air conditioning. When the computer room became too hot, the system automatically shut down.

As in military situations, overconfidence and a false sense of security can lead to defeat in our battle against the forces of evil. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul cautioned, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse by saying, “Don’t be so naive and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it’s useless. Cultivate God-confidence.”

We are not told to try to outsmart the enemy of our souls, but to trust the One who can. “God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (v.13). Confidence in God, not in ourselves, is the key to staying spiritually on guard. —David McCasland

_When all goes well and I feel strong,_
_Oh, help me, Lord, to see_
_That I must place my confidence_
_In You and not in me._ —Anon.

_When temptation knocks, send Jesus to the door._
1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. 

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. 

11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
Shameful behavior is being displayed in magazines, movies, and on television. Immorality is even joked about. The world is seeking to convince everyone that nothing is sinful anymore. So we must be on guard against any compromise in our hearts.

While I was in the military, I realized that I was becoming unmoved by the obscene words and conduct of some of my fellow soldiers. When I recognized what was happening, I asked the Lord to restore my sensitivity to the grievous nature of sin.

A permissive attitude toward evil will lead us to fall into sin. That’s why we are to deal radically with every form of wickedness.

Jesus went so far as to say that we should pluck out our eye if it causes us to sin (Matt. 5:29). He didn’t mean we should maim our bodies, but rather we are to take strong action when tempted to sin. Books, magazines, or video images that arouse wrong desires must be deliberately avoided. This is also what Paul had in mind when he said we are to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Someone who is indifferent to the sin around him or trifles with it in his own life is in grave danger.

We cannot ignore the seriousness of this issue. It’s time to take action! —Herb Vander Lugt

_The flesh says do what you would do—_
_Just be what you would be;_
_But Christ says do what’s right and true_
_If you would be like Me._ —D. De Haan

The Christian gains victory by starving the old nature and feeding the new.
12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.
Researchers at Kenyon College conducted a test in cooperation with the US Navy. The purpose was to discover how the tone of the voice affected sailors when they were given orders. The experiments revealed that the way a person was addressed determined to a large extent the kind of response he would make.

For example, when an individual was spoken to in a soft voice, he would answer in a similar manner. But when he was shouted at, his reply came back in the same sharp tone. This was true whether the communication was given face-to-face, over the intercom, or by telephone.

This study reminds me of Proverbs 15:1, which states, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” What we say and how we say it not only makes a difference in the reaction we’ll receive, but it also determines whether conflict or peace will result. Many arguments could be avoided and tense situations relaxed if we practiced the truth of this verse.

The next time someone speaks to you in a harsh or angry tone, reverse the trend by expressing meekness, quietness of spirit, and loving concern. What a difference a soft answer can make in our relationships! —Richard De Haan

So many folks use words that are harsh,
   When angry, they speak their mind;
But Christ would have us reverse this trend
   With words that are always kind. —D. De Haan

To get out of a hard situation, try a soft answer.
Today’s Bible Reading — Proverbs 15:1-7

1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.
3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.
4 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.
5 A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.
6 The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.
7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.

INSIGHT

One of the major themes in Proverbs is the use of the tongue. Proverbs constantly warns us of the consequences of the wrong use of our words and the benefits of choosing our words wisely (vv.1-7; 10:20-21; 12:13, 18; 13:3; 15:23, 28; 16:24, 27-28; 18:7; 21:23; 25:11-12). Wrong words are likened to a powerfully destructive fire (16:27; 26:18-22) and the deadly weapons of war (12:18; 25:18; 26:18). A wise person is one who is restrained and judicious in his speaking (10:19; 11:12; 15:1-2, 7, 28; 17:27). We are reminded that if we keep silent, we will never say the wrong thing (10:19) and we will even be thought to be wise (17:28). Our Lord Jesus warned that we will have to account for every careless word we have spoken (Matt. 12:36). Paul exhorts believers to speak truthfully in love (Eph. 4:15).
Why did David say that Saul and Jonathan “were loved and gracious”? (2 Sam. 1:23). We can understand why he would say this of Jonathan, his good friend. But why say this of King Saul, who had brought him so much sorrow?

There were good things David could say of Jonathan that he could not say of Saul. Yet, instead of pointing out Saul’s faults and failures, he commended what was good in him: his courage, his military victories, and his prosperous kingdom (vv.21-24).

David’s graciousness causes me to wonder: How often have I brooded over and judged the flaws of my opponents? How often have I been offended when others have found good in those who have harmed me? How much do I dwell on the bad I see in someone rather than the good that God and others can see?

The Bible says that we need to leave judgment in the Lord’s hands, for when Jesus returns He will “expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God” (1 Cor. 4:5).

Do we focus only on the traits that make our enemies so unlikeable? Accentuating the positive qualities of those who trouble us is a good way to deal with resentment, and to transform our hatred into love (Matt. 5:44). —David Roper

We’re told to love our enemies,
Who in this life we face,
For showing love that’s not deserved
Reveals to them God’s grace. —Bosch

It’s hard to hate someone when you’re complimenting him.
David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

19 “Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!

20 “Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.

21 “O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil.

22 “From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

23 “Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

24 “O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

25 “How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.

26 “How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!”

INSIGHT

Jonathan and David were the best of friends (v.26). Jonathan had gone against his own father, King Saul, to save David (1 Sam. 20). When Saul and Jonathan died in battle (1 Sam. 31:1-6), David honored them with this Song of the Bow (v.18).
The Lake Michigan shoreline (a short drive from where I live) is dotted with lighthouses built to enable ship captains to navigate into safe harbors. The structures are varied in size, shape, and color, but each has unique charm and beauty. Pictures of the lighthouses are featured in books and calendars, and some people collect replicas and other lighthouse items.

But lighthouses were not built just to be admired; they were built to hold lights that guide sailors to safety. A lighthouse is most useful and appreciated when, in the darkness of night, only its light can be seen—not the structure itself.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He called them “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). He also indicated that their task was not to draw attention to themselves, but to do good works that would cause people to recognize God’s goodness and glorify Him.

Jesus said that just as a lamp’s purpose is to give light, we also are to let our light shine (vv.15-16). We’re most effective when we shine brightly in the darkness, guiding people who need to find safe harbor in Christ.

For a light to be effective, it has to be shining in a dark place. —Julie Ackerman Link

*My life was dark until the Light shone in,*
*That Light was Christ, who saved me from my sin;*
*His light that I’ve received I want to share*
*And let it shine to people everywhere.* —Hess

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**Day 20**

**This Little Light Of Mine**

**READ:**
Matthew 5:11-16

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Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
—Matthew 5:16

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A little light makes a big difference in the darkest night.
11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

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**INSIGHT**

The Bible uses various metaphors to depict the Christian. Believers are called “sheep” (John 10:27); “fruitful branches” (John 15:5); “ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:20); “soldiers, athletes, farmers” (2 Tim. 2:3,5,6); and “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5). In Matthew 5:11-16, Jesus uses two common objects—salt and light—to show the impact a Christian ought to have on the society he lives in. Salt has been used as a preservative, a flavor enhancer, and a thirst stimulant. A lamp is intended to illuminate and give direction to ourselves and to others. The light also serves as a sign. In order to be effective, the light must be placed in a conspicuous place. We are, therefore, expected to bring the salt of preservation and joy to a bland, tasteless, and decaying world; and the light of salvation to a dark and sinful world.
The story is told of a Christian who was home on furlough from serving in the armed forces. He was rushing to catch his train when he ran into a fruit stand on the station platform, knocking most of the piled-up apples to the ground.

The young boy who operated the stand tried to pick up his scattered fruit but was having difficulty. The apologetic serviceman put down his luggage and started collecting the apples. He polished each one with his handkerchief and put it back on the counter. So impressed was the boy that he asked gratefully, “Soldier, are you Jesus?” With a smile the soldier replied, “No, but I’m trying to be like Him.”

Sometimes, as we hurry about our own responsibilities, we become too busy to care about other people. But we must remember that Jesus urges us to show kindness and concern for our fellow travelers. He set the example for us by being a servant. We need to take the time to be helpful also.

Would anyone ask of us, “Are you Jesus?” And could we honestly respond, “No, I’m not Jesus, but I’m trying to be like Him”? Christlike kindness can open the door for a heart-touching testimony. —Vernon Grounds

Be like Jesus, this my song,
In the home and in the throng;
Be like Jesus, all day long!
I would be like Jesus. —Rowe

Nothing is more attractive than being like Jesus.
1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

**INSIGHT**

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the greatest declarations of Christ’s deity and humanity. In His incarnation, Christ “made Himself nothing” (v.7). In “taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (v.7), Jesus did not replace His deity with humanity. Instead, Jesus added humanity to His deity but did not cease to be God. However, He did suspend, or set aside, certain divine privileges—His pre-existent glory (John 17:5) and the independent exercise of His authority and power (5:19; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49; 17:8). He submitted Himself to the will of the Father (5:30; 6:38).
The Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC, has a guard 24 hours a day. Every hour on the hour, 365 days a year, a new soldier reports for duty. When the new guard arrives, he receives his orders from the one who is leaving. The words are always the same: “Orders Remain Unchanged.”

The same could be said of the orders that Jesus gave to His disciples. Just before He ascended to heaven, He told His followers, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). He also said, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

From that day to this day, Christian to Christian, generation to generation, the good news of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed. We too must tell others that He is the Son of God, that He died to pay the penalty for our sins, and that salvation is granted to all who put their faith in Him. Then, as we fulfill our duties and disciple new believers, we are to pass on the orders to evangelize the lost.

Much has changed in the almost 2,000 years since Jesus chose His first disciples and started the church. But regarding the command to spread the good news of Christ, these words can still be said: “Orders remain unchanged.” —Dave Egner

_You have called us, Lord, to witness—_
_Called to speak of Your dear Son;_
_Holy Spirit, grant discernment;_
_Lead us to some seeking one._ —D. De Haan

Keep the faith—but not to yourself.
Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

**INSIGHT**

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He commanded His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations.” This is now commonly known as the Great Commission (vv.19-20). The Great Commission, the last recorded words of Jesus before He returned to heaven, is so important that it is captured in all four Gospels (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21) and the book of Acts (Acts 1:8). The Great Commission is more than just simply sharing the good news that Jesus died for our sins. The imperative “make disciples” is its central focus. We carry out the Great Commission when we witness and testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:46-48), when we teach individuals to obey God’s Word (Matt. 28:20), and when individuals commit to Jesus as Lord and Master (Rom. 10:9-10; Phil. 2:10-11).
E

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verything looked bleak to David
and his men when they arrived at
Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:1-6). The Amale-
kites had attacked the city and taken
their wives and children captive. The
men were so discouraged that they
wept until they had no more energy.
And David, their leader, was “greatly
distressed” because the people were
contemplating stoning him (v.6).

In the end, David’s army rescued
their families and defeated the Amale-
kites. But the story takes a great turn
even before that when “David found
strength in the LORD his God” (v.6).
Other translations use the words
c

encouraged or refreshed.
The text doesn’t say exactly how
David did this. But it makes me won-
der,

In what ways can we strengthen, encourage, or refresh
ourselves in the Lord when we’re feeling discouraged?

First, we can remember what God has done. We can
list the ways He has cared for us in the past, and how He has
provided for us or answered a prayer request.

Second, we can remember what God has promised.
“We be strong and courageous . . . for the LORD your God will
be with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

Like David, let’s learn to strengthen ourselves in the Lord,
and then let’s leave the rest with Him. —Anne Cetas

“I will strengthen,” so take courage,
Child of God, so weak and frail.
God has said so, and it must be,

For His promise cannot fail! —Anon.

Our greatest strength is often shown in our ability
to stand still and trust God.
David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.

David’s two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

INSIGHT
While David and his men were preparing to fight along with the Philistines against Saul’s army (1 Sam. 29), some 50 miles away in the north the Amalekites (whom David had previously raided [27:8-9]) retaliated and raided David’s home base in Ziklag. They destroyed it and captured David’s family and the families of his men (30:2-3). His men, bitter against David, blamed him for putting their loved ones in such danger and threatened to kill him (v.6). In the midst of the crisis, David turned to God. First, David “found strength in the LORD his God” (v.6), and then he prayed and “inquired of the LORD” (v.8) for a solution.
While visiting a World War I military cemetery in France, I was struck by the number of grave markers bearing only these words:

**A Soldier Of The Great War: Known Unto God**

The cemetery was surrounded on three sides by stone panels bearing the names of 20,000 soldiers who fell in nearby battles. Imagining the loneliness of men dying in war and the anguish of families grieving at home was overpowering.

There may be times in life when we feel forgotten and alone. Like the psalmist we cry out: “Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favor again? . . . Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion?” (Ps. 77:7,9). The psalmist’s answer to feeling abandoned came in remembering all that God had done in the past, meditating on His wonderful work, and speaking of it to others (vv.11-12).

In our darkest moments, we can remember the words of Jesus: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

We are never forgotten by God. —David McCasland

*When trials loom or death is near,*
*In Christ we can confide;*
*We never need to feel alone—*
*He’s always at our side.* —Sper

**In every desert of trial, God has an oasis of comfort.**
1 I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. 2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

4 You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. 5 I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; 6 I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

7 “Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favor again? 8 Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion?”

10 Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.” 11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember Your miracles of long ago. 12 I will meditate on all Your works and consider all Your mighty deeds.

13 Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? 14 You are the God who performs miracles; You display Your power among the peoples.

15 With Your mighty arm You redeemed Your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

InSight

David had three Levitical choirs and orchestras, led by Asaph, Jeduthun (or Ethan), and Heman (1 Chron. 16:41-42; 25:1-8; 2 Chron. 5:12). Asaph, who wrote this psalm for Jeduthun, also wrote Psalms 50 and 73–83.
Dick Sheppard served as a chaplain in the British army during World War I. One night he was lying in the dense blackness of no man’s land when he heard footsteps approaching. Unable to see who it might be, he was tempted to cry out, “Friend or foe?”

Years later, on another dark night back in his homeland, Dick remembered that experience as he gazed up into the sky and wondered about the God of the universe. Again he felt like calling out, “Friend or foe?”

Often in the blackness of some bewildering trial, unable to discern God’s purposes, we are tempted to question His goodness. Some even wonder whether there is a God; and if there is, whether He cares for us.

We who believe the Bible know that the almighty, eternal Creator has revealed Himself as a loving Father, and that He infinitely cares for us. And through His Son, He has shown Himself to be a Friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19). When in faith anyone accepts the sin-atoning sacrifice of Jesus, that person receives the promise that he will never be forsaken by God (Heb. 13:5). What a privilege to know in our darkest moment that when we cry out, “Friend or foe?” Jesus answers, “I am your ever-present Friend!” —Vernon Grounds

_Friendship with Jesus,_
_Fellowship divine;_  
_O what blessed, sweet communion—_  
_Jesus is a Friend of mine._ —Ludgate

If Christ is your friend, you need not fear.
9 “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. 10 If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love. 11 I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you.

In John 15, Jesus used servants and friends to contrast the new level of intimacy that believers have with Him (v.15). What else does the Bible say about friendship? A true friend is one who is “one in spirit” with you and who loves you as he loves himself (1 Sam. 18:1), one who would lay down his life for you (John 15:13). Three times, Abraham was referred to as “the friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23), and God even revealed His plans to him (Gen. 18:17). Moreover, God spoke to Moses “as a man speaks with his friend” (Exod. 33:11). Jesus likewise tells us “everything [He] learned from [His] Father” because we are His friends (John 15:15). A friend of Jesus does whatever Jesus commands (v.14). By contrast, James warned that to be a friend of this world is to be an enemy of God (James 4:4).
Worry is sin. It is caused by lack of faith, a failure to believe God’s Word. Yet it is a sin that many Christians find hard to overcome.

Stop and think of the things you have worried about. How many actually happened? And how many of the things that did happen had never entered your mind? We tend to be filled with anxiety over what might happen but never does.

I once read about a paratrooper in the US Army who had made more than 50 successful parachute jumps without a single serious injury. But the first day back home after being discharged, he stumbled over a rug, fell against a table, and broke four of his ribs! He had worried a great deal about his parachute jumps, but then something happened he had never worried about: He tripped over a rug.

So why worry? Jesus said that it’s futile to fret, for worrying can’t change anything (Matt. 6:27). We need to remember that our heavenly Father knows all about our situation and watches over us (vv.28-34). We can be sure that He will take care of our needs no matter what tomorrow brings. It’s better, therefore, to be wise and trust the Lord.

Remember, worry never solved a single problem! So don’t be a worrywart! —Mart De Haan

When you feel the tension mounting,
   And across the busy day
   Only gloomy clouds are drifting,
As you start to worry—pray!  —Anon.

Worry doesn’t improve the future,
   it only ruins the present.
25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

INSIGHT

In the agrarian culture of Jesus’ day, people worried over the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter because those necessities were dependent on the weather and other factors out of the people’s control. Pointing to God’s constant providential care for His creation—how He feeds the birds and causes flowers to bloom and grass to grow—Jesus assured His people of God’s care and provision. After all, we are of much more value than birds, and our heavenly Father knows that we need these basic necessities (Matt. 6:26,32).
Choosing Joy

**READ:**
Romans 5:1-11

We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 5:11

Most of us don’t choose a difficult life—it chooses us. But we can choose our response to it. As someone once said, “Pain is inevitable but misery is optional.” Yet, when difficulties arise, misery often seems to be the only option.

Author Lloyd Ogilvie tells of a Christian friend who was physically and emotionally depleted because of extreme pressures. A depressed mood engulfed him. When Ogilvie asked him how he was doing, he said grimly, “Well, joy’s certainly no option!” Ogilvie replied, “You’re right! Joy is no option. It’s your responsibility.”

Shocked, the friend retorted, “You talk about joy as if it were a duty.” Ogilvie responded, “Right again!” He explained that we have a duty to God, ourselves, and others to overcome our moods and to battle through to joy.

In Romans 5, Paul gave these reasons for joy: We have peace with God through Christ, access into grace, and hope of future glory (vv.1-2). We have assurance that tribulation produces perseverance, which in turn builds character and leads to hope (vv.3-4). We have hope that doesn’t disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts (v.5).

Fill your mind with these truths. Then, no matter what your circumstances, you can choose joy. —Joanie Yoder

> **When trials come and my moods descend,**  
> **When pain and sorrows seem never to end,**  
> **As I yield to You, Lord, may I see**  
> **The peace and joy You’ve promised me.** —Fitzhugh

For the Christian, joy is a choice.
Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In this passage, Paul tells us to rejoice not only in our future glory (Rom. 5:2) but also in our present sufferings (v.3). We are to rejoice in our salvation and our right standing with God because of what Jesus has accomplished for us (vv.1-2) and because we are no longer God’s enemies, but have been delivered from God’s wrath (vv.9-11). In the same way, we are to rejoice in our present sufferings, because these sufferings are designed by God to perfect us (v.3).
Columnist George Cantor told how he dealt with a childhood fear. Almost every night he would wake up in the darkness and imagine scary creatures lurking outside his room. Often he would be too scared to go back to sleep. Sometimes he would go and lie down by his parents’ bedroom door, figuring that as long as he was near them, nothing would hurt him.

That child’s need for some physical evidence of his parents’ presence reminds me of the young servant of Elisha. He woke up early one morning and found that the Syrian army had surrounded the city. Alarmed and afraid, he cried out to Elisha, “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” (2 Kings 6:15). After Elisha prayed, the Lord opened the young servant’s eyes. What he saw must have filled him with awe and wonder. The Bible says that all around Elisha were “hills full of horses and chariots of fire” (v.17). The Lord’s army was there to protect them.

We too at times long for God to give us some kind of reassurance that He is near, and sometimes He does. But that’s the exception. He wants us to learn to trust His promise that He is with us. No matter how frightening the situation, God’s people always have more on their side than the enemy has on his. —Mart De Haan

At times our fears may loom so large
We long for proof that God is near;
It’s then our Father says to us,
“Have faith, My child, and do not fear.” —D. De Haan

Faith knows that God is working behind the scenes.
8 Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.”

9 The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.”

10 So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

11 This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

12 “None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.”

13 “Go, find out where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.” The report came back: “He is in Dothan.”

14 Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

15 When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked.

16 “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

17 And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
The pilot of a military plane was forced to parachute into a jungle in southeast Asia. How could he possibly find his way out? A local man saw what had happened and came to the pilot’s rescue, slashing through the tangled underbrush. The frightened pilot cried out, “Where’s the road? Where’s the way out?” The rescuer shouted back, “No road! I’m the way! Follow me!” The pilot trusted the man, who led him through the jungle to safety.

Some people have a difficult time accepting similar words spoken by the Lord Jesus. He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Critics call this teaching intolerant and divisive. But because the Son of God said it, and the Word of God records it, it is true no matter how much it is challenged. Faith in Jesus is the only way to eternal fellowship with God.

The pathway to God is not found by following a creed, developing moral character, or attending church. It’s found by trusting Jesus to forgive our sin and reconcile us to the Father. When we open our hearts to the crucified and risen Savior, we are on the only pathway that will bring us home to God. —Vernon Grounds

Not all roads lead to God,
As many people claim;
There’s only one true way—
Christ Jesus is His name. —Sper

No one can bypass Jesus and get to heaven.
1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.

4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

**INSIGHT**

There are seven “I am” sayings about Jesus in the gospel of John: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:48), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the gate” (10:9), “I am the good shepherd” (v.11), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:1). Jesus is the only way to God. In fact, Christianity was initially called “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23). The Bible makes it clear: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
It was a wild night for our family. At 11:30 p.m., I got a call from my son Steve. “Dad, I’m going to Iraq.” “Right now?” I asked in disbelief. “Yes, I’m ready to go.” Earlier that day, our Navy corpsman (medic) son had told me he thought it would be several months before he would go.

We talked a little more until he had to hang up. Then family phone calls followed as we let his sisters know what was happening. They called him to wish him well and pray for him—and that was it.

A couple of restless hours later, Steve sent a text message: “We’re not going. We’re headed back.” A helicopter ride to another state and back was the extent of Steve’s trip that night, but it was still a valuable experience. It tested their readiness. The military had to know that when the call came, the corpsmen would be mentally ready to go.

When it comes to being ready for eternity, we won’t get that kind of practice. No one knows when we will depart this earth through death or be called home at Jesus’ return.

If you were called into eternity today, would you be prepared to meet God face-to-face? Have you opened your heart to Him? (Heb. 4:7). Are your sins forgiven? Are you ready to go? —Dave Branon

Ready to speak, ready to warn,
Ready o’er souls to yearn,
Ready in life, ready in death,
Ready for His return. —Tillman

God’s call may come at any time—so be ready all the time!
Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet His work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”

And again in the passage above He says, “They shall never enter my rest.” It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews urged those who had heard the gospel not to put off a decision to believe in Jesus (4:2); and he spoke of those who already believed as having entered God’s promised rest (v.3). The Jews of that day understood that in the Old Testament they had been given the full possession and enjoyment of the Promised Land as an inheritance (Deut. 12:9-11; 25:19). But Jesus offered a new inheritance, a spiritual inheritance in Christ, and the place of rest is the kingdom of heaven. This offer of salvation, the offer of possessing and living in heaven, is available to all who believe. “The promise of entering His rest still stands” (Heb. 4:1). Therefore, “today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (v.7).
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