

# The Army Chaplaincy

Professional Bulletin of the Unit Ministry Team

SUMMER-FALL 2010

**Strengthening  
Army  
Communities  
through  
Ministries of  
Sacred Speech**

Chaplain Center  
and School  
U.S. Army Chaplain  
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6100  
Sacred Speech

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PB 16-09-2

- 1 **From the Chief**  
Chaplain (MG) Douglas L. Carver
- 5 **From the Regimental SGM**  
SGM Tommy L. Marrero
- 6 **Commandant's Notes**  
Chaplain (COL) David Smartt
- 7 **From the USACHCS CSM**  
CSM Marylena McCrimmon
- 8 **Giving Voice to the Sacred Story: Developing  
Military Homileticians**  
Chaplain (COL) Kenneth W. Bush
- 13 **At the Edge of the Grave**  
Chaplain (COL) David Reese
- 16 **Prayer of Thanksgiving**  
Chaplain (COL) Joel Cocklin
- 17 **How to Defeat Discouragement**  
Chaplain (BG) Ray Woolridge, USAR
- 21 **Hope**  
Chaplain (MAJ) James Drake
- 22 **Absculitas Ut Servitam**  
Chaplain (LTC) Rick Spencer
- 24 **Fervent Faith in Tough Times**  
Chaplain (CPT) Eric Dean
- 31 **A Ritual of Transition**  
Chaplain (COL) Bonnie Koppell, USAR
- 33 **Welcoming the Dawn**  
Chaplain (MAJ) Mark Moss

**Chaplain (MG) Douglas L. Carver**  
Chief of Chaplains

**SGM Tommy L. Marrero**  
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**(Contents Page continued)**

- 35 Moral Values in Islam**  
Chaplain (LTC) Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad
- 37 Deeply Rooted**  
Chaplain (COL) Ralph Gore, USAR
- 38 Native American Heritage Prayer**  
Chaplain (MAJ) James Drake
- 39 Grace Amidst the Graves**  
Chaplain (CPT) Scot McCosh
- 42 The Power to Overcome**  
Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd
- 43 Finding God in Spiritual Depression**  
Chaplain (MAJ) Michael A. Milton, USAR.
- 55 Finishing Strong**  
Chaplain (LTC) Yvonne Hudson
- 56 Cinnabon Sin**  
Chaplain (MAJ) David Trogdon
- 58 A Written Prayer from a Family Member of a Deployed Soldier**  
Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd
- 59 This Ain't No Secret**  
Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd
- 60 Book Reviews**

# From the Chief

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Chaplain (MG) Douglas L. Carver, Chief of Chaplains



*“So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things!” --James 3:5*

## **The Powerful Privilege & Responsibility of Sacred Communications**



**R**alph Waldo Emerson, a great American philosopher and poet, once wrote that “*speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.*” While I’m not one to agree with all that Emerson wrote during his life, I admit that I agree with him whole-heartedly on the power of speech. Dr. Paul Tripp in his book *War of Words* makes the overarching point that God created words for a spiritual purpose and that the words we speak always impact our hearers in one way or another. Words are never neutral. They do mean things. If that is true even in normal communications, then how much more is speech powerful in the context of sacred communications? The short answer is that speech is exponentially more powerful in the sacred context. We bless, or curse, people with words. We employ speech to raise hopes and dreams, to challenge and encourage, to change lives and eternities, to build and plant, to turn a spirit of darkness into light. If we are not careful, we can use speech to numb instead of nourishing minds and souls, to wound instead of heal, and to crush spirits instead of lifting them up. The bottom line is this: speech is power and chaplains are called to employ sacred speech in powerful ways that bless and build our Soldiers, their Families and Army Communities.

Chaplains are called upon to communicate various messages in multiple contexts. We speak in briefings, during training events, in moments of religious education, in worship, and even to open or close a Battle Update Brief. Whatever the moment, God gives us the privilege to speak for him into the hearts of hearers around our Army. From a different angle, the context of sacred communication is often in those moments when the chaplain becomes the courier of a divine message from God to the pressing needs of a Soldier’s soul. Given the plethora of spiritual needs in the souls of our Soldiers during this era of enduring conflict, it is imperative that we maintain awareness of the power of our words in sacred communications and of the impact they have, positively or negatively, in the lives of those Soldiers and on the character of our Army communities.

It is because of the importance of this power in sacred speech that we must ensure we are good stewards of sacred communications. Our Chaplain Corps is blessed with chaplains who possess multiple and diversified skill sets for ministry. Some of us are master homileticians, while others are powerful counselors, proficient administrators of resources, or excellent trainers. While we each have our practical ministry comfort zones, we cannot confine our willingness to minister within them. As we administer resources, our people may attribute our good stewardship to training at the Chaplain School or a civilian institution. The same types of thoughts may go through their minds as

we counsel them proficiently. When we speak from the pulpit though, whether in chapel or under the sun in Afghanistan or Iraq, it is in those moments more than any others that our people, consciously or not, believe we are speaking less from professional training, and more from divine inspiration. In sacred communication moments, our Soldiers and their Families believe they hear God's voice. Calvin Miller has described preaching as a "*dialogue of hope – a verbal rendezvous between the Spirit and the listener.*" During enduring conflict, it is more important than ever that we ensure the success of this "dialogue of hope" between God and Soldiers. This is a high privilege and a higher responsibility, and we must steward that responsibility in two key ways.

First, we must ensure our sacred speech is such that it helps transform the soul of our Soldiers. Transformation does not take place without action. In terms of our spiritual lives, we are transformed by the actions we take to grow and the actions God takes to shape us spiritually. In this light, I encourage you to review all your sacred communications before the communication moment and ask yourself the practical "so what" question, What is your message asking, encouraging, or compelling your hearers to do? In other words, what is the application of the message? In his book *Preaching that Changes Lives*; Michael Fabarez says that "*preaching always aims to change lives. If this is not the conscious goal of the preacher, then the preacher will miss the point of his calling.*" None of us want to "miss the point" of this key privilege and critical responsibility, so we need to ensure our messages to Soldiers' souls provides the clear application to navigate them from where they are to where God's calling them to be. Asking the "so what" question helps ensure the clarity of application that informs Soldiers what their role in spiritual growth is at the same time that we tell them what God's role is in ensuring their spiritual transformation. It is how we ensure our communications help "bring Soldiers to God and God to Soldiers." Application fuels the action that empowers spiritual transformation, so I encourage your good stewardship of sacred communications by asking the "so what" question before you deliver your sacred messages.

Second, we increase our stewardship of sacred communication by our professional and pastoral development. One of the key objectives of our Army Chaplain Corps Strategic Plan is to "*develop a culture of life-long learning.*" Life-long learning is "*an essential element of preserving the spiritual strength*" of the Chaplain Corps, but it is also critical in ensuring the Chaplain Corps empowers the soul of the Army and increases its spiritual strength. CH (COL) Ken Bush, the Director of Training & Leader Development at the Chaplain School, has authored an excellent article for this edition of *The Army Chaplaincy* on comprehensive sacred communications development for chaplains and I commend it to you. I would remind you, in this context, that the professional development of sacred communicators is a shared responsibility. I bear a portion of that responsibility as your Chief. We are increasing our coverage of the subject in our institutional training at the Chaplain School and I continue to encourage senior chaplains around the Army to ensure that sacred communications is substantially addressed in their annual training plans. I have also recently formed the College of Military Preaching. The College of Military Preaching will serve as an advisory group to the Chief of Chaplains on the subject of sacred communications in the Army. It will possess the following key functions:

- Serve as an advisory body to the Chief of Chaplains on the state of preaching, homiletics or sacred communications within the Branch and propose training or education to improve this area across the Corps.
- Assist the US Army Chaplain Center and School in the planning of an annual preaching summit to be held at that location.
- Serve as mentors and coaches in the branch to include working with local installations as requested and available, and serve as evaluators of preaching portfolios.

- Serve as adjunct faculty to the US Army Chaplain Center and School as requested and available.
- Participate in the Sacred Communications Coaching Initiative managed by the US Army Chaplain Center and School.

The College has now inducted its class of charter members who span all components of our Army, and even includes retired chaplains who have volunteered their services to build our branch's abilities in this realm. The College will now begin to grow in impact and coach, teach, and mentor our branch either by distance or on location as Senior Chaplains include College of Military Preaching subject matter experts in their training.

The other side of this shared responsibility is that possessed by each chaplain- the priority to ensure your own professional development. Individual chaplains can now begin to engage with the College of Military Preaching mentioned above to coordinate mentorship in this ministry arena. A chaplain of your faith tradition will be assigned to coach you in this endeavor I also encourage you to engage in a reading program that spans the spectrum of your requirements in serving God and Country. Essential in that reading plan to ensure good stewardship of sacred communications and the power of sacred speech are works on preaching, homiletics, and related subjects. I read such works myself and it would thrill me if chaplains across the Army began to share lessons learned from their professional reading on the subject as I converse with you during my travels. If every chaplain in the Army simply read one book on the subject of sacred communications between now and the end of the fiscal year, we'd increase our collective life-long learning through the contents of nearly 3000 volumes. I also encourage chaplains to explore the various Doctor of Ministry programs available with sacred communications tracks. Many seminaries and divinity schools have partnered with us to provide our chaplains advanced standing in their Doctor of Ministry program resulting in cost savings and shorter time commitments for our chaplains. Information about these partnerships is available through the University of Military Ministry website. I encourage all our chaplains to partner with me in the shared responsibility of ensuring sacred communications best practices by proactively pursuing an intentional development plan in this critical ministry lane.

Honestly, during my tenure as Chief of Chaplains, the subject of sacred communications has been one that commanders around the Army have addressed with me as a concern. I take heart in that the nature of those conversations is now taking a positive turn and our chaplains are routinely employing the power of sacred speech with care, commitment, confidence and courage. Keep up the good work in this ministry to the souls of our Soldiers and our Army Communities. This ministry of sacred speech is absolutely vital to our spiritual leadership to the Army. Without excellence in this ministry, we will reduce our capacity to spiritual lead the force. It is encouraging that our positive influence is growing through many ministries to include sacred communications. My goal in the publication of this issue of *The Army Chaplaincy* is to present a catalyst for that continued growth and the impact of our branch's communications excellence. That's my role. Your role is to read it and to participate in and pursue professional development in this field. In sum, your role and mine is to "improve our own foxholes" when it comes to sacred communications. I'll be glad to discuss this great ministry with you as I travel around the Army, and I look forward to hearing what God's teaching you and how you are expanding the "dialogue of hope" through sacred communications! To paraphrase the words of the prophet Isaiah, "May the Sovereign LORD always give you an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary." (Isaiah 50:4)

PRO DEO ET PATRIA ... FOR GOD AND COUNTRY!

# From the Regimental SGM

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By SGM Tommy L. Marrero, *Chaplain Corps Regimental Sergeant Major*

## Advancing Communication and Mission Accomplishment in Religious Support



*“Communication among soldiers, teams, units, and organizations is essential to efficient and effective mission accomplishment. Two-way communication is more effective than one-way communication. Mission accomplishment depends on information passing accurately to and from subordinates and leaders, up and down the chain of command and NCO support channel, and laterally among adjacent organizations or activities.”*

The words above are written in FM 7-21.13, *The Soldier’s Guide*, paragraph 3-33. Communication is essentially important to the Army and our Chaplain Corps’ mission accomplishment. For Chaplains and Chaplain Assistants, proficient communication is critical as Unit Ministry Team members deliver religious support and model the Army Values to Soldiers, DOD civilians and their Families. As we apply our Military Occupational Specialty (56M) technical core capabilities through integrating religious support operations, spiritual readiness and basic human interactions; it is important that we communicate well as Soldiers, as leaders, and as Chaplain Assistants those things *The Soldier’s Guide* calls “essential to efficient and effective mission accomplishment”.

It is not uncommon for those with whom we speak, (i.e. peers, subordinates, and leaders) to develop a perception that when we speak, we speak on behalf of the Chaplain. Chaplain Carver’s article highlighted that sacred communication is powerful, is a privilege to deliver, and is a profound responsibility for those who bear it. As chaplain assistants, we must always remember the power of the privilege and responsibility we bear in supporting and ensuring sacred communication from God to Soldiers.

We all know that first impressions are essential, and our first impression with Soldiers and Families is often conveyed by how we chose to communicate with them. Our communication as Chaplain Assistants will create a perception about our level of professionalism as a Soldier and as a deliverer of religious support. We are trained to speak professionally and in this time of information



agility and acceleration every word will be measured to contribute to an assessment of who we are and what we represent as a Soldier, as a leader and as a Chaplain Assistant. It is imperative that we as Chaplain Assistants communicate religious support with professionalism, care, commitment, and compassion across our formations and to our Army Families. Nothing is more important to a leader than keeping their Soldiers informed with situational understanding, and then tasking them appropriately in accordance with their capabilities and the information they've been provided. As Chaplain Assistants, we support sacred communications that advance Soldier and Family Member spiritual understanding of their situations, and the reality that God will equip them for their tasks during this era of enduring conflict. Our commitment to support our Chaplains in sacred communication can literally build understanding and hope in the souls of Soldiers in the midst of great challenges. In that light, I challenge you as you enjoy this edition of the Army Chaplaincy to reflect professionally on the educational articles and then ask yourself how you can enhance your religious support capabilities to better facilitate sacred communications that "*Bring Soldiers to God and God to Soldiers.*" For God and Country!



# Commandant's Notes

*Chaplain (COL) David Smartt*

In 1986 I was asked to write an article on “Preaching in the Field” for *Military Chaplains’ Review*. Twenty-four years later, the journal is now *The Army Chaplaincy* and the topic is called Sacred Communications. Twenty-four years is a long time to wait for the next issue on a critical topic.

Much of the credit for getting this issue to press is due to the hard work of Chaplain (COL) Dave Reese of the Army War College who collected a broad collection of sermons in time of war. He has graciously permitted us to print some of them here. I recommend them to you as the best of the best. Look forward to the publication of his book.

This issue is part of a larger effort to improve the quality of Sacred Communications across the chaplaincy. We have already refocused our curriculum to stress the importance of communicating the sacred message within the unit context.

Additionally, as part of Chaplain Professional Reintegration Training, we will give every new Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course graduate the opportunity to submit a sample of their Sacred Communications for review and comment to a member of the College of Military Preachers from their faith group or preaching tradition.

Preaching can be one of the most powerful and visible means for reaching out to the spiritual needs of the troops. Through this medium, the chaplain has the awesome responsibility and opportunity for transmitting the sacred message into the present life situation of the Soldiers in the unit. Success is a matter of the preacher-chaplain’s personal approach to ministry, the distinctive challenge and benefit offered by the uniqueness of the field environment, and the impact of the dynamic process by which the chaplain speaks with power to the spiritual needs of his Soldiers.

While the principles in the 1986 article on “Preaching in the Field” still applies today, it’s important that new chaplains add their perspective to the pool of knowledge, making the selection of sermons from which we can draw that much richer and better to serve our Soldiers, our Families and our Army.



***Pro Deo et Patria!***

*Religious Support and Spiritual Resilience start here!*

*Chaplain (COL) David Smartt serves as the  
Commandant, U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School.*

# From the USACHCS CSM

*CSM Marylena McCrimmon*



Unlike Chaplains, for whom Sacred Communications is a central responsibility, chaplain assistants never preach as part of their duties. It is not unusual, however, for the 56M to say a few words as part of a unit event. These few words represent an outstanding opportunity for a Chaplain Assistant to have a large impact on the spiritual resiliency of the unit.

I recently reviewed the photo collection of a retired chaplain assistant. In the collection, there were pictures of chaplains and chaplain assistants as well as dignitaries. What surprised me more than anything was the large number of photos of him addressing groups of Soldiers and Families.

At the Army Chaplain Center and School, we give chaplain assistants, whether students or cadre, opportunities to do invocations, benedictions, and other speaking parts in the ceremonial life of the school. The words of Chaplain Sacred Communicators, as presented here, can provide the 56M with some ideas and best practices.

We have set up a page on the University of Military Ministry Sacred Communications website to provide a location for chaplain assistants to upload samples of their skills in this area. You can upload text, sound, or video files so we can all learn from your experiences. There is a link to this site on the front page of UMM SharePoint. We urge you to upload examples of your best efforts.

Maintaining a non-judgmental approach is vital to the chaplain's preaching ministry. Some of the Soldiers who come to the chapel service might never go to a civilian church, largely because they believe only "good" people go to church. They would feel hypocritical attending church while leading what they believe to be worldly lives. Also, some of these Soldiers may have been discouraged by people in churches who were supposed to be true believers, but did not display even the most fundamental of spiritual virtues — love and forgiveness. The chapel is a "come as your are" atmosphere — not only in terms of clothing, but also in terms of who we are with each other and before God.

My commitment to being actively available to the troops has had significant bearing on their response to the chaplain and his or her message. Much of the impact of their message is already determined by the extent to which the troops have seen the chaplain and chaplain assistant actively participating with them in unit operations. I have sensed deep appreciation from the Soldiers for our having been there, and for our having taken the time to care for them.



***For God and Country!***  
***"Religious Support Starts Here"***

*CSM Marylena McCrimmon serves as the  
U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School Command Sergeant Major.*

# Giving Voice to the Sacred Story: Developing Military Homileticians

“Preaching is public performance; along with worship leading it is one of the most public acts performed by clergy. And although modern people often voice disdain for preaching, the quality and/or style of the preaching remains one of the most important measures by which churchgoers choose their congregational affiliation.” Dr. Ervin R. Stutzman<sup>1</sup>

*By Chaplain (COL) Kenneth W. Bush*

Oral communication of the sacred story is a core competency of the Chaplain Corps. While religious traditions differ on the exact nature of this aspect of sacred calling, it is critical in this era of persistent conflict that chaplains can effectively communicate the sacred story to Soldiers, Family members, and civilians looking for spiritual direction and hope. Army chaplains are uniquely situated to connect both the sacred story and the stories of the military audience because they reside in both. On one hand they live the story of an Army at war, experiencing the same hardships of separation, isolation, pain, fear, injury, and death as their congregants. On the other hand, as part of the outworking of God’s sacred story in this generation they are called to give voice to its message to men and women who need the hope, peace and healing that it brings. How do we develop military homileticians who can effectively give voice to the sacred story?

## **Theological Education: Learning the Fundamentals**

The creation of effective messengers of the sacred story begins with the fundamentals the chaplain learns during his or her formal theological education. While, different approaches to communicating the sacred text shape how it is taught (e.g., expository, inductive, narrative), we can identify commonalities that assist us in evaluating effective homiletics instruction. Charles Foster and his co-authors in *Educating Clergy* identify four pedagogies used by successful seminaries that can be applied to the teaching of sacred communication: *interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance*.<sup>2</sup> Interpretation is defined as “the facility for *interpreting* texts, situations, and relationships.”<sup>3</sup> It deals with understanding the sacred text and includes disciplines such as hermeneutics and textual interpretation as well as supporting disciplines like history, biblical studies, and theology. Theological schools are uniquely able to deal with these theologically shaped. Formation is defined as the “dispositions and habits integral to the spiritual and vocational *formation* of clergy.”<sup>4</sup> The chaplain’s character and spiritual life are the fruit of a personal encounter with the sacred story and precedes calling to ministry and formal theological education. Since effective military homileticians must preach out of the daily practice of God’s presence, their theological education should encourage the development of a lifelong practice of spiritual and vocational formation. Contextualization involves the “consciousness of the content and agency of historical and contemporary contexts.”<sup>5</sup> It seeks to bridge the gap between the text’s meaning in its original context and its meaning to the contemporary audience. Contextualization includes understanding generational, gender, and cultural differences and how these impact message content and delivery.

Finally, performance is viewed as “student *performance* in clergy roles and ways of thinking.”<sup>6</sup> It focuses on general principles of oral communication or the more theologically formed discipline of homiletics. When considering whether a chaplain’s theological education is broad enough to set him or her up for success in communicating the sacred story, those charged with evaluating the candidate or chaplain (e.g., endorsers, supervisors, senior chaplain interviewers, and instructors) must consider all four of these pedagogical domains.

### **Institutional Training: Building the Team**

As part of the Chaplain Corps team, candidates and chaplains receive institutional training on communicating the sacred story at the US Army Chaplain Center and School (USACHCS). Time limits and the challenges of theological diversity make it impractical for the school to make up deficiencies in the student’s theological education. The focus is on honing skills already learned, particularly in the area of performance, and enabling new chaplains to understand the unique context of sacred communications in the military especially during a time of enduring conflict. In the Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course (CHBOLC), this training begins during Chaplain Initial Military Training with a class on *Understanding Worship Traditions in the Operational Environment* (2 classroom hours and 3 study hours). Students observe a field service conducted by a Small Group Leader (SGL) and are required to observe a variety of installation worship services during CIMT through Phase 3. During Phases 1 and 2 students participate in a *Sacred Communications Lab* (a total of 14 classroom hours and 5 study hours) and a *Field Service* class (a total of 13 classroom hours and 3 study hours). During these classes students observe a field service demonstration and then plan, coordinate and lead their own field service. During CHBOLC a student conducts one garrison-focused service and one field service. In Phase 1 they also take *Preaching in a Military Context* (2 classroom hours and 3 study hours). In this class they review basic homiletics skills and craft a message outline using an assigned text. In partnership with the installation, the school added a ministry practicum that provides students additional coached speaking opportunities as an intern in a post service or activity.

The chaplain’s training in communicating the sacred story continues during the Chaplain Captain Career Course (C4) with a 40 hour *Advanced Sacred Communications* block that focuses on improving their ability to conduct and supervise worship services more effectively by better understanding the worship context. Instruction includes sermon and worship planning, message preparation and delivery, and the creation of a sacred communication/preaching improvement action plan. An additional 40 hour practicum provides students the opportunity to improve their worship leading and the effectiveness of their message delivery by receiving feedback from their SGL and fellow students. Students also discuss how to translate this material to their future role as brigade chaplains. To reinforce what is learned, all students plan, coordinate and conduct one or two USACHCS chapel services. As opportunities arise, students receive instruction from recognized practitioners. Most recently Dr. Haddon Robinson conducted a two-day homiletics workshop. USACHCS broadcast this seminar on Adobe Connect to chaplains in the field who could interact via e-mailed questions. This was the first in what the school hopes to be a standard lifelong learning delivery approach.

### **Lifelong Learning: Practicing the Skills**

Responsibility for improving sacred communication does not stop at the doors of the institution. Chaplains are expected, like their counterparts in the professions of medicine and law, to hone their

knowledge and skills through lifelong learning. The recently created Chaplain Professional Reinforcement Training (CPRT) initiative provides a framework for lifelong learning from the basic through the career course. A key part of CPRT is the requirement for supervisors to work with enrolled chaplains to create an Individual/Spiritual Development plan that includes sacred communications as one of the focus areas. After a self-assessment and supervisor's assessment, the chaplain works with their supervisor to craft a mutually agreed upon improvement plan. For example, as a part of this plan chaplains could be required to read a book or article on a particular aspect of sacred communications; take further professional training courses at a theological institution, conference or on-line; observe examples of excellent communication, or be assigned to complete some form of practice.<sup>7</sup> USACHCS plans to extend this formal lifelong learning framework beyond initial term chaplains. Because the perishable nature of sacred communication skills, they should remain a part of a chaplain's professional development throughout their career.

Another program to raise the bar in telling the sacred story is the Sacred Communications Coaching Initiative sponsored by the College of Military Preaching.<sup>8</sup> After 2 September 2010, CHBOLC graduates are required to submit a videotaped message delivered in a military context along with critiques using the USACHCS evaluation form. This message with critiques is uploaded to the University of Military Ministry. The staff will forward the package for critique to a member of the College of Military Preaching from the same faith tradition and if possible the same denomination as the chaplain. When the critique is completed, USACHSC will notify the chaplain that it is available for review. This critique is not a part of the student's formal institutional evaluation, but is a free look by one of the Corp's experts.

### **Coaching: Building the Bench Coaching Methods**

- Observe them doing ministry based on established standards, provide feedback and observe them conducting similar ministry.
- Require subordinates to observe you doing ministry and invite feedback on what they observed.
- Conduct joint ministry and discuss what he or she learned through the process.
- Develop a guided reading program and require a written evaluation of its application to military ministry.
- Assign exercises such as listening to or watching high quality messages and discuss what they learned.

In the past clergy were spiritually and vocationally formed largely through the practice of apprenticeship. Given the nature of the knowledge and skills required, coaching is still "the best pedagogical practice for achieving excellence in preaching."<sup>9</sup> In a brigade-centric Army much of the responsibility for this ongoing development of new chaplains falls upon the brigade chaplain. As mentioned earlier, they are the primary coach in CPRT and are responsible for improving the sacred communications skills of their subordinate chaplains. The most effective means to accomplish this is to provide chaplains the opportunity to preach in a military context, observe its conduct, provide constructive feedback based on an agreed upon standard, and allow the chaplain to repeat the process. Because of the diverse religious environment of the Corps, supervisory chaplains may be coaching subordinates from very different faith traditions. While they may not feel qualified to

discuss certain matters of style or theology, they can hold subordinates to the standards of their own traditions discussed in the initial coaching sessions and to generally accepted standards of content and delivery. The latter includes the importance of a recognizable theme or controlling idea, appropriateness to the context, connection to the sacred text, impact on the hearers, and oral delivery skills.<sup>10</sup> Supervisory chaplains can also contact members of the College of Military Preaching through the University of Military Ministry (UMM) web page who are from their subordinate's faith tradition for advice. The UMM also contains best practices, articles, training materials, and links to resources that may be used in the coaching process on the Sacred Communications/Homiletics Improvement web page.<sup>11</sup> Chaplains who coach subordinates from different faith traditions than their own also develop professionally through the process.

Brigade-level supervisors should partner with the Installation Unit Ministry Team to ensure that sacred communications is one of the topics covered in installation training. This training should focus on providing skills that cannot be readily trained at the unit level or require more extensive resources. Installations may use the College of Military Preaching as a speaker's bureau. The College is an advisory group created by the Chief of Chaplains. Members are nominated by current members and approved by the Chief of Chaplain annually. As part of their commitment, chaplains inducted into the College voluntarily serve as coaches and instructors as their schedules permit. The travel and per diem would be paid by the requesting installation or unit.

A part of building a bench of skilled communicators is identifying and tracking chaplains with special gifts or skills in this area. One possible methodology for doing this is for USACHCS staff and faculty to identify these chaplains during their attendance at CHBOLC and C4 and forward the names of nominated students to DACH-1 for future assignment consideration to key pulpits. Another source for building a bench of skilled chaplains for key pulpit assignments would be to use those nominated by their peers from lower to mid-grade ranks for the College of Military Preaching.

### **Assignments: Getting into the Game**

In order to effectively use and develop those identified as skilled communicators, it is important that the Corps identify key congregations/pulpits requiring their abilities. While certain chapels historically stand out as centers of influence, the Chaplain Corps should develop an agreed upon set of considerations. One approach would be to consider *strategic influence*, *strategic location*, *examples of best practice ministry*, and *congregational size*. A critical consideration is *strategic influence*. Does this chapel program have the potential to shape the Army culture through its influence on current or future leaders of the Army? Centers such as Fort Leavenworth, Carlisle Barracks, and West Point fit this description. Another factor is *strategic location*. This is a key criterion for overseas locations. Strategically located congregations are generally resourcing hubs for smaller chapel installation programs or geographically outlying areas in places like Europe. Overseas congregations are also strategically important in part because of the lack of civilian worship opportunities off-post. A third factor is congregations that represent a *best practice of ministry*. They should be considered given priority of fill as a means to encourage further development and to serve as models for other congregations. This might be particularly helpful in the development of best practice ministries that focus on specific demographics such as single Soldiers or young Families, or to specific styles or approaches to worship (such as GenX, Millennial or Gospel). Finally, *congregational size* is a factor. While size is not solely an indicator of influence, large congregations have greater influence because they draw on a broad base of congregants.

### **Advanced Education: Developing Master Coaches**

Finally, in order to create a culture of excellence in sacred communications across the Chaplain Corps, we need a cadre of master coaches. Skilled communicators of the sacred story with the aptitude and motivation to become master coaches should be considered for Advanced Civilian Education in Homiletics with a follow on assignment to one of the key military pulpits described above or as an instructor at the US Army Chaplain Center and School. In addition, one of the primary functions of the College of Military Preaching is to provide master coaches for use by the Chaplain Corps community. We should also encourage chaplains with a serious interest in this area to enroll in Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree programs with an emphasis in preaching like those at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, or the Aquinas Institute (Catholic). It is important to remember that the Chaplain Corps has cooperative agreements with a number of seminaries around the country who will offer advanced standing toward a DMin for upon completion of the Basic and Career courses.

### **Conclusion**

Developing military homileticians who can effectively give voice to the sacred story is a team effort. It begins with the foundation the chaplain builds during their initial theological education and continues through professional lifelong learning. Institutional training enables them to place those skills in the context of the Army community and adds knowledge and skills unique to that context. Supervisors primarily at the brigade-level have the responsibility to continue to refine and develop these skills through coaching to prepare them for their current ministry and potential assignment to strategically influential military pulpits. Those with demonstrated ability should be groomed as master coaches to encourage excellence in sacred communication by providing a broad base of expertise across the Corps. Communicating the sacred story is a core competency of our Corps. While methods and contexts may change over time, the need to bring the sacred story's message of grace, hope and healing to Soldiers and Families remains constant. We owe it to those who have borne the burden of war to tell it well.



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# At the Edge of the Grave

*By Chaplain (COL) David Reese*

To get to where we need to be this morning, we have to start at a place where we don't want to be.

It is a place we don't want to visit;  
a place we certainly don't want to linger;  
a place that we don't like to think about.

It is a place ... that if we had the power ... we would like to see banished  
forever.

We have to start at the edge of the grave.

If we could just rid ourselves of this awful place where tears and heartbreak mingle over a gaping,  
open mouthed hole in the earth,  
where dreams like broken and shredded like so many shards of glass,  
where everything from the past, the present, and the future is brought to a blurry focus at a  
single point in time ...  
if we could just be rid of it, then how much better our lives could be!

If we could but destroy death – remove it as a surgeon removes a deadly tumor – then we would  
be free!

We could live our lives without fear,  
without anxiety,  
without pain,  
without grief.

We could know what it was like to experience life without limits. We could give love freely and  
receive it without question.

It would be like ...  
heaven.

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... and I heard a loud voice saying, ‘Now the dwelling  
place of God is with men... They will be his people and he will be their God ... There will be no more  
death.’”*

We stand at the edge of a grave and mourn the loss of a young Soldier killed in combat ... who  
died too soon and too tragically.

We grieve the loss of a child killed in a senseless school shooting or a mother fatally injured in a traffic accident.

We are angered over these events – as we should be.

“They were too young. They had their whole life ahead of them. This shouldn’t have happened.”

At the edge of the grave of a 16 year old cancer victim, we wouldn’t dream of saying, “If only they had lived longer. If only they hadn’t died, but remained here with us with the painful consequences of their disease. We would rather them live and suffer than to have passed away.”

We stand with clenched fists and clenched teeth, biting back the anger we feel and the grief that we know will become our companions.

Yet that anger drains away and the indignation disappeared three weeks ago when I stood at the bedside of my 92 year old father who struggled through every failing breath, whose 6’2” frame had withered to 160 lbs, and whose face is drawn tight with pain. “Take him, Lord. Don’t let him suffer. Don’t let him be in pain any more. Take him.”

*“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes ... there will be no more death.”*

Death creates an ambiguity in us. The grave holds sway over our emotions. At the edge of the grave of a fallen Soldier, we proclaim the tragedy of the loss and the untimely nature of his death. But at the edge of the grave of a 92 year old man, we say, “He lived a long and fruitful life,” as though he had an expiration date and it was time for him to go.

These emotions are real, they are appropriate; however, they need not be the final word. The final word can be “life,” but only if we are able to move past our starting place to the place we understand as Easter.

The remembrance and celebration of this day in our journey is only realized in light of the hope brought to fulfillment by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He alone has conquered death and the grave on our behalf.

For us to experience the true fullness of the Resurrection means we must decide to move beyond the grave, and the only way we can do that is through a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

What allows us to stand at the edge of the grave, experiencing the full spectrum of emotions associated with death, including a sense of hope, is found in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians: “We would not have you ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (1 Thess. 3:13).

What allows us to walk away from the edge of the grave and move beyond it is the inherent promise that God makes in Revelation: “I am the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.”

In the midst of every message from the world that contradicts it, the message from God is: “Trust me.”

The world stands at the edge of the grave and says, “See ... I told you so ... this is how it all ends.”

God, through Christ in his mighty act of forgiveness at Calvary, says, “Now the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

The world stands at the edge of the grave and says, “This is it ... this is all there is.”

God, through Christ's triumph over death says, "I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Behold I make all things new."

The world stands at the edge of the grave and says, "If you can't see it, taste it, touch it, then it cannot be true."

God, through Christ's obedience, says "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true ... He who overcomes will inherit all this and I will be with him and he will be with him and they will be with him."

These words, full of life and new beginnings, full of forgiveness, full of promise ... full of hope ... are true because they represent the eternal faithfulness of God in history.

This truth from the Book of Revelation is but the punctuation mark on the long sentence that God has written throughout time; a sentence that tells of his love, his forgiveness, his redemption and his faithfulness.

It is the exclamation mark on a promise delivered.

This Resurrection Day, we stand at the edge of the grave, knowing that it isn't simply waiting to be filled, but that it is truly empty .... rendered powerless by the saving sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

Christ himself binds up the wounds and pieces together the broken dreams that lay about the grave. Christ himself speaks words of comfort and strength to those who mourn; he calls our name as surely as he called Mary's name that first Resurrection morning.

Tony Campolo, a great educator and a passionate servant of God, tells about sharing the platform with his pastor one Easter season. His pastor had one refrain that captured the essence of the tension between the grave and the resurrection.

Campolo says he hammered the message home as he talked about the events of Good Friday, as he related the ills of the world and the contemporary headlines that made it seem as though the grave was going to win out. After every litany of suffering, grief or pain, Campolo's pastor would say, "It's Friday ... but Sunday's comin'!"

Every Easter Sunday morning as my family gets dressed up for church we turn on an old Carman song that imagines the conversation between Lazarus and the saints of the ages in the grave. As each one in turn ... Moses, Elijah, and Ezekiel ... tells about how they knew God in the burning bush, in the still small voice, or in the wheel within the wheel. Lazarus he tells the story about how he knew God as Jesus – the living, breathing Jesus who would call his name. The song breaks the quiet of Sunday morning as the volume gets turned up for "Lazarus, come forth," as Jesus rips him from the grave.

Friends – we'll stand at the edge of plenty of graves, to be sure. But we have the very word of God that we need not remain there. Friday's come and gone ... it's Sunday! This is the day that the grave does not own us ... for we proclaim the resurrection of Christ who has opened the door to life for us.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!



Chaplain (COL) David Reese

# Prayer of Thanksgiving

**(Editor's Note:** A member of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (Falcon Brigade), CH (COL) Cocklin offered this prayer at Fort Bragg's Main Post Chapel )

*By Chaplain (COL) Joel Cocklin*

Almighty God, your prophet Isaiah has boldly proclaimed, "...they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary and they shall walk and not faint."

Flying on the wings of eagles is exhilarating. It is the running and the walking that are difficult. These chaplains, chaplain assistants and spouses here this evening have had 15 long months of running and walking. They felt faint when loneliness came over them with such an impact they felt they couldn't go on. Disappointment was so real as birthdays and anniversaries were missing the one person they really wanted there. The sting of discouragement was so prominent as the days drug on and on as if they would never end. But here they are, home safely and here we are to claim your promise that in our waiting, our strength is renewed. Thank you Father for successfully ending this time of separation and now accept our worship we offer to you with grateful hearts. May the time of transitioning back to being a family be in accordance with your holy design.

Thank you for the many lives touched by these spiritual teams during this long deployment. Thank you for the moments of tears and laughter, the touch of human and spiritual comfort, and the words of hope spoken and unspoken by these faithful servants.

We continue to pray for those who remain in harms way so far from us. Wrap them and their Families in your arms of love and protection, quickly bringing their time of separation to an end.

Keep us as a Nation vigilant to the values and spiritual heritage you have so richly blessed us with. Keep our hearts and minds set on you so that we would do all things pleasing in your sight. This we pray in your Holy and Powerful name, Amen.

# How to Defeat Discouragement

By Chaplain ( BG ) Ray Woolridge

How many of us are discouraged tonight? How many of us have faced discouragement? How many times have you woken up on Sunday morning and decided you were so discouraged that you didn't want to go to church, and so you decided you'd sleep in, and then you remembered that you were the preacher?

Discouragement: "to strip you of your courage." It robs you of your courage. Discouragement emotionally paralyzes you.

1. Out of clutter find simplicity.
  2. From discord make harmony.
  3. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."
- Albert Einstein's three rules of work

The Amalekites were desert nomads. They were bandits, the forerunners of modern Bedouins. They were ruthless and harsh enemies of the Philistines and the Israelites. Things could have been worse. It was common for them to attack a village, overcome the village's defenses, and then kill the men of fighting age, and then carry off the women and boys to be slaves, and leave the old alone to fend for themselves. David was as a soldier even more ruthless than the Amalekites. He would not leave anyone alive (1 Sam 27:11).

## **Three Facts about Discouragement**

1. **Difficulties are inevitable. Difficulties lead to discouragement.**

**Lesson: "Expect to take a licking in life!"**

No one comes through life untouched by disaster. Disaster, Damage, Destruction, David was the good guy and he got hurt.

1 Samuel 30:1-2 (NIV) *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, 2 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.*

Proverbs 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

What about you?

2.

**Distress after difficulties is predictable.**

**Lesson: “You won’t get over it—but you will go on!”**

**Allow yourself to Grieve your losses.**

1 Samuel 30:3-5 (NIV) *When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. 4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. 5 David’s two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.*

Still smoking, still burning.

“Believe in dreams. Never believe in hurts’ You can’t let the grief and the hurts and the breaking experiences of life control your future decisions.”

- Rev. Robert H. Schuller, theologian

3.

**Disagreements and Divisions are unavoidable.**

**Lesson: “*When the ship is sinking, the captain will be blamed!*”**

**Division may result from your leadership. That’s another reason to look forward to heaven, where there will be no disagreements and no misunderstandings.**

1 Samuel 30:6 (NIV) *David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.*

David had attacked the Amalekites ruthlessly, following what he felt he should do as a good soldier. Saul had attacked the Amalekites following God’s order. But Saul had not obeyed God’s command fully. Saul had allowed some of them to live, and Saul had allowed his men to take plunder.

How did David deal with the situation?

Saul had driven David out.

The Philistines had driven David out.

The Amalekites had destroyed David’s place of rest.

Expecting a warm welcome and a warm bed and a wonderful reunion with their loved ones, they found smoking ruins.

Their wives had been taken captive and their children carried off.

Then David’s closest friends, his comrades, turned on him.

These men had followed David perhaps believing in David’s cause, perhaps knowing that David was God’s anointed one. Knowing that David would be the king soon, they expected to be princes and possibly future commanders when David became king.

But they didn't know how much following God's man would cost them. They didn't have the spiritual resources to keep their eyes on the Lord. They responded in a natural, fleshly response. They overlooked God's protection, they forgot God's leader, they overlooked God's goodness in the past. They took up stones to kill their leader.

How did David respond to his men? Did he debate? Did he fight? Did he answer? No. David was silent.

Any ordinary leader's heart would have sunk. But David was no ordinary leader

“Let no feeling of discouragement prey upon you, and in the end you are sure to succeed.”  
— Abraham Lincoln

### **To Defeat Discouragement ...**

#### **Discover Strength in the Lord**

1 Samuel 30:6 (NIV) *But David found strength in the LORD his God.*  
The KJV says, “*David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.*”

The word “strengthened” means to “prevail, to harden, to become strong.” But to strengthen oneself? How do you do that?

Remember Hebrews 13:5-6 (NIV) ... *God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” 6 So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

When David was at his wit's end, he was not at his faith's end.

David and his men arrived home after weeks on the road to find their families missing and their homes in ruin. The heart tearing news was more than he could bear: a treacherous band of nomads had abducted his wives, children and the families of his men. David and his men shed strong men's tears of desperation and grief. Filled with worry, the men were mutinous and blamed David for their troubles. They were all exhausted from weeks of fighting and hiding from the murderous King Saul. David was physically depleted, emotionally distraught, and relationally bankrupt. David had no person to turn for comfort. What did he do?

#### **David turned to the Lord**

David disappeared for a time. David quieted his heart before God. David asked God to refresh him. David reminded himself of God's promises. David fell into the familiar, well-worn practice of prayer instead of worry. David “*strengthened himself in the Lord.*”

David realized that only with God's help, God's presence, God's power, God's guidance, would he be able to lead his men to rescue their loved ones. After refreshing himself in God, David got

direction from the Lord on how to do the rescue, and David was enabled to save the families before harm was done.

Discouragement is an attitude and attitudes are always a choice. I get discouraged when I choose to think discouraging thoughts. But no one is forcing me to think those thoughts. I can choose to focus on something else (like God) if I want to.

What did David do? He remembered God's Protection in the Past. David remembered God's presence in the Present. David remembered God's Promises for the future.

### **Ask for Direction from the Lord**

1 Samuel 30:7 (NIV) *Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."*

### **Develop a Partnership. See 1 Sam. 23:16 re. David and Jonathan**

About a year ago, I was very discouraged as a pastor. In many ways, I felt like a failure. I wrote a couple of letters to pastors I respect. I also spent time with some local pastor friends. One man I wrote was Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church. This is what Bill wrote back to me (I am not a big bud of his, but I have met him on a couple of occasions):

*"Dear Ray, Every great leader I know has gone through eras of intense disappointment and despair. I don't have any easy answers for you. All I can tell you is during my bouts with discouragement, I kept putting one foot in front of the other and trusted God for "power along the way." Eventually the clouds lifted and joy was restored."*



# Hope

**(Editor's note:** In December 2008, when he was released from active duty for the third time, CH Drake offered this prayer.)

*By Chaplain (MAJ) James Drake*

How many times will I have to put my cell phone on hold?  
How many times will violence suck me away from those I love?  
The lives I've led are different every trip overseas as I wake up in the same dream.

I'm off chasing freedom and back home my older brother dies.  
Without fail my brothers-in-arms offer their lives on an ancient and dusty altar.

The line blurs between the worlds I walk in  
and the one I desire to wake up in every morning.

Hope does not leave me disappointed  
as a peaceful transition of power demonstrates to the world what's possible.

# “Auscultabo Ut Serviam”

## Strengthening our Army Chapel Catholic Community Through Listening and of Service

(**Editor’s Note:** This homily was delivered 20 June 2010, 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Liturgical Year, Heidelberg, Germany.)

*By Chaplain (LTC) F. Richard Spencer*

In today’s Gospel from Luke, Chapter 9:18-24, we hear the Sacred Call of Jesus as he appealed to the nobility and goodness in our hearts. To strengthen our Army Chapel Catholic community we must be able to hear the “call” in order to respond to Mission.

For my Episcopal Motto and Shield reflecting my Coat of Arms as I prepare to serve as a Bishop in our Catholic traditions, I have chosen “Auscultabo Ut Serviam” which means: “I will listen that I may serve”.

Being stationed here in Europe, we have many examples we can turn to for encouragements as others have heard “the call” and have courageously responded – even when faced with great difficulties.

In April, 1849, a powerful French army was marching toward the city of Rome. The army was so powerful that it destroyed everything in its path. No one thought it could be stopped. In the face of these great odds, General Garibaldi issued the following proclamation to the able-bodied men of Italy: “All efforts to stop this powerful army have failed. I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death. But I call on all who love their country to join me”.

From all over Italy, people responded to General Garibaldi’s call – poor people, rich people, old people, and young people. And to everyone’s surprise, that army of volunteers defeated the French.

Years later, in England, something similar happened. In the early 1900’s, Sir Ernest Shackleton needed volunteers to accompany him on a dangerous expedition to the South Pole. He placed the following ad in the London Times:

“Wanted: Persons for dangerous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition if successful.”

People thought that Shackleton would have difficulty recruiting the 28 volunteers that he needed. To their surprise, he was swamped with over 5,000 applications from all over England. Shackleton got his crew. And in the months ahead, it did indeed suffer great hardship: arctic storms and polar blizzards. But it succeeded and returned home to honor and recognition.

In today’s Gospel from Saint Luke, Jesus makes a similar call to people. His call is not to take up arms to defend homelands. Nor is it a call to embark on an expedition to the ends of the earth. Rather, it is a call to people to join him in establishing God’s kingdom on earth. It is a call to people

to help him transform the world into the kind of place that God had in mind when God created it. And like Garibaldi and Shackleton, Jesus tells his followers that the task won't be easy.

"If anyone wishes to come after me," he says, "he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake, will save it."

And since the day that Jesus spoke those words, millions of men and women have accepted his invitation. Millions of men and women have joined him to try to make our world into the kind of place that God intended it to be.

And this brings us to an important point for our Army Catholic communities. We are in the midst of PCS season once again, and volunteers are welcome to assist in our many and diverse ministry programs and activities. Today, Jesus is still putting out a call for followers to join him in his work. Today, he is still saying to men and women – tall, short, young, older: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must .... Take up his cross daily and follow me."

You yourselves are among them. You have not heard Jesus promise you fame, honor, and a life of ease. You have only him say: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must ... take up his cross daily and follow me."

Jesus knew what he was doing when he asked for volunteers to help him. He knew that what our military communities needs most today is not great minds – we have plenty of them – but great hearts. He knew that what our military chapel community needs most today is not great knowledge – we have plenty of that – but great dedication. He knew that what our military communities needs today is not great power – we have all we need – but great faith.

That is why he said, "I don't point out a light for you to follow. 'I am the light' (John 8:12). Pick up your cross and follow me!

"I don't point out a way for you to travel. 'I am the way.' (John 14:6).

"I don't point out a life for you to imitate. 'I am ... the life.' (John 11:25). Pick up your cross and follow me!"

This my friends is why we have gathered together here in this military chapel. This is what we celebrate in this sacred liturgy: Listening to God's Word which leads us to action to strengthen our Army chapel Catholic community.

I close with a prayer to Jesus and invite you to join me in this prayer. It was written by an anonymous Christian nearly 1,500 years ago.

“Lord!

Be a bright flame before me.

Be a guiding star above me.

Be a smooth path below me.

Be a kindly shepherd behind me.

Be these things today – tonight – and forever.” Amen.

“Auscultabo Ut Serviam” - “I will listen that I may serve.”

# Fervent Faith in Tough Times

**(Editor's Note:** This message, which is based on Revelation 2:8-11, was delivered at the Warriors' Chapel at Camp Liberty, Iraq in 2007 during worship service. )

*By Chaplain (CPT) Eric Dean*

I recently was approached by a Soldier who was having a real crisis of faith. This soldier told me that he didn't know what to believe anymore ... that he prayed and Soldiers were killed or hurt anyway. It seemed to this Soldier that his faith was totally irrelevant to the situation he was in. This issue caused the Soldier great frustration, anger and hopelessness as he believed that God remained disinterested and silent.

Many of us have wrestled with the question, "why," in our lives. We try in vain to make sense of tragedy and chaos only to be frustrated when we learn that bad things sometimes happen to good people, in spite of our prayers and faith that God will deliver them.

But does it have to be this way? Do we have to have a crisis of faith when we experience loss, hardship and tragedy, or is it possible that we can walk in even greater faith in spite of these issues?

Since we all go through tough times sometime in our lives, let's look together at what God's word says about gaining fervent faith in tough times. So, turn with me in your Bibles to Rev 2: 8-11.

This message today is the second of seven that we will hear over the next several weeks. We will examine the letter to the seven churches mentioned in Revelation and apply the principles we learn from this letter to our own lives today. In this letter to the church at Smyrna, we will discover together four truths that Jesus calls us to live out every day of our lives. These are truths that will enable us to walk as men and women of fervent faith in tough times and good times, experience the full blessing that comes from walking with God in all seasons. The first thing Jesus reminds us of is:

## I. **His eternal authority** (v.8)

a) When Jesus speaks in verse 8, he refers to himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This letter was originally written in Greek, from a Greek island to Greek-speaking people in an area in modern-day Turkey. So, Jesus is specifically referring to something in their language and culture to demonstrate that he is the beginning of everything that is and he will be there long after everything

else ends. He transcends creation, time and space. He is supreme over everything that was or that will be.

b) It is interesting in the context of this letter that Jesus begins by referencing His eternal authority – not so much that He can give instructions to the church without question, but so that they will have peace when they learn of His message of persecution and death. Even in persecution and death, Jesus still has complete authority. The believers can stand fast in their faith until the end, knowing that though man can kill the body, the spirit belongs eternally to Jesus.

c) The church at Smyrna, like the other 6 churches in this letter, was started by the Apostle John. Although we don't know who the first leaders of this church were, we do know that one of John's disciples, a man named Polycarp, was the leader of this church either when this letter was written to the church or just shortly afterward. Historical documents prove this as fact. There is little question among scholars that the angel of the church Jesus addresses in each letter is the leader of that particular church, which in this case, was quite possibly Polycarp, the disciple and friend of John himself.

d) John therefore had to give the message to a close friend, a spiritual son in the faith that the persecution this man and his church members had experienced would only increase. Because John knew the eternal authority of Jesus, he could trust the Lord with the life of his friend and the church he started. Polycarp could trust in the fact that he and his church members belonged to Jesus and nothing, not even death, could change that fact.

e) Friend, do you belong to Jesus today? Are you certain of His eternal authority in your life? Have you come to a place in your life where you have made a conscious decision to repent of sin and to follow Jesus? If you have, then you can live a fearless life knowing that there is nothing and no one who can separate you from the love and presence of God for all eternity.

Jesus not only reminds us of His eternal authority, but also:

## II. **His victorious resurrection** (v. 8)

a) When we look at verse 8, we also see Jesus' reference to his victory over death and the grave through his resurrection. Jesus literally states he became dead and came to life again, and in so doing, reiterates His victory over death and His eternal authority.

b) Having read this letter together, it is easy to see why it was

of paramount importance that the Christians at Smyrna understand their possession of eternal life, for they would be asked to be "faithful until death." Jesus here is in essence saying, "I know what you are going through. I have been persecuted, lied about and tortured. I was

faithful until death and was resurrected. If you will also be faithful until death, you too will have eternal life. Take courage and be faithful.”

c) In Polycarp’s day, the persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperors began to skyrocket. Polycarp was now an old man... the last living link to the original disciples and Jesus. Everyone else was a third or fourth generation disciple and did not know the original disciples personally, as Polycarp did. The Roman officials knew, if they could break Polycarp’s faith publicly, Christianity would be destabilized and would fade away. If he did not recant, then the Romans would have him executed and thus, strike fear into the hearts of Christians and in doing so, silence them and their religion.

Polycarp was eventually captured by Soldiers shortly after a warrant for his arrest was issued. After he gave them something to eat, he asked for an hour of prayer, which they gave him. He prayed with such fervency that his guards said that they were sorry that they were the ones who had captured him. Nevertheless, he was taken before the governor and was condemned to be burned in the market place.

After his sentence was read, the governor said to him, “Reproach Christ and I will release you.” Polycarp answered, “Eighty six years I have served him and he never once wronged me. How then shall I blaspheme my King who has saved me?” Polycarp was taken to the market place and, instead of being nailed to the stake, as was custom, the Soldiers simply tied his hands to the stake. Polycarp had promised them that he would stand immovable in the flames and would not fight them. As the dry sticks placed around him were lit, the flames rose up and circled his body without touching him. The executioner was then ordered to pierce him with a sword. When he did, a great amount of blood gushed out of Polycarp, putting out the fire. His Christian friends wanted his body for burial, but this was refused. The fire was then relit and Polycarp’s body was burned.

d) Because Jesus stood fast to the end and gave His all for us, Christians have been standing fast and giving their all for Jesus throughout the ages, assured of His eternal authority and His victorious resurrection which promises them eternal life.

e) Likewise, we are called to make a stand for Jesus. It may not require us to be martyred for His sake; it may require something more difficult, i.e. standing for Jesus in the little things every day of our lives. If we truly believe with our whole hearts that Jesus is the Creator and King with eternal authority, holding victory over death and the grave, then we will begin to live like it, taking a stand for Jesus whenever we are faced with a compromising situation.

f) Polycarp was faced with the temptation to speak bad about Jesus in order to stay alive. What are you tempted with? Some people are tempted with acceptance. They know that if they make too much of a stand for Jesus, they will be an outsider. So they compromise their speech, their actions, etc., in order to be “one of the guys.” Others compromise to be loved. They make compromises in

relationships in order to gain or keep the love they think they have. Everyone has his or her weak spot. How does the devil tempt you to compromise your commitment to Christ?

Remember, the approval of man lasts only for a moment. The approval of God lasts for eternity. The love of man always has strings attached. The love of God is unconditional. Why exchange the best for something flawed? Why turn our back on the Cross in those moments right when we need the power of the Cross in our lives the most?

Let me ask another question this morning: Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for?

Like the Smyrnans, Jesus reminds us of His eternal authority and His victorious resurrection. He then:

### III. **Reveals our spiritual state** (v. 9)

a) Here Jesus contrasts the physical state with the eternal state. Here Jesus states that one's physical condition stands in opposition to one's spiritual condition.

b) The Smyrnans claim that they are poor – in a material sense, this was true. Most likely, their wealth had been plundered by the Romans due to the persecutions for their faith. In fact, the Greek word for “poverty” in this verse is “ptocheia,” which literally means abject poverty and destitution, rather than the other Greek word for poverty which means simply having enough just to get by. This people were literally homeless beggars, yet in a spiritual sense, they were rich.

c) Proverbs 13:7 states, “There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.”

d) Jesus also saw the spiritual condition of the Jews in that area. According to the text, we know that these were Jews in so much as being the natural seed of Abraham. Biologically and racially, they were Jews. Though the Jews of Smyrna had physical circumcision, they lacked the circumcision of the heart: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God” (Rm 2:28-29).

The Jews of Smyrna certainly fit this bill. Under Roman Law, Jews were given special status that allowed them to continue to worship according to their custom. All other religions were only allowed to be practiced in the country of origin. Since Christianity was never intended to be a separate religion, but instead a fulfillment of the Messianic promises of Judaism, Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century claimed to follow the Jewish religion. Under Roman Law, this was allowed. When the non-believing Jews

heard about this, they began a campaign to convince the Roman authorities that Christianity was not a part of Judaism and thus had no protection under Roman law. The Roman authorities agreed with these Jews and thus unleashed a reign of terror against the Christians that is still talked about by school children today.

Jesus was aware of all of this and thus states that these who claim to be Jews are not, for they deny the faith and act contrary to it rather than embrace it.

When Polycarp was burned at the stake, contemporary witnesses state that it was the Jews who gathered the wood for his fire, and they did so with great eagerness, in spite of the fact that it was the Sabbath and they were forbidden to do so by Jewish law.

e) Jesus knew the spiritual state of the believers – they thought they had nothing, but Jesus stated that they were rich. Jesus knew the spiritual state of the persecutors – they claimed to be right with God, but their actions were more demonic than divine.

f) If Jesus knew the spiritual state of the believers and the non-believers alike, he knows our spiritual state as well. My question to us is, what does he see when he looks at you and me? Does he see a faithful child of God, who walks in a manner worthy of the name Christian? Or, does he see someone deceived by self-righteousness, convinced of our good standing with God when really we need to repent? If so, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to walk out of these doors today, continuing to live hypocritical and self-righteous lives, or will we bring it to the Cross today, repent and live our lives without compromise? The choice is yours today. In a moment, we'll give you the opportunity to follow through with your choice.

Jesus reminds us of His eternal authority and His victorious resurrection. He reveals our spiritual state and:

#### IV. **Rewards our hard-fought faith** (v. 10)

a) Jesus informs the church in this verse that they were about to enter a time of testing. We know from the Bible that God often warns his servants prior to a time of trial. This gives his servants His perspective and great hope knowing that He recognizes what they are going through and yet it continues to remain within His sovereign will and purpose to leave them there.

b) We often have a problem with accepting difficulties as the sovereign will of God. Philosophers and Theologians have wrestled with the question of why God allows bad things to happen to good people for thousands of years. The fact is, whether we want to accept it or not, we simply don't know. What we do know is Jesus never calls us to understand Him. He does, however, call us to trust and follow Him.

Many times, we will understand with hindsight why certain things happened. Sometimes we never will. Either way it remains His sovereign privilege as King of Creation to be glorified through us, regardless of the circumstances.



c) Though oppression and persecution often comes by way of people, Scripture identifies the motivating powers behind the scene. The early church understood though the Jews and Romans persecuted and killed them, Satan was really the driving force behind these injustices. When members of the church found themselves in prison or led to the executioner, they were to understand that it was spiritual power which had placed them there. This would make it easier to bear the persecution and to pray for those who had persecuted them. Knowing that their persecution was known by God and within His plan provided immeasurable comfort.

d) Once again, Jesus contrasts physical reality with spiritual reality. He states that if the Smyrnans hold fast until death, that they will receive the crown of life. The implications of this statement for these believers were powerful.

1) In the Greek and Roman cultures, the rulers and athletes were buried with a crown, literally a wreath, to celebrate their victories in their lives. The crown that Jesus gives never fades or dies, but is eternal and symbolic of the eternal victory with which we are rewarded.

2) the Crown of Life is significant because they were to understand that death would be merely a transition for them. The truth Jesus conveys is that death, for a Christian, is the prelude to life.

3) Jesus, who has already made reference to His eternal authority and victorious resurrection, comforts the Smyrnans because He, Himself, has already gone through what they are about to go through. Jesus was the first martyr, leading the way for those who follow.

e) And follow Him they did. Polycarp followed Christ. He did not renounce his faith. He did not waver. He stood fast with a firm faith in difficulties and won the crown of life.

f) Towards the end of the first century, right after Polycarp was martyred, there was a legion of Roman Soldiers in northern Gaul, in modern day France. These Soldiers were the Green Berets, the Delta Force, of the Roman legions. They were the bravest of the brave and the toughest of the tough. They were Caesar's own guard. When not deployed, these Soldiers wrestled professionally for Caesar. They would enter the ring, salute the Emperor and say, "Wrestlers are we for you, o Caesar, to win for you the victory and from you, the victor's crown." They would make this statement three times before beginning to wrestle. At the end of the match, they would give Caesar the glory of the victory and receive from him the victor's wreath. Now, however, they were at war. The commander called a formation. He read an edict from the Emperor. Apparently, a rumor was going around that Christians had infiltrated the Army. Each commander was ordered to find the Christians in his command and execute them. This commander told his Soldiers that though he was certain that none of his Soldiers were Christians, he was nonetheless required to formally ask them. "Any man here who is a Christian, step forward now."

Without missing a beat, 40 men stepped forward. Not just any 40 men, but the best, toughest, most squared away Soldiers in this elite force. The commander was stunned – surely not this many and surely not these. The commander addressed the formation. “I don’t think you quite understood what I said. Return to ranks. Now, we will have another formation tonight. At that time, I will ask the Christians to step forward. Any who do so will be executed. Dismissed.”

That night, the commander held another formation. “If there be any Christians among you, let him step forward now.” Once again, without missing a beat, the same 40 Soldiers stepped forward and stood at attention. The commander knew what he had to do. He dare not defy Caesar, but he could not kill his own men, men that he had grown to respect and deeply admire. So, instead of running them through with a sword, he had them strip off all their clothes. He then ordered them to march out to a frozen lake nearby, where they were to stand at attention until they either recanted their faith or died. As an added bonus, he stated that any man who recanted his faith would have a warm fire waiting on him when he returned. The 40 marched out to the lake. Once there, they stood at attention and shouted, “40 Wrestlers are we for you, O Christ, to win for you the victory and from you the victor’s Crown.”

The wrestlers shouted this over and over all throughout the night. One wrestler couldn’t take it anymore. He recanted his faith and took his place at the warm fire. “39 Wrestlers are we for you, O Christ, to win for you the victory and from you, the victor’s crown.” Slowly, their voices became quieter and quieter as one by one, they began to freeze to death. The commander couldn’t stand it anymore. He ripped off his own clothes, joined the wrestlers on the lake, and won for Christ that day the victory and from Him, the victor’s crown. Polycarp, the Smyrnans and the wrestlers for Christ were no different than you are me. These were normal people with families, reputations, careers, desires and dreams. Yet they all had a firm faith that carried them through the tough times.

What about us? Do we have the kind of faith that keeps us from compromise? Is our faith firm enough to take a stand for Jesus when it is easier to just go along with the crowd? If Jesus were to send a message to us today about our spiritual condition, would we be encouraged or embarrassed? Can we truly say that we have come to a point in our lives where we resolve to follow Christ no matter what the cost?

Let’s stand ... — Salvation — Jesus didn’t turn his back on you — he went to the Cross for you.

- Maybe you know Christ, but you’ve been living a compromised life – one foot in the world and one foot with Jesus, trying to please everybody. “No man can serve two masters ... ” Are the things you’re living for worth Christ dying for? If not, you need to come to the cross, repent and commit to following Jesus with your whole heart again.



Chaplain (CPT) Eric Dean

# A Ritual of Transition

*By Chaplain (COL) Bonnie Koppell, USAR*

**(Editor's Note:** CH Koppell was inspired to write this devotional in response to remarks made by CH (MG) Carver regarding Solders' need for inspiring words as they return from deployment)

## **CHAPLAIN:**

We come together at this time of transition, to the end of this deployment, and prepare for the journey home. It is a bittersweet moment as we pause to reflect on our experiences during this period of service. We are pained by the memories of our losses; we think of those who will not be returning with us and of those who will forever carry the wounds of battle. Although our injuries may not be visible to the naked eye, our souls bear the scars of this war.

We take comfort in the words of the Psalms, <sup>3</sup>God will give strength to the people, God will bless the people with peace<sup>2</sup>, reminding us that strength is a necessary precondition for the peace for which we long.

We are haunted by images too painful to remember and too profound to forget. We come to You now, Holy God, to ask that you ease our burden as we return to our homes and our loved ones. Help us to find the balance between honoring the good that has been accomplished during this time, and letting go of the ugliness which is a necessary accompaniment to our chosen calling as warriors.

Purify our hearts and our souls, that we may be reunited with our family and friends in a spirit of open-ness and peace. With hope and faith we entrust our souls into your care, trusting that in Your lovingkindness You will restore them to us cleansed and healed.

At this time we invite those who so choose, to write on the paper provided a reminder of what you would like to leave behind here at this time. Let us all spend a few moments in prayerful meditation. Whenever you feel ready, you may place these notes in the receptacles provided, and we will ritually burn them as a symbolic was of letting go. (Provide paper, pen and metal receptacles. After a few moments, these notes can be lit on fire, and the participants invited to join in the following prayer.)

## **PARTICIPANTS:**

Dear God, as we watch these flames ascend to Your holy throne, our hearts are torn with grief for all our losses, for all the pain we have experienced and for the death and destruction we may have caused. While we pray with whole hearts for peace, we know that you have made a world where injustice must be fought on every battlefield.

We ask that You would touch us with Your merciful hand, and allow us to move forward in our lives in wholeness. Help us to be worthy children to our parents, generous spouses to our husbands and wives, caring friends and loving parents. Allow us to leave behind what needs to remain behind, and emerge from this deployment with peaceful hearts.

May this offering be as precious to You as the sacrifices of our ancestors in generations past, and may our sacrifices and those of our loved ones not be in vain. Amen.

# Welcoming the Dawn

By Chaplain (MAJ) Mark Moss

(Editor's Note: This devotional is based on Psalm 130 and written in Ar Ramadi, Iraq)

Some of the most dangerous times out here in Iraq are the night hours. At night is when the enemy sneaks out and places booby traps, which we call Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), which can harm our Soldiers. They also sneak out, in violation of curfews, and attempt to fire mortar rounds into our perimeter, or they launch rocket-propelled grenades at our Observation Posts (Ops). Duty at night, both inside and outside the perimeter of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Junction City, is a time of heightened danger and requires heightened awareness by our Soldiers so that they can foil the enemies' attacks.

I know from talking to Soldiers that some Soldiers get hooked to the adrenaline rush created by this environment. But I also know from talking to them that, in their more honest moments, and when they have time to reflect on the dangers around us, most will tell you that they are more than happy when nothing is happening. As compared to the night shifts, the daylight hours are quieter, and it is easier to see the enemy. This means that our Soldiers, and those they guard, are safer for a time, and they welcome and look forward to the daylight hours. We hear allusions to this in the 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm where it says;

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. <sup>2</sup>Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. <sup>3</sup>If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? <sup>4</sup>But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. <sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. <sup>6</sup>My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: *I say, more than* they that watch for the morning. <sup>7</sup>Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is* mercy, and with him *is* plenteous redemption. <sup>8</sup>And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

In this Psalm, the writer describes the same feelings as our Soldiers here experience when he says twice, "My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning ..." Back in King David's days there were no police officer who could be notified by dialing 911. There were no home alarm systems, electric lights to discourage thieves, and help keep crime down. Wild animals roamed freely at night and were hard to detect. Night was a time to be feared if you found yourself being pursued or attacked by some undesirable person with evil motives. When this happened, the person who was being victimized watched with untold eagerness for the morning to come. In the light he could better see his threat, and other people, who could help him, would start to come out and move around.

Spiritually speaking, we are like the Psalmist and those American Soldiers out performing their duties at night. Life seems overwhelming at times and there appears to be much we should fear. When we are in great emotional or spiritual pain, we cry to the Lord, and we feel much like a person

caught unawares by an enemy in the dark. We may wonder if God remembers us and will answer our cries for help. But God the Father has proven His ability to overcome the darkness of sin, death and Satan. He does this through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. God reminds us in Scripture of this great victory. The Psalmist encourages us in the 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm to wait on the Lord, expecting His help. God has already won the biggest battle, the one for our souls. His help in all of our other trials will come to us at the time He deems best to accomplish His will in the world and our lives. Trusting in Christ, we look to the ultimate dawn of His second coming and the morning when we join our Lord in heaven one day. Amen



Chaplain (MAJ) Mark Moss

# Moral Values in Islam

By Chaplain (LTC) Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad

Moral values, such as honesty, trustworthiness, justice and chastity, are innate values which Allah planted in the hearts of mankind; then He sent His messengers with a system of life in accord with this innate disposition to affirm it.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

***“So set your face truly toward the faith, (Establish) Allah’s handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: No change (let there be) in the work established by Allah: this is the standard Religion: But most among mankind understand not.”***

***[Surat Ar-Rum:30].***

A believer adheres to these moral values because his nature, fortified by faith, induces him to do so, and because the religion he believes in commands him with them and promises him a reward for them in the Hereafter. Secularism, on the other hand, even in its less virulent form that satisfies itself with removing religion from political life, rejecting it and the innate values as a basis for legislation, undermines the two foundations for moral values in the hearts of mankind. As for secularism in its extreme atheistic form, it completely demolishes these two foundations and replaces them with human whims, either the whims of a few rulers in dictatorial systems or the whims of the majority in democratic systems.

***“Have you seen the one who has taken his own desire as his god? Would you then be a guardian over him?”***

***[Al-Furqan:43].***

Since whims and desires are by their nature constantly changing, these values and behaviors are often based on cultural trends. For example, what could be considered today to be a crime, punishable by law with the severest of penalties, can easily become permissible tomorrow, or even praiseworthy, and the one who objects to it often becomes “politically incorrect.” This shift from one point of view to its opposite, as a result of society’s estrangement from innate religious values, has been a frequent occurrence throughout history.

Regardless how ignorant a traditional society may become, by the Grace of God, some of its members will maintain some of the innate moral values; but the further a society gravitates towards secularism, and materialism the fewer these individuals will maintain these moral values, and the more marginal their influence will be until God’s influence via his true servants brings about correct moral transformation

To this Allah says in the Qur'an:

***“And when they are called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them, Lo! a party of them refuse and turn away. But if the right is with them they come to Him willingly.”***  
***[Al-Nur: 48-49].***

The right here that this verse is referring to is not necessarily what is universally moral right, but simply that in which they see some personal satisfaction of their own selfish desires. So when prohibition was lifted and the sale of alcohol became legal in the general society, those individuals who were a part of the production and sale of alcohol were not then and still are not today, concerned about the individual and social problems alcohol has created. To this Allah say's,

***“They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: In them is great sin, and some benefit, for mankind; but the sin is greater than the benefit.”*** ***[Al-Bakarah: 219]***

So here Allah makes it quite clear, when there may be some short term benefits within the material world, often these same benefits will only cause long term harm to the individual as well as society as we see with the use of alcohol and gambling.

The Believing people are always seeking the way, or direction prescribed by Almighty God (Allah). Even though something may appear to be advantageous, nonetheless the person who fears the displeasure of his Lord will first weigh his/her actions with that in which will be acceptable to Allah first and last.

O' Allah, guide us to be amongst those that remain conscious of your presence at all times.

Help us to be of those that enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.

***“Our Lord, Give us good in this world and good in life hereafter, and save us from the torment of the fire”.*** ***[Al-Bakarah: 201]***

Help us on the day when there will be no turning back, the day when our actions will either be for us or against us.

***“Our Lord,! Let not our hearts deviate now after you have guided us, but grant us mercy from your own presence; for you are the grantor of bounties without measure”.*** ***[Ali-Imran: 8]***



*Chaplain (LTC) Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad was affirmed into the U.S. Army as the first Islamic chaplain in the U.S. Armed Forces at the Pentagon on Dec. 3, 1993. He is currently assigned to the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, Fort Jackson, S.C., as the Course Developer and Analyst for the Brigade Chaplain and Chaplain Captain Career Course (C4) courses.*



# Deeply Rooted

**(Editor's Note:** This devotional was offered at the 172<sup>nd</sup> Corps Support Group Battle Update Briefing (BUB) at Groups Headquarters, LSA Anaconda, Balad, Iraq, on February 12, 2004 as the 172<sup>nd</sup> CSG completed its RIP/TOA with the 7<sup>th</sup> CSG. A chaplain devotional thought was the first report on each BUB agenda.)

*By Chaplain (COL) Ralph Gore, USAR*

**Ephesians 3:17-19** “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

The Seattle Space Needle was completed for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. It rises 605 feet into the air and, at the time of its completion, was the tallest building west of the Mississippi. There is an observation deck 520 feet above the ground, which requires 848 steps to reach. Or, if you take the elevator, you travel at 10 miles per hour, approximately the speed of a falling raindrop. The observation deck provides a 360-degree panorama of the surrounding countryside, enabling visitors to see the Cascade Mountains to the east, the Olympic Mountains to the west, Mount Rainier to the South, and Puget Sound to the North-Northwest. There is a revolving restaurant at the top that weighs approximately 125 tons and is moved by a one-and one-half horsepower motor.

The foundation for the space needle is 30 feet deep and 120 feet across. In the largest continuous pour of concrete ever attempted in the west, 467 trucks took 12 hours to place 5,850 tons of concrete. The Space Needle is fastened to its foundation with 74 bolts, each 32 feet long and 4 inches in diameter. The foundation weighs substantially more than the Needle itself, making the center of gravity for the Space Needle five feet above ground. The Space Needle was built to double the standards of the 1962 building code.

It regularly sustains gusts of wind up to 90 miles an hour and was built to withstand gusts of 200 miles per hour. An earthquake in 1965, measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale, did no damage to the structure. On the observation deck, a record player that was playing at the time of the quake did not even skip a beat. The reason the Space Needle is able to sustain such high winds and natural forces is that it has been deeply rooted, with foundations so wide and so firm that nothing moves it at all.

Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would find themselves so deeply rooted in the love of Christ, that wide, deep, and firm love, that they would have the power to know the unknowable love of God. An interesting paradox, isn't it? To know that which is beyond knowing. Perhaps the reason we sometimes lose our center of gravity and find ourselves blown about by circumstances is our failure to learn better how deep, how wide, and how firm is the foundation that is God's love.

# Native American Heritage Prayer

**(Editor's note:** This invocation prayer was offered at the Fort Riley Conference Center in Nov. 2008)

*By Chaplain (MAJ) James Drake*

Our Creator;

As the sun has climbed to the height of this day  
on the prairie, we are caught up by the beauty  
of our homeland where our families lived before  
us. Here they followed the buffalo herd in need  
of the blessings they would receive from them.  
Listen, a cry goes up from the wind blown dust;  
a cool wind laden with wood smoke stirs our soul.

We join with our Native Brothers and Sisters who  
from the beginning tended this land.

Here is our shared history.

Together we were saddened by forced encampment,  
yet the dawn each new day sustained us.

We have been conquered, but we remain and share this land  
with many who traveled far too make our home, their home.

We are no longer a few tribes;  
we are now one of many peoples that make this land their home.  
Thank you for those amongst us that carry our heritage as families,  
as native warriors on the prairie and in the forest  
and as citizen soldiers in defense of our homes and freedom.

Each day bring a fresh hope and new members to our tribes,  
our families, our people, and our great land.

Bless us Great Spirit with your grace,  
as you blessed us when we were but a few.

Amen.

# Grace Amidst the Graves

*By Chaplain (CPT) Scot McCosh*

It was a cold, damp Sunday morning, the gray skies spitting down an icy sleet; A fitting day to visit the nation's cemetery at Arlington, Virginia. My trip to the Washington D.C. area had not been solely for this purpose. In fact Saturday served as a strange juxtaposition to the events of Sunday. It had been filled with sunshine and celebration as I had the joy of conducting the wedding ceremony for a friend in the historic Chapel at Fort Myer. Yet, I could not leave the city without visiting the hallowed grounds of the cemetery, and the resting place of one of the first Soldiers whom I had lost in combat – SFC Jonathan Tessar.

My history with First Sergeant Tessar dates back to the Spring of 2004 and my arrival at Fort Campbell, Kentucky to serve as the Chaplain of 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. SFC Tessar had come from the Special Operations community back to the conventional forces to lead and train young Soldiers and had been given the honor of serving as the First Sergeant of Alpha Company. Jon always had an open door for his Chaplain and we spent much time talking about the “crisis of the day” facing his Soldiers: rocky marriages, financial woes, depression, concern with deployment, drug and alcohol abuse. You name it, Jon and I worked together to combat it for the young men under his charge. During this work I came to know of Jon's Christian faith forged in the crisis of his own life, and his desire to find a place for him and his family to worship. I had recently been asked to serve as the Senior Pastor for the Contemporary Protestant Service on post and Jon and his family visited. I was elated because while the service took much of my time and energy, few of my own Soldiers were part of the congregation. With Jon, the tattooed tough guy, and his beautiful bride and children as part of the congregation, I knew that others would soon come.

The Tessars made our congregation theirs, and one of my fondest memories of Jon was him making snow cones at our church picnic just prior to deployment. Once we were in Iraq he became part of a small group studying the Purpose Driven Life, where he shared powerfully his faith journey from being the guy who was too tough for God, to the broken and empty man that needed the saving grace that only a God willing to die for him could give. Just days into our deployment Jon's life on earth was ended in a catastrophic IED strike that also claimed the lives of three other of our Soldiers. I conducted Jon's memorial ceremony in Iraq, while my wife, also an ordained minister, brought God's presence to the Tessar family at home. While she was able to attend Jon's burial at Arlington, I had not yet returned from Iraq, and this was my first opportunity to visit Jon's resting place.

The walk from the visitors' parking lot to the gravesite gave me an opportunity to take in the vastness of the cemetery and the valor and sacrifice that each stone represented. The long history of much of the cemetery stands in contrast to the fresh newness of the most recent graves. Jon's tomb is no longer in the newest row of stones, but rather sits now in the midst of several more rows of even more recent burials. The newest row is still freshly dug, the stones placed, but no grass on the mounds of dirt. The ground looks as raw as the emotions expressed by those who visit here.

As I stood at Jon's graveside, and knelt to touch the stone, I was touched with both tears and a smile. My heart was overwhelmed by the events of the past year, and the loss of twenty Soldiers who had at some point been under my care. Yet, there was joy as I stood there, knowing that Jon

loved what he did and that I, without a doubt, love the ministry that I have with Soldiers like him. Knowing his faith, I was confident that although Jon's body was beneath my feet, his spirit was soaring in the heavenly realms.

In this midst of this moment my focus was phased by the angry cries of a young man kneeling at the freshly dug grave of a friend, just ten meters from where I stood. He was beating the ground and crying out, "It's not fair. It should be me and not you. I'm not leaving this place if you can't." His shouts were accompanied by sobs and his hands filled with the wet mud of the raw ground. The young man's father stood nearby watching his grief stricken son, as his girlfriend came and knelt by his side seeking to console him. I watched in silence, quietly praying for the young man, thinking back to the many sobbing Soldiers whom I had embraced in the past months. I turned back to Jon's grave and sent up a brief prayer to God asking for wisdom, and sensed his leading to be His hands and feet to the young man behind me. In fact, the song that had been played at Chapel earlier that morning had said, "If we are the body, Why aren't His arms reaching? Why aren't His hands healing? Why aren't His words teaching?" So I turned and walked from my friend's grave and into the presence of strangers.

I quietly approached the young man's father and told him that I was an Army Chaplain, and asked if he thought his son would mind me talking to him. The tearful father shook my hand and said that he thought it might help, and went on to explain that his son, Josh had come to Arlington to look for the grave of a friend, which he had not found. However, in his searching he came across the resting place of another friend, whom he did not know had been killed. The grave was only days old. As he paused I started to step toward his son, the father continued sharing. He mentioned the anti-war rally that had taken place the day prior, and revealed that his son had been part of the counter protest and in so doing, was spat upon and called a "baby killer." This loving father then motioned me toward his son, with tenderness in his eyes.

I knelt in the mud by Josh, who was prostrate, his face in the dirt. I placed my hand on his back and told him that I too had recently returned from Iraq and was here to visit the grave of a friend, and that I was an Army Chaplain.

I affirmed his feelings of anger and hurt, his pain and passion and then asked if it would be alright to pray with him. He gently nodded his head yes, his face still touching the ground. I don't remember the exact words of my prayer, but I do remember asking God's healing and strength to be with this young man and with all our Soldiers, and asked that he would help those of us who lived on to honor our friends who had died.

As I concluded the prayer with an Amen, and began to stand, Josh lifted himself out of the dirt and onto his crutches. It was then that I realized that Josh was an amputee, having lost his own leg in a combat related incident. Josh stood tall, and shook my hand with a firm grip, contrasting the soft muddy streaks running down his cheeks. I looked into his eyes and saw a young man whose heart was more broken than his body, but whose sense of pride and desire for purpose pressed on. Knowing that in a matter of weeks, I would be deploying again, I asked Josh to do me a favor and pray for me in the days to come, as I had prayed for him. He eagerly committed to this task and as he did his father spoke up. He asked me if I might be willing to give my lapel pin to his son, to mark out this moment and serve as a reminder to Josh to keep the commitment that he had just made. I looked down at the metal pin, a small replica of a cross made of scraggly branches, topped with a crown of thorns. I happily unpinned the cross from my sport-coat and pinned it to Josh's lapel, as he stood with his chest out as if he were receiving a military medal. There was nothing of greater value

that I could have given him in that moment, a tangible reminder that the God to whom we prayed knew the pain that we felt that day, for He had given his only Son in the war on sin.

As we parted ways I walked back to Jon's grave with tears in my eyes, mud on my knees and a smile on my face. God's grace had been present even amidst the graves. I knelt by the headstone and said, "Thanks Jon, even from the grave you are opening doors for me to minister to Soldiers." Upon returning to my car I called my wife to let her know that I was on my way back to Fort Bragg. She was thankful and added, "I was worried about you today as you visited Arlington because I knew that it would be emotional. We prayed for you in Sunday School, that it would be a good visit."

I smiled and said, "Honey, your prayers were answered. The visit was good."



Chaplain (CPT) Scot McCosh

# The Power to Overcome

By Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd

**(Editor's Note:** This devotional was published in FRG Newsletters Wiesbaden, Germany, in 2008)

Have you ever had the feeling of being overwhelmed at home or at work? Imagine, just for a moment, how Joshua must have felt. You remember Joshua; he was the leader of the Israelites after Moses. It was Moses who led the Israelites out of slavery and to the edge of the Promised Land. Moses is the one who is responsible for bringing the 10 Commandments down from the mountain top. Moses is the one who single handedly leads the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness right to the very edge of the Promised Land. But, before they cross the river into the Promised Land, Moses dies. Joshua is chosen to replace Moses. Talk about a great and overwhelming task! Joshua is chosen to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land where, by the way they still reside today. He has to engage all kinds of enemies and uncertainties into a land he has never seen. He is faced with enormous responsibility without the mentorship of Moses. Now Joshua has to make all the decisions. He is overwhelmed and alone, all alone ... just him and God.

As Joshua stands up and peers into an uncertain and challenging future these are the words he hears from God. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9)."

Just as God was with Joshua so God is with you! You are that leader that replaces Joshua, way down the line. You are the one who has the awesome task of raising a family, of working, of being a Soldier or the family of a Soldier. You are charged with doing all the wonderful things you do every day for the glory of God. It is you. So, as you go forward into an uncertain and challenging future remember these words..."Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."



Chaplain (MAJ ) Joey Byrd

# Finding God In Spiritual Depression

By Michael A. Milton, Ph.D., President, and James M. Baird Jr. Chair of Pastoral Theology,  
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(Editor's Note: This text was entirely based on the teaching of Psalm 42 and Hebrews 4:14-16)

“The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, and question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’— what business have you to be disquieted?”—Martyn Lloyd-Jones<sup>1</sup>

## Tears and Faith

Are tears and faith compatible?

I once had a fine Christian woman<sup>3/4</sup>a Sunday school teacher and a leader in our church<sup>3/4</sup>come to my office and tell me, “I just can’t stop crying. I don’t know why. I just can’t stop crying.”

A Baptist minister came to see me, because I was safe (being a Presbyterian), and he confessed that despite thirty years of ministry, he suffered from a deep woundedness that he couldn’t understand. He wondered if he was saved since he hurt so deeply and yet couldn’t understand why.

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats spoke into the mystery of the source of this pain when he wrote,  
“But is there any comfort to be found?

Man is in love and loves what is vanishing,

What more is there to say?”<sup>2</sup>

“What more is there to say?” Are tears and faith compatible? One of the most poignant and moving pieces of literature ever written, Psalm 42, helps us to answer that for ourselves, our loved ones and those we may minister to.

## *Psalm 42*

*1 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*

*2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

*3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is*

*your God?”*

*4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my*

*soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*

*Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation*

*6 and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you*

*from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*

*7 Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;*

*all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.*

*8 By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,*

*and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*

*9 I say to God, my rock:*

*"Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning*

*because of the oppression of the enemy?"*

*10 As with a deadly wound in my bones,*

*my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long,*

*"Where is your God?"*

*11 Why are you cast down, O my soul,*

*and why are you in turmoil within me?*

*Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

*Hebrews 4:14-16*

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,  
Jesus,*

*the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our  
weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet  
without sin.*

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may  
receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*



## **When Fog Descends**

Living on a mountain can be interesting. Not too long ago, when my family and I lived on Signal Mountain near Chattanooga, heavy fogs would seemingly appear out of nowhere and descend on the mountain. It was hard enough to see my hand in front of me, much less the road, as I would wind down the mountain in the early morning. It can be a challenge to live and drive in a fog.

Frederick Buechner is a minister and author who declares that he loves God. Yet he writes about a time when he lived and ministered in a fog of faith of sorts. According to his story, *Telling Secrets*<sup>3</sup>, the fog rolled in for Buechner when he was a child and his father committed suicide. Dr. M. Craig Barnes, former senior minister of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, and most recently senior minister of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, and a professor, admits to times of ministering through the fog of questions he has about why his father, a pastor, left home one day and never returned.<sup>4</sup>

A few years ago, John Piper delivered a wonderful series of addresses on Charles Haddon Spurgeon, arguably the greatest preacher since George Whitfield. At the heart of Piper's presentation was the mystery of Spurgeon's frequent descents into the fog,<sup>5</sup> for the great Preacher suffered from tremendous depression that would literally debilitate him for long seasons. The hymnist and English poet William Cowper (1731-1800), the colleague of the great John Newton, likewise, suffered from a life of struggling with not only depression, but also what we might today label as mental illness.<sup>6</sup>

There is a fog that the late, eminent Dr. Martyn-Lloyd Jones called, "spiritual depression"<sup>7</sup> that can descend on the best of us. I mention these three pastors because I want you to know that such times of depression know no difference between mature Christians, new Christians and unbelievers. Sadly, some Christians try to act like this depression doesn't exist, because it is not necessarily the best advertisement for Christianity. Some Christians who believe in the myth of a higher life through good works or perfection in this life fail to account for the reality of this experience. I believe the Bible says it is true and that even Christians are subject to the fog of spiritual depression.

Depression, or melancholia as it used to be called, is a growing reality in America. One recent study put it simply: "More Americans report being depressed."<sup>8</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a physician before he was a minister, warns pastors to use differential counseling when dealing with this matter.<sup>9</sup> That is, as we counsel, we should differentiate as best we can, between problems that are physical and problems that are spiritual. When there is doubt, he suggests that the pastor refers the person to a medical doctor. But when there are signs of spiritual problems then the pastor should treat them with the Word of God. Lloyd-Jones reminds us that body and soul are linked and play off of one another. I have no interest, training or credentials on the physical side, but the Word of God compels me to address the reality of spiritual depression.

The Psalms speak to the condition of the human soul. Of the 150 sacred Psalms of David and others, there are several genres to be identified: Psalms of Ascent, Psalms of Praise, Petition, Liturgical Psalms, and Psalms of Lament. Psalms 42 and 43 are Psalms of Lament and go together. Indeed they were probably written at the same time.<sup>10</sup> They are psalms written by exiles from the Temple. The sacred notes tell us that the Sons of Korah wrote them as a Maschil. The Sons of Korah could have been an ancient Levitical musical ensemble or they could have been descendants of that man who opposed Moses and was swallowed in the earth. Many believe that they were with David in the North because of the reference to the heights of Herman and were perhaps running from Absalom. John Calvin believed that David wrote Psalm 42 and that the Sons of Korah were simply preserving it as a treasure.<sup>11</sup> Many believe that the word Mashil means contemplation, or it could be

from a Hebrew word meaning insights. Again, for Calvin, as he notes its presence in other places, he sees this as a particular set of Psalms that speak of the God's chastening of Israel. These are the hard Psalms that teach faithfulness through trial and even spiritual abandonment. Perhaps Charles Haddon Spurgeon best described a Mashil's goal:

"It is always edifying to listen to the experience of a thoroughly gracious and much afflicted saint."<sup>12</sup>

So, what we have in this sacred text is an insight or contemplation by the Psalmist on a case of spiritual depression. Here we also have divine insights into finding God in such times in our own lives.

The first divine insight is simply this: In Psalm 42...

#### I. The Lord has Given us a Divine Diagnosis of Spiritual Depression (vv. 1-4)

My pastoral training tells me that there are two kinds of spiritual depression: one pathological and one rational. In pathological spiritual depression, there are inexplicable times of sorrow and grief, restlessness and deep heartache when the soul, for some unknown reason, cannot be quieted. These are the cases of when there is weeping without understanding.

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones mentions temperament as a possible reason for such cases. Some people may be given to discouragement because that is the way God made them. In this case, I think of Elijah. He was used by God to raise his landlady's child from the dead (I Kings 17:17-24) and to display the glory of God on Mount Carmel by defeating the priests of Baal (18:20-40). However none of these events stopped Elijah from going into the wilderness and in I Kings 19:4 we find him praying that he might die!

- Sometimes even good times can bring this weeping without understanding. Charles Haddon Spurgeon often experienced this after preaching. There is a sort of post-partum depression after victories. We know this to be true in our own lives. These times are inexplicable, but real.

There is also depression in the believer's soul that is caused by real events. These are rational cases:

- Isaiah was a man who was heartbroken for his sinful nation. This was a rational reason, an identifiable reason to be depressed. He had come before the throne of the living God (Isaiah 6), but had heard that he would preach and none would come (Isaiah 6:10). God says in verse 13 that a tenth will return. Therefore Isaiah pants after this tenth. His heart yearns for the salvation of his people.

- Jeremiah was a man who wept for his people who were in sin and would face judgment. This story in Lamentations is a divinely revealed case of spiritual depression.

- The father of the Prodigal Son was a Biblical man who had good reason to be depressed. He waited for his son. The older son continued with life as usual, but love constrained the father. In fact, Jesus shows us that this is the very heart of God.

The Bible says, "there is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Spiritual depression can also come from temptation by the devil. I would say this is a rational depression as well. We think of Job, who was under intense demonic attack to break his love for God. Look at the life of Peter, as Satan tempted him. Jesus said that Satan wanted to sift Peter and he did.

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul says that we are in the middle of spiritual battles, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." This does not mean that we

go looking for a demon behind every mood swing in our lives, but neither should we ignore this truth.

There is also spiritual depression when we see our sin for what it really is. In Psalm 51, David confesses his sins and mentions the bones that God has broken. He speaks of spiritual depression because of his sin.

Sin, it may be said, is at the root of all depression. We live in a sinful, fallen world where we mourn, and the pain around us indents our very souls.

In the Psalm before us, we are not given the reason for the author's spiritual depression, but only its effect. It is as if God has said, "It doesn't matter how you have come into this place. I will speak to your condition no matter what brought you here. I will simply reflect what you feel without bringing you to the bar to answer further questions as to why you got here."

In Psalm 42, the Holy Spirit reveals a believer who has five specific marks of a spiritual depression:

1. A Thirsty Soul (v. 1)

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

The longing for the presence of God comes to this Psalmist. He uses the deer, flanks hot from the chase, chest heaving and struggling for air, to describe his longing for God. God is living water, even as Jeremiah called the Lord,<sup>13</sup> and even as Jesus called His own life to those who would come to Him.<sup>14</sup> To the woman at the well, we hear of this living water:

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water' (John 4.10)."

This is a man whose life has been refreshed before by this living water. He does not desire it for the first time, but he is distant, he is thirsty, he is craving for the taste of God again. This man has what C.S. Lewis called an "appetite for God."<sup>15</sup> But to desire God is to desire all that God brings to our lives. He is longing for the company of God's people. In verse 4, he remembers going with the people of God into the house of God. He recalls worship. He longs for fellowship.

Have you ever been like that? I remember as a prodigal son, I lived far removed from the saints of God and the faith of my childhood. I longed to come home to God. I once had someone ask me in my pastorate if I was bothered by the sounds of little children in the worship service. I told them that I love to hear the occasional "Shhh!" I love to see the sight of little boys squirming in the seats and little girls whispering. These are the sights and sounds of life in the congregation of the faithful! I am just glad to be back among them! My soul is quenched by God and His people and His Worship and His Church. Having wandered in the wilderness away from God and His Church, having had my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, and pant for breath, being chased by the hounds of Hell seeking to destroy me through my sin or others' sins against me, I am so happy to be home. I want to drink from the deep wells of God's Word. I want to savor the bread and the cup when Communion comes by. As a pastor, I love dipping my hand into the covenantal waters to pour the waters of God's grace over the heads of fellow believers and their children. Oh how happy I am to be home! And like Dorothy, after coming home to her own bed from her magical trip to Oz, I never want to leave home again. Never!

Your soul may be thirsty now. Sin may have taken you far from God. Circumstances may be conspiring to hold you hostage from the fellowship of God's people. This is the experience of spiritual depression. I know: the Bible says so. I know: I have been there.

But consider this second sign of spiritual depression:

## 2. A Questioning Soul (vv. 2, 9)

When shall I come and appear before God?

Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

In verse 2, the psalmist wants to know when he will come before God. He is so far away from the House of the Lord that he doesn't know if he will ever get back. This is the Holy Spirit's revelation of the intense internal struggle of the psalmist. This is the soul that cannot imagine ever getting home.

Have you ever been so lost in a city that you could never imagine getting home? I was like that one time in London. My wife and daughter and I were there, and of all things I had rented a car in London and had driven up to East Anglia to visit a relative. On the way back, once we hit London limits, we got seriously lost. And Mae was reading the map, and I was on the wrong side of the street, and it was dark, and I couldn't find the light, and...and Amy just started praying for God to lead us home. And guess what? Right after that prayer, we turned into the Foreign Missions Club on Aberdeen Street in Islington. God brought us home. How God? This is the question. But are not our prayers also questions? A rabbi once said "the man who does not question God, does not know God." If your prayers, like the Psalmist, are your questions, then this is so.

Another sign of spiritual depression is this:

## 3. A Weeping Soul (v.3)

He speaks of his "tears [having been his] food day and night." There are times when we cry like Joseph did in Egypt. We feel we are a long way from home, a long way from where we want to be. Tears are sacraments, revealing the inner places of the heart. Paul says that there are times when we pray with groanings that cannot be put into language. Paul wept as he ministered in Ephesus.<sup>16</sup> Paul wept as he taught the congregation:

"... for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears" (Acts 20.31).

Joseph<sup>17</sup> and Paul, and even our Savior—a man of sorrows acquainted with grief,<sup>18</sup> who wept over the funeral scene of Lazarus,<sup>19</sup> was troubled at the brokenness of humanity, over Judas' betrayal—all expressed this deep human sentiment, this longing, this desire, this craving for God and His goodness to break through human despair and even death and judgment.

The fourth mark of spiritual depression is the mark that comes—not from within, but from without:

## 4. An Accusing Voice (vv. 3 and 10)

We hear the voice of accusation: "Where is your God?" in verse 3b and again in verse 10. The psalmist himself cries out and asks, "Why have you forsaken me?" Michael Wilcock in his commentary on the Psalm is right, I think, that the accusation comes not only from unbelievers but hurts all the more for it is within the believer himself!<sup>20</sup> Maybe you feel like that. You say, "I must not be a good example of a Christian. Look at my tears and look at my condition!" This was the case with Job's friends who accused him. In Job 18:21, Bildad associates Job's predicament with that of an unbeliever, "Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him who does not know God."

This sounds like a smug Christian who cannot reconcile faith and suffering, or one who cannot trust in God because of a spiritual depression brought on by tragedy. Job replies with all of us, "How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words?" We know that Satan is an accuser of the saints, but sometimes Christians can become unwitting agents of accusation as well. You have felt this accusation in your life, in your tragedies, from your friends, and if you are a pastor even from your parishioners. Christ Himself was accused by Satan. He was accused by the Jews.

And even Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus had gone off to pray. So when you are accused you are in sacred company.

Yet there is fifth mark of spiritual depression:

5. Remorse (v. 4)

In verse 4, the psalmist remembers the former days of worshipping in the Temple. He remembers the joy and praise and a pilgrim feast. The condition of spiritual depression can be seen in this loitering with memories. These were good memories, but even good things can become painful when they are taken from you. I used to speak with a lady who lost a son in a tragic accident. She spoke of good times, but those memories had now become painful for her. Sometimes we weep for memories of times no longer available to us.

We may be tempted to say that Psalm 42 is a sorrowful psalm. But does it not reflect what we all sometimes feel?

What I want you to remember is that our Lord Jesus was the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3), and He identifies with us so well in these times, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.” (Hebrews 4:15). Think of His desert experience. Think of Gethsemane. Think of His abandonment on the Cross by His Father. You are not far from God when you are in such a low state. One of my favorite places to go as a pastor is Psalm 34:17, 18. This passage speaks to the week-in and week-out situations that I face as a pastor:

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

We also have other great insights in Psalm 42. For here...

II. The Lord Gives us a Divine Remedy in Spiritual Depression (vv. 5-8)

If this Psalm only reflected the condition of believers, we would be greatly blessed. However, there are more blessings in the fact that this Psalm does not stay in the doldrums, but arises like a Phoenix out of the ashes, and shows us that there is great hope where there is great darkness.

What is the response of the Psalmist in this Psalm?

1. Christian soliloquy (v. 5)

The Psalmist talks to himself and “encourages himself in the Lord” as David does in other places.

Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him because the souls of all the people were grieved—every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God (I Samuel 30:6).

Note how the Christian in spiritual depression is still under the power of the Holy Spirit and questions the forces conspiring against him. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says the great problem is in listening to our emotions rather than speaking to our emotions. This is Christian soliloquy.<sup>21</sup> This is the Christian singing, “Standing on the Promises of God.” God comes to us as we repeat His promises back to us. This calls, of course, for each of us, while it is day, to saturate our minds and hearts with His truths. Then when any shade of darkness comes, we shall be well armed for the struggle.

2. Christian recognition of the Sovereignty of God in suffering (v. 7)

All Your waves and billows have gone over me.

These are also the words of Jonah in his deep-down-in-the-belly-of-the-whale prayer. All spiritual depression takes place in the lower depths. All spiritual depression is a deep-down-whale-belly place to be. Let’s look at that prayer in Jonah chapter 2. Jonah’s prayer of deliverance includes:

(1) Affliction in verse 2, “I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction.”

(2) Awareness of God's Sovereignty in His affliction in verse 3, "For You cast me into the deep...all Your billows and Your waves passed over me."

(3) Gospel hope in affliction through a redeemer in verse 6b, "Yet You have brought up my life from the pit."

(4) A time of worship that comes out of affliction in verse 9, "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving."

The place of sorrow has been sanctified as Jonah, like the Psalmist of Psalm 42, cries out to his God. It is true that our place of sorrow, whether explainable or inexplicable, is the place where we must be honest with God about our condition, be trusting in God about His sovereignty, see our Savior walking into the darkness to succor us in our sorrow, and come to praise Him through the very darkness which seeks to snuff us out.

This is the faith that sings with hymn writer Margaret Clarkson:

O Father, you are sovereign, the Lord of human pain,

Transmuting earthly sorrows to gold of heav'nly gain.

All evil overruling, as none by Conqu'ror could,

Your love pursues its purposes<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>our souls' eternal good.<sup>22</sup>

3. Christian hope in the Sovereignty of God for Good (v. 8)

The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime and in the night His song shall be with me<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>a prayer to the God of my life.

This is reminiscent of what we find in Paul's words, "All things work together for the good," and in Joseph's words, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good."

In all of this, we need to see that this is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is not a moralistic sermon that says, "When you get down, just think happy thoughts." No, this is the God of all comfort coming to you through His Word and applying His Spirit. The Gospel in this passage is that Christ Himself became the Man of Sorrows, but He is also the New Man and the Resurrected Man. There is a new power at work in the world anticipated by this Psalmist but now fully enjoyed by God's people.

So often I find myself with people or families going through health problems, heartbreaking situations with children, conflicts with spouses, trials from job loss, and with saints experiencing pain from the past that is gripping them and sucking joy from their world. The Gospel in the midst of that darkness is always the same, "Christ is risen." This is why Paul says in I Corinthians 13.7, "[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." This is why Job in the darkest night of his soul is able to cry out, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" The ruling motif in the Christian life is resurrection following crucifixion.

Note this final insight from the Psalmist:

III. The Lord Gives us Signs of Healing in Spiritual Depression (vv. 8-11)

Briefly, we may trace the signs of healing this Psalmist enjoys.

1. A Renewed Love Affair with "The God of my life" (v. 8b)

I love this. The Psalmist knows spiritual depression, but the God of his life is always there. He knows Him better than those who have not journeyed away from the Temple. Deep has been his pain, but as deep as the sorrow has cut, there, all the more, is the grace that flows. Through it all we learn to trust in Jesus, and through it all we come to call Him "The God of my life." Oh, how I love this.

This man is able to look through the pain and see:

2. A Renewed Christian Soliloquy (v. 9)

Note that verse 9 is an echo of verse 5, "I hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help [literally the "salvation"] of my countenance and my God."

In his book, *When God Interrupts*, Craig Barnes tells the story of how he was trying to prepare a sermon, settle staff conflicts, and basically save the world in one week. He had one more thing to do before going home; he had to lead a Communion Service at a nursing home. As he said, “It was the last thing I wanted to be doing.” He was in the blue funk that sometimes settles over the pastorate. That is when he met Mrs. Lucille Lines. I give you the story from his book:

Mrs. Lines was almost blind and very hard of hearing. She had gradually become shut off from the world. Her health was slipping away, and now she is confined to a small room, having given up her house years ago. She has outlived her husband and close friends. Very few people in our church still remember her. She has lost almost everything but life itself.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Barnes wrote that it was a humble scene. He muttered the words, “This is my Body broken for you. This is my blood poured out for you.” They fumbled their way through and he guided her shaking hand to the bread and the cup. Then she spilled the juice on his slacks. He thought to himself, “Just one more thing that isn’t going right!” He patted her on the back, said a prayer and was leaving when he heard her so clearly, “Thank You, God, for being so good to me. Thank You that I am not forgotten. Thank You for always loving me.” Her simple words were his healing that day.

Her insights are that of this Psalmist—in the darkest moments of life, when we are at the very end of our lives, shaking and maybe even confused, God is there. When we are speechless and deaf to the world, when we may even be spilling our salvation all over ourselves, Christ is just beyond the veil. In Christ, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the love of a Father who will never let you go, God is good and God is there.

#### Conclusion

Dear friends, I can’t give you a twelve-step-guide to avoiding spiritual depression or a three point message to getting rid of spiritual depression, because the Bible doesn’t do that. However, there is a one-step-guide. It is the step that God took when He left heaven and came to earth. God’s Word reflects what we sometimes experience and then guides us to the Gospel to tell us that He is there. If He is not, as the Psalmist says, “the God of your life,” then now would be the right time to call Him to be your Lord.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886) is not a name known to most of us though he bequeathed a hymn to the Church, an anthem if you will, for those who suffer in the deepest part of their souls; for those whose tears have become the sacraments of a deep heart longing for God that cannot be fully met until they see Christ face to face. This man, Joseph Scriven, was an Irish minister who was to marry the love of his life. But just before their wedding his fiancé suddenly died. Grieving, he left Ireland for Canada to minister there. In a few years, in faithful ministry he met another young lady and their hearts beat together in a desire for the covenant of marriage. Joseph asked this woman to marry him. She accepted the proposal and they were on their way to a happy life. In a strange, unsearchable Providence, this young lady also died.

Alone on the frozen tundra, as it were, of a foreboding Canadian landscape, a place that had become a veritable battlefield for his soul, this soldier of the Cross did what many soldiers do when the artillery fire of the enemy is coming in so heavily. Like the wounded on Normandy as some of us saw in *Saving Private Ryan*, they call for their mothers. And did this minister. He longed to see his mother again in Ireland. He longed for home. He longed for comfort. He longed for God. But he took his longings and spoke to himself about God. He said these words, which may be an anthem for all who seek to follow the Lord in the inexplicable circumstances of this life, who sometimes even through the fog of life, must cling to the promises we preach to others. It is a song we may even sing in the night of our depression, the song that Joseph Scriven left us as he encouraged himself in God:

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.<sup>24</sup>

He sought God and found Him. Finding God in spiritual depression, in the trials of ministry, in the heartbreaking struggles of everyday life, is something we cannot do alone. Nay, it is a supernatural thing to be brought to Jesus and yet we are told to seek Him. And Jesus who “knows our every weakness” invites us to draw near to Him in prayer. You will find Him there, the One who knows your sorrow infinitely better than you could ever imagine. He is there shining a light of grace and hope and everlasting life. You will not only find God in spiritual depression, one day you will worship Him through that depression.

I asked the Baptist preacher who came to see me, “How is your prayer life?” He answered, “My prayer life? That is all I do! My tears constantly lead me to my knees! I live with God day in and day out in this depression!” I leaned in to him, took his hand in mine, and I whispered, “Then blessed are you. And blessed is the gift of your spiritual depression.”

Our troubles, our trials, yes our spiritual depression will become the very thing that leads you, like the Psalmist in Psalm 42 and 43, and like my Baptist minister friend, to enjoy the presence of Jesus Christ in ways that others cannot. It is the mysterious instrument of God that is leading you to love heaven and to long to be with Jesus there. And when that anointing of the Lord comes upon you, perhaps in a worship service, or in the quietness of the morning light upon your bed, and you begin to drink deeply of His presence, and then one day when you see Jesus face to face, you will bless the rod of affliction as it leads you to drink from living water of the Lord forevermore.

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(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids,,: erdmans, 1965).<sup>2</sup> W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, New ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1983). I located this in the wonderful essay by Dr. David Calhoun, "Poems in the Park: My Cancer and God's Grace," in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God, Theology in Community* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008); Yeats.<sup>3</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).<sup>4</sup> See M. Craig Barnes, *When God Interrupts Finding New Life through Unwanted Change* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, c1996).<sup>5</sup> John Piper, "Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity," in *Bethlehem Baptist Church Conference for Pastors* (Minneapolis, MN: 1995). <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ23/article1.htm>. The article is adapted from a paper delivered at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, January 31, 1995.<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, James King, *William Cowper : A Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986); John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God : The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd, The Swans Are Not Silent* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001).<sup>7</sup> Lloyd-Jones.<sup>8</sup> See Stanton Peele, "Why No Reduction in Depression in

America,” Harfort Courant, July 7 2003.<sup>9</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids, MI: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965).<sup>10</sup> “The literary unity of Psalm 42 and 43 is such that they should be treated as one psalm,” says William A. VanGemeen in Frank Ely Gaebelein and Dick Polcyn, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary : With the New International Version of the Holy Bible, Psalms - Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1991).<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ed. And collated with the author’s French verion by The Reverend James Anderson Translated from the original Latin (Accordance Bible Software, 8.4.4).<sup>12</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (Accordance Bible Software 8.4.4, 1869).<sup>13</sup> “... the LORD, the fountain of living water” (Jeremiah 17.13).<sup>14</sup> See also these passages: “The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water’ (John 4.11)?”; and, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7.38); and, “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7.17<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, [1st American ed. (New York,: Harcourt, 1958).<sup>16</sup> “serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20.19).<sup>17</sup> It is good to study the case of Joseph and his tears that flowed so greatly in Genesis. See Genesis 42.24; 43.30; 45.2, 14,15; 46.29; 50.17. He is a type of Christ who wept. But he is a picture of the believer in Psalm 42 whose tears is his food day and night.<sup>18</sup> “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53.3).<sup>19</sup> “Jesus wept” (John 11.35).<sup>20</sup> Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, ed. J.A. Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001).<sup>21</sup> Lloyd-Jones, see page 21, for example.<sup>22</sup> Margaret Clarkson, “O Father, You are Sovereign” (Hope Publishing Company, 1982).<sup>23</sup> Barnes.<sup>24</sup> Joseph Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” No. 629, Lawrence Roff, ed. *The Trinity Hymnal* (Philadelphia, PA: Great Commission Publications, 1990).

# Finishing Strong

*By Chaplain (LTC) Yvonne Hudson*

**(Editor's Note:** This devotional thought was for the Chaplain's Corner of the Brigade Newsletter. It was written in the last 2 months of a 15-month tour for 7th Sustainment Brigade, in Tallil, Iraq, 7 October 2007 -22 December 2008)

It is often the final moments in sports that make the difference on whether a team wins or loses a game or a series. How many times have you and other fans stood on your feet and cheered loudly for the players as the time clock counted down. Perhaps you were the person the team was counting on during the time clock countdown. Whether football, basketball, hockey, soccer, or life, the final moments in every game count.

How you finish will determine how you feel about your performance. Will you be satisfied with your performance when the game is over? Yes, we always tell the loser of the game, the last kick, the last tackle or the last 3-point effort was not what lost the game.

However, deep down everyone thinks otherwise. If you lose the game for the team, deep inside you feel like you choked, you failed. If you lose in sports you tend to analyze the game and say I didn't lose the game for the team, it was all of us. You tend to blame others for your mistakes. It wasn't you. It was the other guy who dropped the ball, not you. If you win the game, you become the hero for life and the team carries you off the field on their shoulders. You think, 'hey I am awesome!'

No matter where you are in your Iraq tour, it is important to focus on how you will finish the tour. Years from now, when you are sitting with friends or family talking about Iraq, what type of memories will come to your mind. The Apostle Paul encourages us to forget what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, we are to press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us.

If you have done a great job while here and have nothing to regret, keep doing a great job. Don't throw away the game at the end. One really bad mistake can wipe out all the good you have done. If you have not been the Soldier or person you want to be, start over now.

So you made mistakes, perhaps you even lost rank, or had to do corrective training. It does not matter. You can still get off the bench and contribute to the effort. God tells us that each day his mercies are new. That means each day you have a clean slate. Will you lie down or will you fight? The choice is yours. Choose to Finish Strong!

# Cinnabon Sin

*By Chaplain (MAJ) David Trogdon*

**(Editor's Note:** This devotional is based on the teaching of 1 John 1:8-9 and was written in Camp Victory, Baghdad, Iraq and given during Brigade Commander's Update Briefing.)

## **“It's Not My Fault, Or Is It?”**

Oscar Wilde once said, “I can resist anything but temptation.” Well, I can identify with that. Earlier this week, I found a box near the coffee pot in our headquarters. I peeked into this box of Cinnabons and to my delight, there was a Cinnabon smothered in icing all by itself. It looked lonely so what was I to do? I didn't need the calories but it was so tempting. I rescued the Cinnabon, heated it in the microwave, got a cup of coffee and enjoyed every bite. I didn't even feel guilty because, after all, it wasn't my fault.

I had plenty of reasons why it wasn't my fault: I am only human. I can't help it God made me this way, so it's God's fault. Also, I was raised to enjoy sweets so it's my parent's fault for raising me this way. Besides, I can't resist a Cinnabon because I always give in. It's a sickness. I can't help it. It's a Cinnabon addiction. You know whoever bought that box should have never left it where a fat chaplain could be tempted anyway, so it's their fault. I also know of a person from J1, who shall remain nameless to protect the guilty, who should have cared enough about her chaplain's health, to have eaten the whole thing instead of cutting off such a tiny piece. So, it is her fault too. Everybody was eating Cinnabons because the box only had one left. If everyone is doing it, it must be okay for me too? So, it's not my fault. The blame really is with Cinnabon because if they hadn't made it so tasty, I wouldn't have wanted it in the first place. I wonder if I can sue. It's Cinnabon's fault. Finally, the devil made eat it! I am not strong enough to stand up to the devil so, it's not my fault, it's the devil's fault. He made me do it.

Maybe you understand the parable of my Cinnabon “sin.”

Far too often when we give into temptation we make excuses for our sin instead of admitting our guilt and receiving God's grace and forgiveness. As a chaplain, and as a Christian who also struggles with temptation and who sometimes gives in, I have heard every excuse imaginable and even used a few of them myself. Just as in the Garden of Eden when Adam blamed God and Eve for his sin and Eve blamed the serpent for hers, we often make the same mistake today. We can blame God for making us this way. We can blame our family background or our past. We can say that we are only human and made a mistake. We can blame others for failing us or influencing us to sin. We can blame everyone and everything else, including the devil for our sin, but it really doesn't matter. God doesn't buy it and He isn't impressed or swayed by our excuses. Our sin is always our fault and ours alone. While we can be tempted, influenced, weakened or persuaded, ultimately when we sin, we can only blame ourselves.

The good news is that when we admit our sin, accept full responsibility for our sin and confess it to God, then and only then do we find God's grace and complete forgiveness. We also can find God's strength to help us to overcome the temptation the next time it comes our way. So, when you find yourself resisting everything but temptation, don't make excuses, confess it to God and let Him help you start over, grow stronger and be victorious the next time.

Who knows, it might even work for the chaplain the next time I am confronted with a Cinnabon craving!

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).



Chaplain (MAJ) David Trogdon

# A Written Prayer from a Family Member of a Deployed Soldier

**(Editor's Note:** This prayer is published in the "Book on Prayers of Families of 1AD Deployed Soldiers." It was written during a Family Strong Bonds Retreat on March 16, 2008.)

*By Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd*

Dear God,

"I want to thank you for the opportunity of having been a part of this retreat experience. Although I know, that all of the other spouses are in the same situation as I am, it was great to hear them voice it, even hear specifics, that I thought were only problems I was experiencing!

Thank you for keeping my Soldier safer Please continue to keep him safe and send him home to us, alive and well, in one piece, both physically and mentally. We want to grow old together, loving each other and watch our son grow up happy and healthy.

I am grateful for the life we get to live. We see so many places and get to meet lots of wonderful people all over the world. The absences give us an opportunity to reflect on what is important **in** life and in a relationship, be it between husband and wife or as a family.

I pray, that you will help us reconnect when the deployment is finished. Especially help my son reconnect with his dad. I know they need a bit of extra help, because they disagree on a lot of levels....

Please let my Soldier know, that we support him 100%. Give him the strength to deal with being away from his family. We love him so much!

Also give me the strength to be the best mom and wife I can be. Help to lead me in the right direction, to make the right decisions, for whatever situation might come my way.

Watch over us and all of our fellow military families all over the world.

Amen"



Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd

# This Ain't No Secret

(**Editor's Note:** This devotional was published in FRG newsletter in Wiesbaden, Germany in 2008)

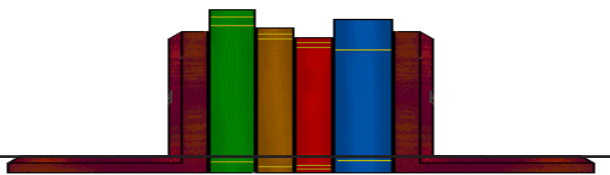
*By Chaplain (MAJ) Joey Byrd*

I really like these words..."Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in the Lord." "Do not be anxious about anything," writes Paul, from prison (Philippians 4:6). If anyone had reason to worry it was Paul. He was held in prison waiting to hear whether he would live or die as he wrote this letter. Paul certainly had reason to worry, to be anxious, but he chose rather to turn his worries into prayers and it worked!

In the book "The Secret" the author writes about the importance of changing our mental thoughts as the way to changing our reality. In other words, if you think depression, or anxiety or negative thoughts then that will become your reality. And, the opposite is true. If you want to have success, achievements, and gain the needed things in life then first you must think those things in your mental pathway for them to become reality. You've heard the saying, "you are what you eat" so "The Secret" says, "you become what you think." Pretty good stuff to consider however, it isn't a secret. Paul writes clearly ... "do not be anxious about anything but in everything, ... present your requests to God and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds."

In our demanding, stressful, sometimes painful world remember that you have resources that can help. Our biggest resource is our faith. I encourage you to practice your faith by bring to God any worries, anxieties, negative thoughts and giving them over to God. And make your requests know to God for the good things in your life that you and your family needs. I encourage you to change and improve the world you live in by first changing your mind patterns with positive faith. It worked for Paul and it can work for me and you.

# Book Reviews



## The Wartime Sermons of Dr. Peter Marshall

Edited by Rev. Peter J. Marshall; Dallas: Clarion Call Marketing, Inc., 2005

While our nation fought alongside the Allied powers in World War II to preserve our freedom and our way of life against the Axis global domination spread by Hitler's Germany and Imperial Japan, many Americans sought and found spiritual comfort in the sermons of the Rev. Dr. Peter Marshall.

Dr. Marshall was a Scottish-born immigrant who came to the U.S. in 1926, and who became known as one of America's greatest preachers both in and since his time. Marshall was called as pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. in 1937 and was twice appointed as U.S. Senate Chaplain, serving from January 4, 1947 until his sudden death by heart failure about two years later at the age of 46.

During the 1940s, Marshall preached with such vivid appeal to the senses, souls and spiritual sensibilities of his audiences, that his hearers often testified that they were inspired to greater faith and patriotism by his evocative orations.

This collection comprises twelve wartime sermons and seven wartime prayers. The reviewer discerns two themes in the collection of sermons. There are sermons preached upon occasions where Marshall addressed his hearers as individuals with a simple, straightforward, evangelical Christian message concerning the necessity and sufficiency of personal faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior, through whom sinners might be forgiven and enter eternal life.

Most notable among these is his sermon "Rendezvous in Samarra" preached on December 7, 1941, to the Protestant chapel congregation of the United States Naval Academy.

Ironically, Marshall was moved to preach this "call" to the Annapolis midshipmen to confront their mortality in the light of eternity before anyone on the U.S. mainland was aware that the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii had been viciously decimated in a sneak attack by Japan that same day. (This treacherous aerial assault led America, of course, to declare war against Japan and Germany and to enter into World War II on the side of our allies).

Marshall's Navy congregation of midshipmen would soon be in the Pacific and Atlantic theaters, locked in this death-struggle. And remarkably, some of his Annapolis congregation would survive to tell how this sermon gave them the opportunity to prepare to meet their God.

Conversely, there are also sermons in this collection in which Marshall also seems to address the United States as a divinely covenanted nation uniquely blessed by God. As such, He issues to this avowedly Christian nation a generally moralistic, patriotic call to repentance, to prayer, and to a life of good works. All this is good. But in this second category of sermons he issues this "call" with apparently few references to the person of Jesus of Nazareth or quotations about Jesus' life, death and resurrection contained in the New Testament Gospels and Epistles, and recounted in his other sermons as mentioned above. Such sermons that appear to fall into this second general category include: "Why should God bless America?" (September 15, 1940)



“Our Covenant Nation” (November 9, 1947).  
“Are we good enough?” (April 22, 1945)

Were there no other evidence, one might be tempted speculate that it was to a more religiously diverse audience in the Senate that these latter moral and patriotic sermons of a less evangelical nature were preached. But this is not the case.

All but two of the collected sermons are identified by the editor, Marshall’s son, as having been preached at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, and reportedly not to the United States Senate or at any of the United States military service academies. So we cannot cogently read back into the history of Marshall’s preaching a distinction that he made between occasions when more distinctly denominational sermons were preached at his church, and more generic patriotic sermons preached to governmental audiences.

One might also argue that the reviewer’s twofold characterization of Marshall’s sermons is unfair, since the collection only represents a sample of his work. It is however, a sample selected by Marshall’s own son, also an ordained Presbyterian minister like his father, who chose

sermons that had, by attested popular demand, become increasingly sought after in the years following Marshall’s death.

Regardless of such distinctions, Marshall’s preached words clearly struck a chord and resonated with the religion and patriotism of his generation in America. As world-renowned journalist Walter Cronkite later observed, “Following World War II, Dr. Peter Marshall was more than Chaplain of the Senate. He was Chaplain of America. His words are a chilling reminder that the wartime sermons are fully applicable today.” (<http://petermarshallministries.com>)

If one wants to read sermons whose vivid imagery, winsome illustration, and compelling logic were attested to have captured the imagination of hundreds in our nation’s capitol and across the USA during World War II, then consider studying this collection of Marshall’s work.

With our nation once again at war, these sermons, first preached more than fifty years ago, address issues of God and country, faith and freedom that need to be addressed as well by faithful preachers to our generation.



Chaplain (COL) Chris Wisdom serves as the Deputy Commandant of the U.S. Army Chaplains Center and School

# Book Reviews



... Continued

## The Will of God

By Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead  
Abingdon Press, 1972

The ‘Will of God’ is a set of five sermons written by the late Dr. Leslie Weatherhead. How often has a minister had to answer the question: ‘Was it the will of God that my child should die?’ I don’t know of any school that equips one to answer that question and speak to the depth of suffering that surrounds it. Dr. Weatherhead, while serving as the pastor of the City Temple in London, had this question posed to him as the bombs of German aircraft rained down on the city. Children died as often as Soldiers. He has given us, in a short 86 pages, a glimpse into the very ‘heart of God,’ a God who cares so very deeply for all of His creation.

Chapter One deals with what Weatherhead calls: ‘God’s Intentional Will.’ He begins by stating that most use the words ‘the will of God’ too loosely. He gives real life examples of how people of faith have failed to think about what those words mean. These examples are still valid, some 58 years after the original writing. He clearly calls upon Matthew’s Gospel (18:14 – NIV): ‘In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.’

After making the point that God cares for the least of these, Weatherhead deals with ‘God’s Circumstantial Will.’ (Chapter Two) How can a truly loving God allow this to happen? Weatherhead weaves a tapestry of stories of how the circumstances of life (some often tragic) can reveal God’s intentional will to us. We live in a ‘broken world’ and because we do, suffering and death are as much a part of life as birth. But

not allowing this to be just a pleasant platitude, Weatherhead again tells ‘real life’ stories to which every person can relate. Reaching back to the first sermon and projecting to the next, he artfully weaves scriptural references that insure us that our questioning, born of grief, is far from being a ‘lack of faith,’ but rather the surest steps of faith.

Chapter Three, ‘God’s Ultimate Will,’ shows us that even though 10,000 events happen that God did not intend, His ultimate will lets His children know that nothing can happen that can finally defeat His plan. Weatherhead clearly warns that a simple ‘glib answer’ cannot speak to the unbelievable pain a spouse or parent is feeling. Think how those first disciples must have felt on Good Friday? The deepest gloom surrounded their lives – but ultimately, they realized they were wrong and that God made use of evil!

All of these ideals sound good ... BUT ... how does one ‘Discern the Will of God?’ Chapter Four cuts to the chase and gives very clear guidance on how the average believer can go about this seemingly impossible task. Is this really God’s will? And if it is, ‘how can I know it?’ a hard task for even the most knowledgeable theologian. He gives six ways that one might discern God’s will, but warns of seeing these as ‘sure fire’ steps that will work for all people in all circumstances. They are (in the mind of this reviewer) solid ways that each of us can use as a disciplined way of ‘Discerning the Will of God’ for our lives.

Chapter Five is a pastoral letter to each of us to seek the ‘Will of God’ and in doing so, we will find the peace that eludes so many. ‘In His Will is Our Peace,’ is surely a fitting ending for those who are seeking. “The Will of God” is not

a treatise written in the office of a man separated from the suffering, but is rather a series of sermons written to those he suffers with. These five short sermons were written during a time of war. World War II engulfed the 'whole' world and literally took millions of lives, both combatants and non-combatants ... the greatest example of man's inhumanity to man! Yet an example that can and does speak to our condition 68 years later with the truth of the ages.

I highly recommend that this book can provide healing to those who suffer and provide needed words to those who seek to minister to those who have lost loved ones and ask the question: 'Why?'



Chaplain (COL) Samuel J.T. Boone, retired, was most recently Commandant of the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School.

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# Editor's Notes

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If you are reading this, by now you have probably at least scanned through this latest issue of our Chaplaincy regimental professional bulletin, The Army Chaplaincy.

I'd like to thank all of the authors who contributed to this issue on Ministries of Sacred Speech that Keep Army Communities Strong. Without contributors' submissions on this worthy subject, there would have been no publication. For this issue, special thanks goes to Chaplain (COL) Ken Bush, Director of Training and Leader Development at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, who wrote "Giving Voice to the Sacred" for this issue, and provided subject matter expert leadership on the subject of sacred speech. Next, I want to thank the USACHCS publications committee and our new Managing Editor Ms. Julia Simpkins, whose tireless hours of careful reading and review for this issue have provided stalwart support to its successful publication. Finally, I want to thank you for taking the time to read these messages and articles that have kept and will help keep Army communities strong.

Submissions for the next issue should be on the theme of "Military Ethics and Moral Leadership". All articles submitted for consideration should be sent in Microsoft Word format (with no page breaks) to [julia.simpkins@us.army.mil](mailto:julia.simpkins@us.army.mil). When submitting art, photos, charts and graphs with the article, please be sure to submit them separately and not embedded in the document.

All submissions should also include: each author's name, postal mailing address and phone number, email address, followed by a short biography (including your current position). Also, please include a high-resolution official military photograph in JPEG format to place at the end of the article with your bio (It is the policy of "The Army Chaplaincy" not to send notification letters regarding the selection or non-selection of submissions).

When submitting book reviews, keep in mind that the book needs to have been published within the past two years. Book reviews are usually 200 to 250 words in length, but depending on the subject, can be longer. Provide the full title of the book, the author or editor, publisher, date, hardcover or paperback and number of pages. Reviewers should include their full name, mailing address, email, phone and where assigned or located. Please check previous issues for book review format or contact Julia Simpkins at [julia.simpkins@us.army.mil](mailto:julia.simpkins@us.army.mil).

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