

OUR DAILY RATION

from the people who bring you *Our Daily Bread*



EXPIRY DATE: NEVER

COMMON NS TERMS

BMT	Basic Military Training
CO	Commanding Officer
CSM	Company Sergeant Major
NS	National Service
OC	Officer Commanding
OCS	Officer Cadet School
ORD	Operationally-Ready Date
PES	Physical Employment Status
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SCS	Specialist Cadet School
SISPEC	School of Infantry Specialists
SOC	Standard Obstacle Course

SLANG

Beach Road: Reference to well-known shops at a market along Beach Road that sell military paraphernalia and camping equipment.

Booking out: Being released from camp, usually over the weekends. Withholding this privilege is a common punishment.

Chao-keng peng: A malingerer, one who feigns injury or sickness to avoid duty. *Keng*—slang for escaping responsibilities (Hokkien); *peng*—soldier (Hokkien). Alternative: *Keng king*.

Confinement: Being restricted to camp for the weekend as a punishment.

Kilat: Completing a task to a high standard, such as having well-polished boots for inspection. *Kilat*—a flash, lightning, or shining (Malay).

Knock it down: To get down on the ground and perform push-ups, usually as a punishment.

Siao liao: Exclamation of dismay, usually used when a situation is out of control or something terrible has happened. *Siao*—crazy (Hokkien).

Sign extra: Being assigned extra duties (over the weekend) as a punishment.

Tekan: Abusive punishment (by superiors). *Tekan*—to hit or beat (Malay).

Wayang kia: A hypocrite who puts on a show in front of superiors. *Wayang*—theatre performance, often used to mean acting (Malay); *kia*—kid (Hokkien).

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FOREWORD

Are you preparing for enlistment or currently serving NS? If so, this devotional is just for you! Here are 30 devotions, drawn from the personal experiences of those who have gone through NS and have learned a thing or two about faith and God along the way. We hope that their testimonies will help you address the challenges you are currently facing, and lead you to draw strength and direction from God's Word as you serve NS. No matter how unpalatable the food, how rowdy your bunkmates, how punishing the training, or how strict your superiors, may you continue to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

How to Use This Booklet

The format isn't complicated, but here are some suggestions for getting the most out of your reading:

- 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. Those words from God's Book are the most important statements you will read each 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.
- Use the closing "think" question to help you apply the key idea from the reading in your life.
- After you've read the article, talk to the Lord about what you've discovered in His Word and how you will respond to Him. Share with someone what you've learnt.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

A WASTE OF TIME

1

A few days into BMT, I found myself crammed into a hall with hundreds of other recruits for an address by the CO. “Who is looking forward to National Service?” he asked. A solitary arm rose gingerly out of the sea of people—mine.

Many of my fellows loathed NS and couldn’t wait to ORD, but I felt differently about the whole experience. Of course, I looked forward to booking out on weekends like everyone else, but somehow I also didn’t mind the tough training, strict discipline, and camouflage cream. I felt rather “positive” about NS, and not just because I found military life fun.

Many people see NS as a waste of time and hate every moment of it. But I took 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 to heart instead: “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus”. As Christians, we can rejoice always because God walks beside us. We can pray without ceasing because He is always listening. We can give thanks to Him in all circumstances because in all things God works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

God is with us in all situations, no matter how unbearable—not only when we are in church or at home, but also in school or during NS. In good times and bad, work or play, and even at the end of a punishing route march, let us be encouraged by God’s presence, and live with joy in our hearts.

Are you walking with the Lord every day, no matter what happens?
—Ernest

THINK

What are some ways by which we can remind ourselves of God’s constant presence in our lives?

JAMES 4:3

And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. (NLT)

AN UNANSWERED PLEA

2

The mental challenges of the course I was attending at SCS were even tougher than the physical ones. It was well-known for its high failure rate.

Therefore, I put much effort and time into studying the materials and rehearsing the scenarios—more than I had done for any school exam. I even booked into camp early to have more time to revise. At the final hurdle, however, I failed the practical test. I was allowed only one re-test, so the evening before, I went down on my knees and pleaded for God's help. But afterwards, I was given the crushing news: I did not pass.

I was overwhelmed by disappointment and bitterness. My hard work had not been rewarded, and it seemed like all my time, effort, and tears had gone down the drain. “Why didn't you hear my pleas?” I asked God.

Only later did I realise that I had placed my own agenda above God's will for my life. I was so intent on passing the course and had put in so much effort into preparing for it that I had expected God to reward me by helping me to pass. But the test was not about enthusiasm or diligence—it was about whether I had the necessary skills and aptitude, and I clearly didn't. God wasn't some wish-granting genie; He would respond to the situation according to His will.

My mistaken expectations had naturally led to disappointment. As the Bible reminds us, “And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure” (James 4:3, NLT).

As we look to the future, let us not lean on our own understanding. Instead, let us seek God's direction for our lives. —Titus

THINK

Think about some of your personal goals. How do they affect your expectations of God?

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.
Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed,
for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

3

I wasn't exactly looking forward to NS as I dreaded the unknown. I had to stay in camp away from my family, live and work with total strangers, and submit to military discipline.

When my enlistment finally arrived, I had a tough time adjusting. Finding my bunkmates too rowdy, I often headed straight to bed after a long day of training. I felt lonely, and missed my family. On top of this, the training was tough and our commanders sometimes even seemed unreasonable—once we had to clean an entire field of fallen leaves by hand before we could go home! And then there was always the danger of messing up during training and being confined in camp while everyone else booked out over the weekend. All this contributed to my sense of uncertainty.

But then I realised that my time in NS was drawing me closer to God. I learned to look to Him for strength to respond in the right way to challenges, and for comfort in times of fear and loneliness. It was wonderful to know that He was always with me.

God gave Joshua the same assurance. Having taken on Moses' role and massive task of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, Joshua must have been fearful of the big unknown. But God reminded him to be strong and courageous, "for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

Although our situation is very different from Joshua's, our fear of the unknown can be just as strong. Like Joshua, we too can draw strength and courage from God, knowing that He is with us all the way. Let us approach NS with the right spirit: as an opportunity for us to draw closer to God and experience His presence. —James

THINK

What challenges are you facing? How can you apply God's assurance in Joshua 1:9 when dealing with them?

ROMANS 12:1-2

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

BE TRANSFORMED

4

I guess I officially became a soldier on the day I enlisted in the SAF. For the first few weeks, however, I tried hard to avoid being one. I did everything I could to convince myself that I was still a civilian, by attempting to think and behave like I used to. I wore green outside, but I remained a civilian inside.

Gradually, however, I realised that I had to allow myself to be “transformed” into a soldier—at least for the remainder of my NS—so that I truly thought, spoke, and behaved like one. But this transformation would take time.

This reminds me a bit about our own Christian walk. When we confess and believe in Jesus, God’s grace allows us to join His army. But in order to become a true Christian “soldier”, we need to remove our old “civilian” selves—which have been shaped by the world—and replace them with new Christ-like selves. And this process takes time.

Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1-2 that to be able to present ourselves as holy and acceptable to God, we need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. This is not simply a matter of getting rid of some old attitudes or bad habits. Rather, we need to undergo a complete change inside. We are to have new minds and hearts shaped by God.

The good news is that we don’t have to do this on our own. The Holy Spirit initiates and drives this change; we just need to submit ourselves to Him and be open to His transforming power as we read His Word and spend time with our heavenly Father daily.

Soldiers serving NS will eventually become civilians again. But as Christian soldiers, let’s get rid of our old selves and put on our new ones forever. —Leslie

THINK

Are you clinging on to your old “civilian” self that has been shaped by the world? How would you go about submitting yourself fully to God’s transforming power?

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

BEING HOLY

5

In BMT, we had a section mate who was always getting us in trouble. Because of his antics, our section, or even the entire platoon, often got punished.

One day, he incurred the wrath of our commanders and caused everyone to be punished. Being in charge of the platoon for the day, I scolded him and, in a moment of anger, swore at him. I thought little of it until later, when I overheard another platoon mate telling someone that he was surprised to hear me swear. I realised then that I had not only done wrong, but had also been a bad witness—people around me had noticed the inconsistency between my faith and my actions.

Scripture provides us with directions on how to live as children of God. Colossians 3:8 reminds us to put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. Instead, we are to set our minds on pursuing godliness and living in a manner befitting our Christian identity. This means renouncing all sinful and worldly behaviour, including the use of foul language.

We are to be holy because God is holy. We are made in His image and have also become His children. Therefore we are to reflect our Father's nature in our behaviour. If we let Him, God himself will work within us, through His Spirit, to renew us daily and make us Christ-like.

So let us always be mindful that we are now children of God and ambassadors of Christ. And may we depend on the Holy Spirit's help to live out our identity in Christ. —Enyi

THINK

What do your current actions say about your faith? What needs to change?

PSALM 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

COMING CLEAN

6

“Siao liao!”

It was the first thought that came to mind when I realised that I had just lost the washer connecting the muzzle to the barrel on my rifle. My thoughts ran wild, thinking of the punishment that would befall me if my instructors were to find out: a defaulters’ parade, confinement, maybe even the detention barracks?

Above all, I feared it would jeopardise my chances of going to command school. My army mates advised me: “Act blur, live longer.” I was told to keep quiet about the loss, return the rifle to the armoury, buy a replacement from one of the shops along Beach Road over the weekend, and replace it the following week. It sounded like a good plan, so I returned my rifle as if nothing was wrong.

That night, however, as I lay on my bed, my conscience kept pricking me. I couldn’t sleep; I knew I had done wrong in trying to cover up my mistake. God would be disappointed with me. After tossing and turning for a while, I was unable to bear it any longer. Mustering my courage, I went to my instructor and tearfully confessed my error. I was prepared for a lashing, but to my surprise, he did not reprimand me. Instead, he just said, “Eh, don’t cry lah. Go back to bed. We’ll see what we can do tomorrow. Just prepare to be punished. Go.”

I can’t recall what punishment I received. But I will never forget the relief I felt after coming clean. And how much greater is our sense of liberation when we confess our sins, for God, our ultimate superior, is more than willing to forgive us (Psalm 32:5). And, for the record, I did enter command school. —Ee Han

THINK

Have you experienced the joy of liberation that comes from God’s forgiveness? Pray that He will give you the courage to come clean with Him today.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

CULTIVATING DISCIPLINE

7

I was warned that the various challenges in NS would test my faith. So when I was enlisted, I prayed and did my devotion every night, to ensure I stayed close to God.

As the months passed, however, I grew complacent. I stopped praying and reading the Bible. It was only when ORD approached that I realised how distant from God I had become and how little I followed His Word. Sadly, I had not been a good witness to others, and was in fact no different from a non-believer in my speech and behaviour.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, the apostle Paul reminds us of the need for discipline and focus in our relationship with God. He likens the Christian journey to a race, where one must exert the utmost effort in order to finish and win the prize.

Paul reminds us that all this effort and dedication will be worth it: the faithful can look forward to a reward much greater than anything this life can offer—God’s commendation. If we train so hard to win trophies here on Earth, should we not do even more when the prize is divine approval?

Therefore, just as we learn discipline and train hard to meet the challenges of NS and to become better soldiers, let us become godly soldiers for Christ by cultivating good habits in prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers, constantly asking God for the strength to persevere.

God’s reminder shook me out of my complacency, and today, I rely on His grace to help me maintain the discipline of praying and studying His Word daily. I am reminded that only by staying close to God, can I overcome life’s challenges, stay faithful, and finish my race strong. —Zixian

THINK

What good Christian habits do you need to cultivate? Who might be able to help you in this?

PROVERBS 19:21

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

DASHED DREAMS

8

I had always wanted to be an officer, probably because my dad had been an OC during his NS days. So when I enlisted, I did all I could to fulfil my dream. But things didn't go according to plan. My performance during the situation test was nothing short of dismal, and I was singled out for criticism. Unsurprisingly, I didn't make the cut.

It was thus with much reluctance that I reported to SISPEC (now known as SCS). I felt I had disappointed my dad and forfeited a lifelong ambition. Then, the opportunity arose to try out for Physical Training Instructor selection, which I accepted with great enthusiasm as "Plan B", and thankfully passed. But that path proved short-lived as well. Being of short stature, I had trouble clearing the SOC in Full Battle Order and dislocated my left shoulder. My dreams were dashed again.

But God did not abandon me. I was eventually posted to another unit where I got to know a particularly inspiring fellow Christian. He always made it a point to share his faith and challenge others to consider the claims of Christ. I also had more time to do Christian volunteer work. God used this "season of disappointment" to strengthen my relationship with Him. I may have had "many plans", as Proverbs 19:21 says, but I have learned to trust in God's leading.

As we go through life, there may be times when we find ourselves lost and disappointed. When my dreams were dashed, God led me out of despair. I came to know Him better, and found true fulfilment in Him.
—Jeremy

THINK

Have your dreams been dashed? Do you see God opening up new opportunities for you to grow?

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

FAITHFUL IN DUTY

9

When I was posted to the Military Police, it seemed to confirm my worst fears that NS would be a waste of time.

After basic training, I was deployed to the MINDEF headquarters, where I spent the better part of two years standing guard at the main gates and saluting high-ranking officers as they drove past, or patrolling the perimeter of the complex for hours. Although we had been trained for important-sounding wartime tasks like protecting supply routes and handling prisoners-of-war, my colleagues and I joked that we were little more than security guards. Worse still, we had to do guard duty on weekends and during the wee hours of the night.

Was I glad when NS ended!

Years later, however, I started to see my NS stint in a different light. At the time, it seemed like a mindless grind, but on hindsight, I realised I was actually doing something important. We were a small part of a big picture—protecting the country, ensuring its security, and making sure that other nations respected our sovereignty. When I read news reports of small countries being invaded, I realised how important it was to have an effective defence force.

In Colossians 3:17, God reminds us to do our best for Christ wherever we find ourselves. One way we can do this is by faithfully carrying out our duties. This is even more vital in NS—our role may seem small and inconsequential, but it is part of something bigger and more important. —Joshua

THINK

How can you serve your nation and honour God in your NS duties?

ROMANS 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

GOD'S COMFORT

10

The first three months in NS were hectic. BMT was physically, mentally, and emotionally tough. I was always exhausted, I missed the comforts of home intensely, and I lived in a constant blur of push-ups and running.

Every night, I tried to do my quiet time, but was soon overcome by exhaustion. All I could do was flip through my tiny Bible, read a verse at random, and then say a quick prayer. Yet God comforted me and used these precious few moments to teach me many spiritual lessons.

One day, I came across Romans 8:18, which said that the glory I would see when I met Jesus again was worth any amount of suffering I might experience as His follower. I realised that just as the tough training in NS strengthened my physical body, the spiritual challenges in life would do likewise for my faith in God.

And no matter how unbearable they seemed at times, the challenges I faced in NS were temporary—I could look forward to ORD. Similarly, our trials as Christians will also end one day, with something even greater.

Suffering for Christ, while difficult to bear, draws us closer to God and teaches us to rely on Him fully. It is only when we are at our weakest that we come to appreciate His strength. And we can hold on to the fact that all our sufferings will ultimately give way to joy: we can look forward to spending eternity with Jesus in glory.

Of course, that doesn't mean that we spend all our time just waiting to escape from reality; God has a purpose for us to fulfil during our time on earth. And we can be strengthened by the knowledge that we have an eternity of God's glory to look forward to. —Leslie

THINK

What challenges are you facing in NS? What spiritual lessons can you draw from them?

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

GOD'S PLAN, NOT MINE

11

I had always wanted to join the army—Special Forces, preferably—so it was a dream come true when I got to join the Commandos. Having prayed hard for it, I believed God had answered my prayers. When I finished BMT with an award, I felt even more certain that this was God's plan for me.

But everything came apart when I was injured in a parachute jump and had to leave the elite unit. Devastated, I asked God, "Why did you let this happen?"

A friend then encouraged me to try teaching. I wasn't keen at first, but found a passion for it in my first class. It seemed another door had opened. Several years later, however, I suffered a second disappointment: due to some administrative issues, I couldn't continue teaching. It seemed as if God had closed a door on me—again.

It led me to question God and His love for me. Why did He let this happen to me again and again?

It was at this lowest point in my life that an opportunity to join a Christian ministry came up. I was asked to head a youth team to share God's Word online, and it turned out to be a most fulfilling task. I had never imagined serving God in this manner.

Looking back, I can see how God had lifted me up when I needed Him most. When I was despondent, He comforted me and gave me hope.

Psalms 40:2 reminds us that our loving God will lift us "out of the miry bog, and set [our] feet upon a rock, making [our] steps secure". It is sometimes hard in the face of repeated disappointment to see how life can possibly improve, yet we can always place our trust and hope in Him because He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. —Ian

THINK

What other Bible verse can we draw encouragement from in the face of disappointment?

ROMANS 8:5

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

JUST DON'T GET CAUGHT

12

“Do anything you want, just don’t get caught” is virtually the unofficial golden rule in NS. I was given this counsel many times, and may even have passed it on to others occasionally!

The principle grants us great freedom of action, with only a single caveat. We can do a poor job, slack off, or break the rules—as long as we don’t get caught. If we do get caught, however, we are on our own: nobody will save us from the consequences and punishment.

While risky, this advice can be very tempting for those of us who chafe under the numerous rules and regulations in NS. Many of our colleagues will gladly embrace its wisdom, coming up with creative ways to circumvent the system and make their lives easier. Even afterwards, as we return to civilian life, this maxim remains very appealing. Indeed, it sometimes seems as though everyone is doing it, and nobody ever gets caught. But, as children of God, should we really live by this principle? What does Scripture have to say about this?

The Word makes it clear that no matter how clever we think we have been, we can never escape God’s watchful eye (Luke 12:2-3). Our lives are lived in the presence of God, and we will be held accountable for our actions (Hebrews 4:13). We may be tempted to break the rules, but let’s not be lulled into believing that we can get away with it forever.

So, rather than following the worldly wisdom of “just don’t get caught,” let’s live by a higher principle. Let’s not be distracted by earthly desires, but focus instead on pleasing God by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5). Glory awaits those who remain faithful (vv.16-17). —John

THINK

Can you identify some “things of the Spirit” that we should be setting our minds on?

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ . . . rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

KNOCK IT DOWN!

13

Did you ever have that one platoon sergeant who never let you pass bunk inspection? Or the CSM who always made you run to that tree across the parade square and back because your boots just weren't *kilat* enough? Or the OC who meted out severe punishments for the smallest mistakes?

Working under demanding superiors—and learning to cope with them—is part and parcel of NS. Even if you are not being *tekan* on a daily basis, at some point you will be “knocked down” for push ups or made to “sign extra” for weekend duties.

You can easily turn bitter over what you see as unreasonable treatment. You might start holding grudges against your commanders and being generally uncooperative. Worse, you might become openly insubordinate, and end up with even more “extras”!

The Bible mentions a group of people with many reasons to feel bitter. Slaves in the ancient world had few legal rights and were often mistreated. Yet, in Ephesians 6, Paul counsels them to obey their masters with sincerity! Why? Because they were to live for God, the ultimate judge, and not allow their lives to be defined by their earthly masters.

We may feel angry about our treatment. But God has promised that if we do what is right, He will deal with the problem in His own time and way—perfectly (Ephesians 6:8). He will help us understand such situations, and comfort us if we have been wronged.

Let's not poison our thoughts by harbouring resentment. Instead, let's continue with our duties diligently, leaving justice in God's hands.

So, the next time you're hitting the ground because some superior has decided that “not enough blood is getting to your heads”, remember Paul's encouragement to live for God, not for men. —Victor

THINK

What are some ways in which you can set your mind on pleasing God even when you are being *tekan*?

HOSEA 2:14

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

LESSONS IN THE WILDERNESS

14

NS came as a bit of a shock for me. Military life stressed discipline, regimentation, and lots of physical conditioning. There was little opportunity for us to indulge in favourite pastimes, whether it is staying up all night playing online games, hanging out along Orchard Road with friends, or fiddling with the latest handheld gadgets. The new reality took some adjusting to.

At first, I missed my old life greatly. Upon reflection, however, I realise that I experienced the most spiritual growth while I was serving NS.

Hosea 2:14 describes God leading an unfaithful, disobedient Israel into the wilderness, where, with all distractions removed, He can woo her so that she will remember Him and turn back to Him.

While NS isn't some sort of punishment for spiritual disobedience, it too can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. When I entered NS, I was separated from all my toys, hobbies, and companions. Thrust into an unfamiliar environment, away from all these worldly diversions and comforts, I turned to the Bible for comfort and guidance. As I spent more time with God and His Word, I found my knowledge of God and reliance on Him growing as well.

To me, NS was a time of honing not just my mind and body, but also my soul. Brought out of my comfort zone, I learned to depend on God more and grew closer to Him.

So, rather than lamenting over the loss of your creature comforts, why not see NS as an opportunity to deepen your relationship with God? Today, let us think about how we can make best use of our time to know and experience God. —Chin Hang

THINK

How can you apply God's Word and learn to trust in Him as you encounter new experiences in NS?

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

LET IT GO

15

As we serve NS, we will encounter people with very different backgrounds and life experiences. Some will be friendly and helpful, others difficult and uncooperative. They may also have values and priorities quite at odds with the Christian worldview.

For my part, I found it very difficult to get along with the *wayang kia* and *chao-keng peng* in my unit. The former would slack off when our superiors weren't watching, while the latter would feign injury to avoid duties. This usually meant more work for the rest of us. Their hypocrisy and irresponsibility bothered me greatly, especially as they often got away with it. In fact, I was sometimes tempted to go out of my way to make life difficult for them. How was I supposed to follow Jesus' command to love such selfish and deceitful individuals? It all felt so unfair.

One day, however, I finally understood the danger of bearing grudges when I read Hebrews 12:14-15. These verses urge us to live in peace with all men wherever possible, lest we allow bitterness to grow and control our lives. Resentment would make us cynical and unhappy, and our relationships with others and God would suffer.

Living in peace with others, I discovered, does not mean condoning their wrongdoing. Instead, it means turning to God for help in handling the situation, and trusting that He will resolve it in His own way.

Why should we allow the behaviour of others to dictate the way we live? The sole authority of our faith and practice is the Word of God.
—Reuben

THINK

How has bitterness towards others affected you in NS? How can you resolve it?

PSALM 37:23

The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way.

LOOKING BEYOND

16

My enlistment letter contained an unpleasant surprise: I had been posted to the Singapore Police Force instead of the SAF. I was bitterly disappointed. I had always been interested in the military, but now I wouldn't get to fire automatic weapons, practise tactical movement, or participate in live-firing exercises. All my peers would be undergoing the Singaporean rite of passage to manhood, while I would be stuck writing out parking tickets.

My father, however, took a different view. Who knows, he said. Maybe joining the police was part of God's plan for me.

It took two and a half years for me to appreciate the wisdom of Dad's advice. Serving in the police force turned out to be pretty interesting: hunting venomous snakes in gutters, wrestling violent criminals into handcuffs, and cleaning up after messy suicides. I learned much about courage, resourcefulness, and professionalism—and the importance of a strong stomach.

Genesis 31-33 tells of how God directed Jacob to return home—and to his brother Esau, who had sworn to kill him after being cheated of their father's blessing. Jacob feared Esau's retribution and was worried sick, but he nevertheless obeyed God's commandment. As it turned out, his brother was overjoyed to see him again.

Like Jacob, we can look beyond our current circumstances, no matter how gloomy they may seem, knowing that they can be used by God for our good—an unfavourable posting may turn out to be for the best after all. Instead of reacting with bitterness and doubt, let us remember that God is always at work in our lives. When a man "delights" in God's way, the Lord will establish his steps (Psalm 37:23).
—Amos

THINK

Are you dissatisfied with your current posting? What long-term lessons can you draw from it?

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

MARCHING ON

17

“Eh, don’t look, don’t look!” my section mate warned me. But it was too late: I turned and saw one of my platoon mates throwing up, and the sight made me do likewise. I felt too exhausted to take another step, yet this was just the beginning of a week-long field camp.

Throughout the camp, we were kept busy with lots of running. Pushed to my limits, the only thing that kept me going was the constant thought: God is in control. Much to my surprise, I not only survived BMT, but ended up physically fitter than I had ever been, and made many lifelong friends. I had witnessed the hand of God working in my life.

After BMT, I was made a Security Trooper, performing sentry and office duties all day long. The routine was mind-numbingly predictable. But I found time to read and meditate on His Word, and learned the value of patience. God had reminded me again that He was present and in control.

Romans 8:28-29 taught me four truths about God: His sovereignty, His providence, His goodness, and His will.

First, God is in control over all things—even when we wonder whether we will survive our ordeal.

Second, God is at work in all things. He will use every single circumstance to work out His purpose for our lives.

Third, He is always working for our good. Regardless of how hopeless our situation may seem, we can trust in Him. He has the power to turn any adversity into a blessing.

Fourth, God’s goal is to make us like Christ. He can use the afflictions, trials, and temptations we face to shape our character and teach us trust and obedience. This process can sometimes be painful, but the final result is glorious—we will be like Christ. —Jacky

THINK

What Christ-like characteristics is God developing in you through your current NS experience? How can you cooperate in this process?

1 PETER 2:13-14

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

NAVY DAYS

18

I served my NS in the navy. Having already served aboard a warship, I was pretty experienced by the time I met the young officer who took over my department. Fresh out of OCS, he had commanded us for only a few months when an incident happened. He made a decision that I did not agree with, but because he was the ranking officer, I had to obey, even though I was older and more experienced. I did it most reluctantly, and went home furious. It took a few tubs of ice cream just to cool me down.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had continued arguing with him. Would he have reconsidered his decision, or simply punished me for insubordination?

I was angry because I was heavily invested in the operations of my department, and resented the intrusion of this relative newcomer. But I realised that my officer had much more to lose than I if the situation was not handled correctly. Regardless of his competence, it was not my department to run, but his.

Understanding this truth allowed me to let go of my resentment. More importantly, I was reminded that having spoken up, I ultimately had to submit to my superior's authority. I had done my part by offering my opinion; the final decision—and responsibility—was his.

Even though it can be very difficult for us to submit to those we consider less capable or experienced, 1 Peter 2:13-14 tells us that we should obey every human institution placed over us by God for our good, without violating His will.

As we serve NS, let us ask God for wisdom and discernment in our attitude towards our superiors, and honour Him by submitting respectfully to authority. —Shawn

THINK

How can we demonstrate humility and obedience when we voice our opinions to superiors?

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits,
since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

OUR ANCHOR

19

The training schedule at OCS was extremely busy and demanding: nine months of pushing our limits, both physically and mentally. We spent much time training out in the field—in fact we looked forward to it, because staying in camp was worse: you were much more likely to fall afoul of a bored instructor or be “volunteered” for some unpleasant duty.

It was during this time that my girlfriend decided to break up with me. I hadn’t been able to spend much time with her because of the constant training: most of my days off were taken up by family activities or spent preparing for the week ahead, and she had grown tired of tagging along. It was a devastating blow.

Although painful, the experience taught me an important lesson: life is full of competing priorities that we must choose between, and our choices will come with implications and consequences.

In the same way, decisions regarding our spiritual lives will have eternal consequences. The world holds many distractions, and our concerns over money, career, studies, relationships, responsibilities, as well as our own aspirations, can leave us confused and uncertain about the right path to take in our walk with God. How then can we make the right choices for life?

In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul admonishes his readers to anchor their lives on Christ, who has enlisted us into His service. This means focusing on Him and living our lives in order to please Him. This is not easy as we may still feel the pain of disappointment, but in the light of Christ’s Lordship, all other priorities will find their true place in our lives. —Joel

THINK

How does making Christ the Lord of your life help you handle competing priorities?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:31

So that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

OUR PRIDE

20

“We are the best in the SAF!”

“We are the best, we are the champions, and we will always be number one!”

“With pride we lead.”

“I serve with pride.”

Appealing to pride is a common motivational practice in the SAF. During my time in BMT, my commanders loved to make us chant, “Duty, honour, country, Ninja Company!” As a result, we believed ourselves better than the other companies and trained longer and harder to excel.

I can understand why commanders often appeal to pride; after all, it usually results in better discipline and performance. It is important to take pride in oneself. While being too proud is unhealthy, recognising our own self-worth gives us confidence and motivates us to work harder in life. As national servicemen, we took pride in our identity as SAF soldiers and responded by putting in more effort.

Likewise, as followers of Christ, we should take pride in our identity in Him. Through His sacrifice, we have been made children of the supreme God, and enjoy a special, personal relationship with Him. This is something truly extraordinary—the Creator of the universe watches over and provides for us, and we can look forward to spending eternity with Him. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, transforming us to be like Christ and allowing us to enjoy full fellowship with God.

Our pride in Christ should motivate us to live for Him. If we truly recognise our unique status as Christians and children of God, we will reflect it in our character and actions. As 1 Corinthians 1:31 states, let us boast in and of the Lord. —Nicholas

THINK

What are some of the challenges we may face when we try to live for God?

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PLAYING RANK

21

“Sir, the sergeant is not helping to expedite the issue,” reports my staff. “Leave it to me,” I reply. A quick phone call does the trick. “Hello, Sergeant, this is Captain Tan here. Can you please see to this matter?”

Rank is a big thing in the SAF. It gets you places, gives you privileges, and gets the job done. It confers authority as well as prestige. But like all authority, it is open to abuse. When we are promoted and placed in charge of others, we may be tempted to flaunt our newfound powers, making unreasonable or unfair demands of our subordinates just because we can. We also risk developing an inflated opinion of ourselves and others based on rank, disdaining those lower than us on the chain of command and currying favour with those above.

Let us learn to handle our authority wisely. As Christians, we can look to the example of our supreme commander—Jesus. Pride was not His way. Although He was their teacher and Lord, Jesus set an example of humility when He washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:12-17).

Nor did He abuse His authority, even when facing death. Jesus could easily have summoned a legion of angels to rescue Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, but this would have been against His Father’s will (Matthew 26:53-56).

Despite His exalted status as the Son of God, Jesus “emptied himself”, took the form of a servant, humbled himself, and was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

It is God’s desire that our thoughts and actions reflect Christ. Let us not grow proud of our position, but humble ourselves like He did, and use the authority granted to us to honour Him. —Derek

THINK

How can you practise effective leadership while being humble like Jesus?

COLOSSIANS 4:3-4

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

PRAYING FOR OPEN DOORS

22

When I was given a PES C grading due to my eczema, some of my friends were envious, because it meant I would be assigned an easy desk job. I couldn't help but feel disappointed, however—it seemed as if I had somehow missed out on serving the nation. But I still wanted to do my best, so I strived to be a “model soldier” by diligently following orders, producing quality work, and developing a healthy working relationship with my colleagues.

A few months before my ORD, however, I realised that I had neglected something else—sharing the gospel with my fellow servicemen. I had been so caught up in serving the nation that I had missed out on serving God. It was not enough to be a role model as a soldier: I also had to reach out to others as a believer. I began to pray for open doors and opportunities to share the gospel with my colleagues and invite them to church.

When the apostle Paul was imprisoned for preaching the good news, he could have asked the Colossian believers to pray for his well-being or quick release. Instead, he instructed them to pray “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ . . . that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:3-4). Paul placed the urgency of the gospel above his own imprisonment and hardship. He also understood that gospel work required prayer, which reflects total dependency on God.

Just as we should strive to serve the nation to the best of our ability, as soldiers of Christ, let us serve God with the same dedication. —Caleb

THINK

What opportunities for serving God are open to us? How can we prepare ourselves for them?

Rejoice in the Lord always ... Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything ... let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

REJOICING IN GOD

23

I was grumbling one day about my duties when my friend, who was not a believer, observed, "Why do you seem to have so many negative things to say these days?" I couldn't respond. I had been complaining so much that even my friend had grown tired of my negative attitude.

Soon after, I came across Philippians 2:14-15, where the apostle Paul explicitly instructs the Philippians to "do all things without grumbling or disputing", as God's children should behave. Every word seemed to stab at my guilty heart.

We often find ourselves grumbling about our lot in life, but as believers, let us learn to adopt a different attitude. In Philippians 4, Paul tells us to "rejoice in the Lord always" (v. 4), to "not be anxious about anything", and to bring our concerns to the Lord (v. 6). Instead of complaining about the negatives, we are to think of the positives— "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (v. 8).

In doing so, we will receive the peace of God in our hearts and minds (v. 7), and just like Paul we will be able to say, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (v. 11).

A contented and joyful spirit is an effective testimony for Christ. Let us learn to rejoice in Him always. —Wieký

THINK

What are some things you can thank God for, even in the midst of challenges?

MATTHEW 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

SHOWING LOVE

24

It was a bad time to be sick. We were training overseas, and had a packed schedule. I was running a high fever, and the lousy accommodation made it worse—the beds were little more than wooden planks with thin mattresses, and the bunkhouse was hot and stuffy. The weather was scorching and humid.

I woke up one night to find my buddy placing a cool, wet towel on my forehead, like a caring nurse. I had not told him how sick I was, but he had noticed my condition and did what was necessary.

A wave of shame engulfed me. My friend was not a Christian, but through that simple action, I felt that he was demonstrating more of God's love than I ever had. I'm not sure whether I would have thought of doing the same thing, had our situations been reversed.

It's so easy to get caught up in our own troubles during NS. Yet, NS gives us many opportunities to show others what our Christian faith means in real terms. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus talks about "good works" when telling us to let our "light shine before others". We are to demonstrate God's love, holiness, and righteousness in practical ways—through our words, attitudes, and actions. We can be patient when things go wrong, caring and helpful, diligent even in tasks we don't like, and holy in our speech and behaviour.

Our good works will give God glory, because others will see that our efforts are a result of His work in our lives.

Even when we don't have the chance to share the gospel directly, we can be witnesses for our faith by showing others what Jesus' love is—by loving our neighbours as we love ourselves. —Leslie

THINK

How can you demonstrate God's holiness and love in your words and actions today?

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there will be disorder and every vile practice.

SO UNFAIR

25

It can be frustrating when our friends seem to get a better deal than us in NS. Perhaps their duties are less strenuous, their unit's discipline is more relaxed, their monthly NS allowance is higher, or maybe their vocations allow them to stay out of camp or have more frequent nights off. It may all seem very unfair if we have to work harder and deal with more duties and responsibilities, yet get fewer rewards.

Many of us covet our friends' better postings and complain about our own. Railing at the injustice of it all, we can become embittered and tempted to slack off in our own duties. But we know this would be compromising our Christian principles: James 3:16 makes clear that envy is counterproductive and can lead to all sorts of sinful behaviour. How can we resist the temptation to covet and compare?

It is natural for us to compare our lot with that of others. But the SAF is a complex organisation with different roles and responsibilities. Sometimes it's not as simple as a straightforward comparison of perks and duties may suggest. Some vocations may be relaxed at times, but will have periods of punishing, high-tempo operations. Others come with additional perks to offset greater risk and responsibility. And cushy desk jobs are usually assigned to those with medical conditions that disqualify them from frontline service.

More importantly, however, we need to shift our focus from comparing our lives with others, to what we have already been given and will be given. What happens to others is between them and God (Romans 14:12). For our part, let us be content and focus on the task He has set before us. Let's not envy others (Proverbs 23:17), but look to the Lord—He knows who His faithful servants are. —Barnabas

THINK

Think about what tasks God has set before you. How has He equipped you to deal with them?

MATTHEW 6:31-33

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

STOP GRUMBLING!

26

Most national servicemen share a favourite pastime: grumbling. There appears to be no end to the things we can complain about. And what's wrong with venting a little frustration every now and then?

The trouble is, grumbling can take us down a dangerous path. My buddies and I often started off by complaining about how tough our training was, but before we knew it, we would be talking about our unreasonable sergeant, our demanding OC, and soon, how unfair the whole of NS was. I even had to remind myself not to blame God for allowing me to waste away in NS!

The act of complaining—whether conscious or unconscious—reveals a selfish spirit in us. We complain because we are not satisfied with where God has placed us, and yearn for a better posting, nicer superiors, more perks, and so on. Jude 16 cautions us against becoming “grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires”. Our complaints reveal more about ourselves than anything else.

Grumbling also demonstrates a lack of faith in God's provision and direction for our lives. The ancient Israelites complained about everything as the Lord led them out of Egypt. “Mere grumbling” led to discontent, and eventually to rebellion against God. As a result, some of them “were destroyed by the Destroyer” (1 Corinthians 10:10). Their example shows the latent danger in grumbling.

Grumbling will harm our personal relationship with God and hinder our witness to others. Matthew 6:31-33 teaches us to have faith and trust in His providential grace, even in the most trying situations. If we put God first in our lives, we have absolutely no reason to grumble, for His grace is sufficient for us. —York Hao

THINK

Reflect on your current situation. Are there aspects that you are dissatisfied with? How can you practise Matthew 6:33 in these situations?

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

TAKING A STAND

27

On the first day of enlistment, a commander addressed the entire company of 200 recruits in the lecture theatre. He asked, "Anyone here who cannot stand swearing?"

I raised my hand, thinking that I wouldn't be the only one. To my surprise, I was. I felt very awkward as everyone turned to look at me. In the week that followed, the same question was asked on several other occasions, and each time I plucked up my courage and raised my hand.

Sticking to my principles did not come without cost: I had to put up with some ridicule from my fellows. However, I realised their scorn was an indication that my witness for Christ had not gone unnoticed. Even though their reactions were negative, they were an encouraging sign that my Christian example was having an effect. Furthermore, I discovered that taking that first step of faith had given me more confidence to stand up for my convictions in the future.

I was also encouraged by Daniel's example. Exiled to Babylon, Daniel and his people lived as slaves in a foreign land. But Daniel never let oppression or persecution get in the way of his relationship with God. He insisted on keeping God's commands regarding food and drink, even at the risk of defying the king (Daniel 1:8-15).

In NS, as in all other environments, we will meet many people with worldviews very different from ours. But like Daniel, we too can ask God for the strength to stand up for our faith. —Manyiu

THINK

What struggles and challenges to your faith are you facing in NS? Pray and commit them to God, asking Him for strength to help you stand up for Him.

PSALM 5:11

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

TAKING REFUGE IN GOD

28

It happened one night while I was in NS. My staff sergeant, in a bad mood, summoned my buddy and me from our bunks around midnight. He then made us stand at attention while he ranted and raved at us for more than three hours.

I was so affected by the experience that for the rest of NS, I would try to avoid him whenever possible. It was so bad that I suffered recurring nightmares about him giving me an undeserved shelling. I would then wake up angry and bitter.

This went on even after I finished NS, until one day at church, when the speaker exhorted us to forgive those who had wronged us. It was not easy to do so, but I suddenly understood that until I learnt to let go of my bitterness and practise the forgiveness of Christ, there would be no closure. After some six to seven years, I finally found release and the nightmares stopped.

The experience taught me the importance of seeking refuge in God when confronted with injustice. If I had realised this earlier, I would have saved myself much trouble.

As Psalm 5:11 says, "Let all who take refuge in you rejoice." We are bound to face problems in life, and NS has its fair share of them. We can become resentful and bitter as a result of these experiences, especially when we feel that we have been treated unfairly. We can always, however, turn to God for help in such times. In difficult moments, we can choose to ask God for the strength and wisdom to deal with our challenges, and be encouraged by His presence. He knows what we are going through, and He is more than sufficient for us in our moment of need. —Stanley

THINK

Have you tried turning to God during tough times? You'll find His grace more than sufficient.

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

THE ULTIMATE COMMANDER

29

While I was in OCS, I was appointed Cadet Wing Sergeant Major. My role was to get everyone prepared for administrative work and field training, and also to disseminate information. It was a big task for me.

As expected, I encountered opposition, with people questioning why things had to be done my way. I depended a lot on my authority as Sergeant Major to see things through. It was certainly effective at getting people moving, but there was some resentment at my high-handedness.

In NS, some of us will be given authority over others, whether based on rank, expertise, or seniority. Likewise, we may be appointed to leadership positions in church or at work in future. As such, we need to learn how to exercise that authority properly.

At first, it is tempting to solve all our problems in a straightforward manner, bulldozing our way past any dissent. This approach is commonplace in the military, where soldiers are expected to obey orders immediately. But this inevitably leads to friction, as I experienced.

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul reminds us that all authority must be used responsibly, because God has ultimate authority over everything. Just as masters are to refrain from mistreating or threatening their slaves (v. 9), and parents must not exasperate their children (v. 4), we are accountable for how we treat our subordinates, and any abuse of our rank. Let us do what is right in God's eyes, and treat them fairly. If fairness is practised consistently, resentment will slowly give way to respect.

Let us ask God for wisdom and learn to moderate our leadership approach appropriately, tempering authority with fairness and remembering whom we are ultimately answerable to. —Reuben

THINK

How does knowing that God is our ultimate commander affect the way we exercise authority?

MATTHEW 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

TO ORD IN PEACE

30

The mood in camp was good, and not just because it was the end of the year—it was also about one month to ORD. Most of us were looking forward to the end of our full-time NS. But as far as I was concerned, I was far from done. In fact, time was running out.

While I had shared the gospel whenever I could during my time in Guards, I had not done so with everyone in my platoon. I knew this Christmas season was the best—and possibly final—chance for me to share my faith with my friends. So I quickly came up with a simple plan to share the gospel with the whole platoon—all 30 men, including my fellow commanders. This was to give each of them a card that carried the message of the gospel, as part of a small goodie pack containing an assortment of chocolates and snacks.

Assembling the pack was easy. The trickiest part was deciding how much gospel content to squeeze onto a small slip of paper. I printed the slips and pasted them onto coloured cards, so that they would not be dismissed as scrappy flyers.

Not surprisingly, most of the platoon attacked the goodies and finished them within minutes. Unlike the sweet wrappers, however, none of the all-important gospel slips ended up in the dustbin. I even spotted one stuck on a cupboard mirror.

I felt nervous when I saw the men reading the cards. But I thanked God, for I knew that some of them were reading the gospel for the first time. For me, this was a small but significant step towards being a disciple of Jesus.

And now I could ORD in peace. —Alvin

THINK

Don't wait until ORD to begin serving God. Start today!

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