

Beyond Hacksaw Ridge:



An

ORDER

of

BATTLE



BEYOND HACKSAW RIDGE: AN ORDER OF BATTLE

By Dick Stenbakken

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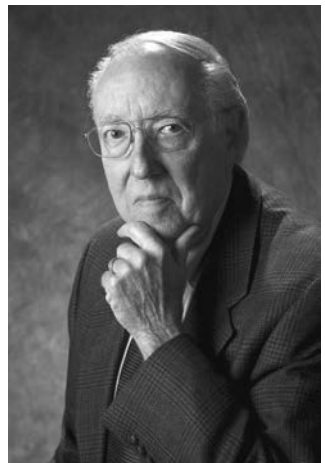
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Drawing on his experience as an Army veteran, Richard Stenbakken has woven together a series of military vignettes illustrating the need for Christ as our Commander, and designed to equip us for a life of service in the Kingdom. This booklet challenges us to take a stronger grip on our faith, and to prayerfully press forward into the spiritual battle we encounter daily.

About the Author

Retired Army Chaplain (Colonel) Richard Stenbakken's background includes a B.A. in religion; masters degrees in New Testament studies, theology, philosophy, family therapy, and education; and a doctorate in education. He has served as a local pastor, a family therapist, and worldwide director of Chaplaincy Ministries. He is best known for bringing the Bible to life in his carefully researched portrayals of biblical characters. He lives at the foot of the majestic Rocky Mountains in Loveland, Colorado, with his wife, Ardis. Sample presentations and more information can be found on his web site: www.BibleFaces.com





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Desmond T. Doss receives the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman.





“MEDIC! HELP ME!”

Private Desmond Doss was not a big guy. In fact, his nickname was “Cornstalk.” However, Doss was a giant when the chips were down. He was a man of prayer who was initially mocked by his unit for his spirituality. His faith had prompted him to join the army as a noncombatant. He was willing to go to war, but he was unwilling to carry a weapon or take life. He wanted to save life—even the life of an enemy. Many thought him to be a coward or crazy or both.

That changed dramatically when his fellow soldiers saw how the prayers of one person impacted the lives of the whole unit. Doss had already been awarded two Bronze Stars for valor as a combat medic in Guam and Leyte, but events on Okinawa would overshadow what he had done before.

On April 30, 1945, Doss crawled within 15 feet of an enemy machine gun to rescue five men from his unit. On May 5, his unit stormed to the top of the Maeda Escarpment. The sheer 40 foot drop allowed only one way to the top: rope nets. Once at the top, the unit was hit by an overwhelming Japanese force determined not to give up one square inch of ground. The massive barrage of gunfire, grenades, and fanatical charges with hand-to-hand combat was a gruesome, living hell.

Vastly outnumbered, the U. S. commanders ordered a hasty retreat off the top of the hill, but there were nearly 100 wounded American troops stranded on the battlefield. That is when Doss, the man without a weapon,

ran back into the carnage to give aid to the wounded.

Doss worked tirelessly providing medical care to soldiers, including injured Japanese troops. Under constant fire, he never wavered, never slowed down, and never quit praying. He prayed, “Dear Lord, help me get one more, one more!”

Moving the wounded to the edge of the 40 foot drop, he wondered how he could get them off the cliff to safety. He was alone. There was no one to help. Or was there? Doss prayed for wisdom and strength. As he did, he saw a rope, and immediately went to work forming a sling that would support the wounded as he single-handedly lowered them to safety using a tree to belay the rope sling. The wounded who were waiting to be lowered kept firing at the Japanese troops who were trying to advance and cut off escape.

At the end of the day, Doss had rescued over 75 men who would have certainly died had he not risked his life to drag them from the carnage and lower them to safety. For his heroic actions, Desmond Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. It was the first time the award was ever given to a noncombatant.

The next day orders were given to go back to the top and attack again. By this time, Doss was the only medic in the unit who could accompany the men. They had such high regard for their praying medic that they would not go into battle until Desmond Doss finished

praying for them. The word was out. Prayer makes a difference.

Prayer, the Key

Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote: “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

Abraham Lincoln saw the need and power of prayer when he reflected, “I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.”

Prayer makes a difference here and now, just like it did for Desmond Doss on the top of that burning hill of hell and death in 1945. Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about prayer.

Desmond Doss had committed his life to God and to serving others. Part of his commitment was a pattern of frequent prayer. Psalm 91:1 points out that, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” In verses 14 and 15, the psalmist continues, “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.” Not only was Doss rescued, but he rescued others and as a result was awarded the nation’s highest honor.

Isaiah expands the concept. “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24). Think about it: There was just the right rope in just the right place at just the right time, all this before Desmond Doss knew he needed it.

God does not need to be bribed, placated, or cajoled to answer prayer. He is willing and able to answer, and to put things in place

before they are needed. But we need to ask, we need to pray. In order to do that we must realize our need and God’s strength, and then connect with Him through prayer.

Jesus said it clearly in Matthew 7:7, 8: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.” Notice that those invitations are all active, not passive. God often waits for our invitation before acting in our behalf, in order to deepen our faith and our relationship with Him.

That does not mean that God is like Santa, willy-nilly willing to fulfill our “gimmie” list. In His wisdom there are times when He elects to not give us what we ask for. Remember Jonah, the prophet who got swallowed up? He prayed, “Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3). Looking back, Jonah probably agreed that it was good that God did not answer that prayer affirmatively. God’s wisdom is beyond ours, and trusting Him to answer in our best interest is wise. It has been said that all prayers are answered: some with “Yes,” some with “No,” and some with “Wait.”

For What Should We Pray?

So, what can we pray about or pray for? James 1:5, 6 gives a clue. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.” Remember Doss’ prayer, “Dear Lord, help me get one more, one more!” Doss got way more than just “one more.”

When Nehemiah got devastating news from the destroyed Jerusalem of his childhood, the Bible says that he wept, mourned,

and fasted. The news upset him greatly, but he did not become paralyzed by his grief. Nehemiah 1:4 says that he, “prayed before the God of heaven.”

In chapter 2, he relates how when the king asked him what he wanted, he knew full well that asking for the wrong thing, or even asking in the wrong way, could cost him not only his job, but his life. So, “then I prayed to the God of heaven.” Then Nehemiah was able to respond wisely and receive what he needed to accomplish what others thought impossible. Throughout the rest of Nehemiah’s book it is clear that he was a man of continual prayer, and had stunning success as a result.

James asks, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray... Is anyone among you sick... pray over him... The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:13–16). Everyone in Desmond Doss’ unit would say a hearty “Amen!” to that, especially the men who would have lost their lives had it not been for their medic’s intervention and his prayer on their behalf.

Jesus, Man of Prayer

Jesus prayed early in the morning (Mark 1:35); He prayed when He blessed the boy’s little lunch of bread and fish that then fed 5,000 (Matthew 14:19); He prayed when the crowd wanted to crown Him king (John 6:15); He prayed for strength to face His death on the cross (Matthew 26:36–44); He prayed for the people who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34); He was a Man of prayer. He even gave us a model prayer in Matthew 6: 9–13: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day

our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Throughout the Bible and history, people of prayer have been able to do mighty things. It is no different today. Prayer is like a key that opens the wisdom and power of a loving, caring God, to whom we may pour out our fears, hurts, and needs. Prayer is like talking to God like we would talk to a Friend; and He is our Friend.

You are invited to pray this prayer:

Dear God, I may not face the horrors of combat, but my life has challenges, hurts, and needs. I pray for Your wisdom, Your healing, and most of all Your presence in my life right now and into the future. I want Your presence and peace in my life so You can work Your wonders in and through me. Bless me that I might be a blessing to those around me. In Jesus’ name, amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- What do I need to pray about, or for, right now?
- Who needs my prayer support?
- Here is a list of things I want to thank God for in prayer:

- Whom will I pray with or for today?



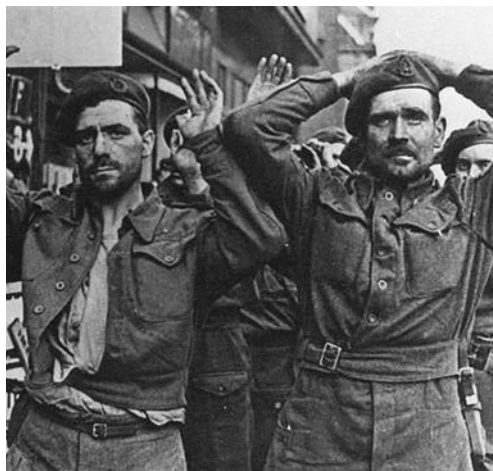
THE MONOPOLY SET

It looked like just another Monopoly set, something to use to take up time in the prisoner of war (POW) camp. But it was not just another Monopoly set. It was vastly different. It held the keys to freedom and escape from being a POW for those who knew how to use what the Monopoly set contained.

In the early 1940s, thousands of Allied troops were in enemy POW camps, and a plan was devised by MI9, the British secret service group responsible for devising ways for prisoners to escape. They came up with an ingenious plan: Monopoly sets produced by the Waddington company were made with a small compass in one of the playing pieces, a two-piece metal file in another playing piece, and real German, Austrian, and Italian money included in the stack of Monopoly money. Silk maps were placed under the paper surface of the playing board. Silk was silent when opened and closed, easily hidden, and durable in all kinds of weather.

A “printing error” on the Monopoly box cover indicated that this set was special! It was not your ordinary board game. The “get out of jail free” corner section on the board took on a whole new meaning for those who knew what was in the board game. It is estimated that thousands of soldiers and airmen used the materials to obtain their freedom.

To the unknowing, it was just another board game. To the knowing, it was a key that took them from being a Prisoner of War to freedom and going home.



★ *British POWs at Arnhem Bridge.* ★

The same is true of the Bible. To some, it seems to be “just another book.” But, like the special Monopoly set, if you know how to use what is in the Bible, it can help you escape from being a POW—Prisoner Of this World. The Bible can help give a better life and freedom here and now, and can provide a map to eternal deliverance and going home with God.

Freedom for POWs

Imagine that you are a POW looking for a way to get out of the situation you are in, longing for something better than being a POW, and suddenly you are given a Monopoly game from an organization back home. It might be very tempting to discount the gift with thoughts like, “This is no help to me! I have no time for this silliness!” Then, you dimly recall

something you heard in the past about the “special Monopoly sets.” Would you be willing to explore and see what was in the box? The answer is rather obvious.

You are invited to look more deeply into the Bible: what it is, how we got it, and how it can help move people from being a POW (Prisoner Of this World) to an abiding, rewarding freedom. And yet there are tools, directional signals, and maps to show the way home.

First, some vital facts: While Monopoly was introduced in 1934, the first book of the Bible (Job) was written around 1400 B.C. and the last book (Revelation) was written about A.D. 90. The Bible consists of 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with a few short passages in Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Greek. About 40 different people helped write the Bible, all of them under Divine direction, with the result of one cohesive message: God wants you to come home to Him and not be a POW.

The Bible tells us about what it is. Here is a look: Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” If you want to escape your POW status, you need guidance, direction, and the ability to move with confidence. The Bible helps that become possible.

So, how did the Bible come into being anyhow? Paul, the great Apostle, wrote to a young man about finding his way in life. In 2 Timothy 3:15–17 he tells Timothy, “You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable

for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The picture here is of the gentle wind that fills a sail to move the ship over the water. Essentially, the Bible is inspired, directed, and prompted by God, using people who move like a ship under sail with His message to us. Note that there are specific uses for the information, too.

Our Blueprint

In 2 Peter 1:20, 21, Peter echoes what Paul said, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Just like the POW Monopoly sets, the Bible was given with a plan and a purpose. It did not just happen. It was designed and deliberate, and God had His power involved in forming the Bible.

Jesus, when talking to the religious leaders of His day, chided them because they represented themselves as Scripture scholars; yet He said of them, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

So, it’s not just about reading or studying the Scriptures; there is much more to it. The Bible is intended to lead to an understanding of and relationship with Jesus. Unless that happens, it is only information.

After the crucifixion and resurrection, Luke records the story of two disciples who just could not believe that Jesus had died. Unrecognized by them, Jesus joined them on the path. Luke 24:27 records, “Beginning

PHOTO: PAUL O'KEEFE



at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

So, Jesus used the Old Testament to tell about who He was and what His mission was. The Bible became His resource to teach His disciples—and us, too—about Himself.

In verse 44 of Luke 24, Jesus clarified this when He said, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”

The three segments Jesus mentioned were affirming that the entire Old Testament points to Him and God’s plan of salvation through Him.

As part of His teaching, Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Just like the special Monopoly set containing information and materials to free POWs, the entire Bible tells about Jesus and how He sets people free here and now, and forever. But with the Bible, like with the Monopoly

set, knowing about it is very different than getting into it and using the materials and information that bring true and lasting freedom.

Jesus said in John 8:36: “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” That is the good news the Bible has to give. Will you accept the freedom God offers from being a POW (Prisoner Of the World)?

You are invited to close with the following prayer:

Thank you Father God for the Bible and the good news of Jesus and how much You love me. I give myself to You as Your disciple. Help me learn more about You every day so I can be truly and forever free. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- What are some of your favorite Bible stories? Why?
- What are some ways to study the Bible that you find helpful?
- List some of your favorite Bible passages, and relate why they are favorites.

- What is your Bible study plan?



WHY IS THERE WAR?

By 8:45 a.m. on the morning of September 11, 2001, more than 14,000 people had reported for their jobs at the World Trade Center towers in New York City. But the day was to be anything but routine. At 8:46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11, which had departed from Boston bound for Los Angeles, slammed into the North Tower in a ball of flame and destruction. Sixteen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower.

At 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77 rammed into the Pentagon. At about the same time, passengers on United Airlines Flight 93 got word of the other hijacked aircraft and the tragic events, so they stormed the flight deck, and that plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 10:07 a.m.

Both towers collapsed in less than two hours. The death toll was 2,996 killed; over 6,000 were injured, and there was more than \$10 billion in property damage. As a result of the dust and contaminants, people are still suffering serious health problems.

The immediate question is “Why? Why did this happen?” The answer is complex, but also simple. Hate drove the entire process. Hate, revenge, and a lust for power have driven most of this world’s wars on national levels, as well as at personal and internal levels.

The wars, hate, disputes, and destruction we experience today—here and now—are a sample of a much larger war, a cosmic great controversy between God and Satan, warfare between good and evil.

It did not take long for the United States to respond to the warfare of September 11. At 8:32 a.m. fighter jets took off from a base in Massachusetts. Others took off from Virginia at 9:30 a.m. At 9:42 a.m. all flights inbound to the U.S. from overseas were ordered to land in either Canada or Mexico. All flights in the U.S. were to immediately land at the nearest airport. By 10:30 a.m. the vice president had ordered fighters to shoot down any aircraft deemed to be on a suicide mission.

There were immediate and long lasting responses to what happened that day. The Department of Homeland Security is one result.

Another War

God responded with a plan to the warfare in heaven, too. He did not shrug it off; there was a planned response, and concrete steps taken to win the battle.

The painful reality is that we, like the people in the towers that day, can’t just opt out of the warfare. We are, and will be, on a battlefield as long as the struggle between God and Satan continues. It only makes sense to be informed about what we face.

The real shocker about war is where war started. Revelation 12:7–9 makes the answer very clear: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil

and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

But, more than history, the text also reveals just who has power to throw Satan out. Don't miss that part! Keeping this in mind is key to the resolution of the cosmic conflict.

Satan has an ego problem. He wants to confront God and, according to Isaiah 14:12–14, Satan has fallen from heaven because he said, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the Most High.”



The struggle is clear: God is the Supreme Ruler of the universe, but Satan wants that title, and he is more than willing to fight for the title and the power that goes with it. Satan, when tricking Eve, told her, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will

be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

Not only was Satan willing to rebel against God, but he wanted all creation to join his egotistical war as well. Part of what Satan said was true. Eve, and we too, now know the face of evil. But there is the other side of the coin: good. That is the essence of the cosmic controversy: Which side of the coin will we choose?

None of this caught God by surprise. He had a plan before there was a need. John recorded it in Revelation 13:8 when he makes reference to the Book of Life “of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Jesus says in Matthew 25:31–34 that when He returns to this earth as Judge, He will separate the people. “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

But Satan does not give up easily. As he tempted Eve, he also tempted Jesus. In Matthew 4:8–10 we see Satan offering Jesus a “shortcut” and a way out of reclaiming the earth and a way of escaping the crucifixion: “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’”

There it is again, that twisted massive ego that wants to be above God. It's an ongoing declaration of war.

In John 14:30 Jesus called Satan “the ruler of this world.” That gives us a clear picture of Satan's grasp, and of our problem. But the good news is that Jesus, while recognizing Satan's false claim to power, “has no hold on me.” Indeed, the good news is that John 16:11 says

that although Satan wants to be victorious, “the ruler of this world is judged [condemned].”

There is more good news! Revelation chapter 20 wraps it up and tells us about the end of the war between God and Satan. Look especially at Revelation 20:9. “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.” The enemy is not just pushed back or defeated. He is utterly, completely destroyed.

In Revelation 21:4, 5 the promise is given that God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”

And with that, the controversy, the wars, death, destruction, and Satan himself are done. The King of the universe has settled the conflict. It is not a truce; it is a 100% victory for God and those who serve Him. Sin, sinners, and Satan are done. Gone. Destroyed. Wars are forever ended.

Alternate Ticket

The enemy has been defeated, the outcome is sure, but the battles are not yet done. We are still caught up in the cosmic controversy. We

still face the brutality of the conflict at international as well as individual levels. The good news is that we know the final outcome, and we get to choose sides.

If you knew, before boarding one of those suicide mission planes on September 11, that your plane would crash and kill everyone on board, would you still get on the plane, or would you want to switch to a different flight? Pretty obvious choice, isn't it? The reality is that Satan and his suicide crew will “crash and burn” at the end of his rebellious war. But there is an alternate ticket already reserved and paid for. It is yours for the taking. It is your choice, right here, right now.

Pray this prayer as you make your choice:

God, I want to be part of Your victorious followers. I choose You as my Commander in the battles of life. Give me Your strength to be victorious today and every day. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- What are the battles you face right now? Who can help you? When will you ask?
- How can you help someone you know with their battles? What is your plan to do so?
- Recall a time when you know God helped you out in a struggle/situation.



FOUR FAITHFUL CHAPLAINS

On January 23, 1943, the troop ship *Dorchester* joined a convoy of 50 ships and headed out to sea. The 902 military and civilian personnel on board had no idea where they were headed. Only the ship's captain, Hans Danielson, knew that they would split from the large group and head for the *Bluie West One* base on the edge of Greenland. On board, 171 of the civilian passengers were charged with extending the airfield in Greenland and increasing the radio transmissions for that part of the frigid North Atlantic.

Originally, the *Dorchester* was a cruise ship used up and down the East Coast, carrying about 300 passengers on pleasure jaunts. Now, with over 900 on board, it was crowded and stuffy below decks but frigid and icy outside. The crowding caused everyone to be concerned and uncomfortable.

Aboard the *Dorchester* were four Army chaplains. John Washington was a Catholic priest; George Fox was a Methodist; Alexander Goode was a rabbi; and Clark Poling was a Reformed Church minister. Although they came from different backgrounds, they worked together to build the morale of all on board the ship.

On the 2nd of February, an escort ship signaled that the small convoy of four ships that had split away from the main convoy was being shadowed by a German submarine. This caused even more concern, and the hope that if they got closer to Greenland the submarine would back away due to sub hunter

flights from *Bluie West One*. Just before 1:00 a.m. on February 3, the submarine unleashed a torpedo attack on the *Dorchester*. As the ship was sinking, the four chaplains began to help the troops put on life vests from lockers on deck. To the chaplains' shock, they saw that the lockers were soon empty. There were no more life vests, but many souls who needed them.

Immediately the chaplains took off their vests and put them on others. As the ship was sinking into the icy waters, survivors saw the four chaplains with arms linked together at the rail, singing and praying for those in the water.

Of the 902 on board, only 241 survived. The lives of 661 were lost, among them the four chaplains who chose to give their lives so that four others might live.

A Life Vest

Just like the troops on the *Dorchester*, we are in a life or death situation. Not because of an enemy torpedo, but because of something much more destructive. That something is called sin, and it leads to death unless there is a life vest that will lift us out of the swirling, drowning, clutches of death. And there is good news! That deliverance is available, and it is just for the asking! Let's take a look.

The Bible gives a pretty clear definition of sin. Check what John says in 1 John 3:4: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Wow. That's pretty specific! And yet it is more than an act; sin



is an attitude, an attitude that has the echo of an old Frank Sinatra song, “I’ll do it my way!” The point-blank reality is we are all guilty. (See Romans 3:23.)

It all started in the Garden of Eden, when both Adam and Eve decided to do things their way rather than God’s way. The result? Look at Genesis 3:9, 10: “Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ So he [Adam] said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”

Sin ruptures all relationships: between us and God, between people, between nations. It is the root of wars both internationally and within us individually. The rugged reality is that we are all on a battlefield. Just like the people on the *Dorchester*, we may not have chosen to be in battle, but we are, so we need to deal with the reality if we are to survive.

So, is there hope? Is there a “life vest” to keep us from going down?

A Declaration of War

Thank God, He provided the answer as a promise to Adam and Eve (and to us as well) in Genesis 3:15 when He said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

This is a clear declaration of war between God and the devil, a great controversy that rages through time. We see that warfare all around us today: Good against Evil. The reality is that sin would bring pain to God (strike His heel) but would bring death to the Devil (crush his head). It is both a warning and a promise: a warning about what the results of sin are: pain and death, but also a promise of crushing sin forever.

Look at the contrast as Paul points it out in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The good news is that we are *not* God’s enemies. We are His friends, and He wants desperately to save us from eternal death. In fact, Jesus put it this way in John 15:13, 14, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command.”

There it is: the issue of attitude. “I’ll do it my way,” or I will do it His way. One way leads to eternal loss, the other to eternal life.

Jesus offers us freedom from the results of sin. At the last supper with His disciples, it is recorded in Matthew 26:27–29 that, “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the remission of sins.’” Then He goes on to make a promise that He will drink it anew with us in His Father’s kingdom.

Paul summarized it clearly in Romans 3:22–24 when he said, “This righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

So, there is the “eternal life vest” being offered to us while our personal Dorchester is sinking. Just as the four chaplains gave up their lives that four more might live, Jesus gave up His life that we all could live. If you were on the Dorchester back in WWII and were given the opportunity to receive a life vest, would you have taken it gladly, or refused it and chosen certain death? It’s not WWII now, but our world is sinking. What will your choice be?

The Apostle John lays it out pretty clearly in 1 John 1:8–10. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

Like solving any problem, the first step is to realize that there is a problem: We are all sinners. The next step is to take personal responsibility: I am a sinner. After that comes confessing that to God and asking His forgiveness. He will freely give us forgiveness. Then, when we accept His forgiveness, we need to put His nature into our lives and daily sing, “I’ll do it *His* way!”

If that’s your choice, for either the first time or as a renewed commitment, prayerfully read and pray the following:

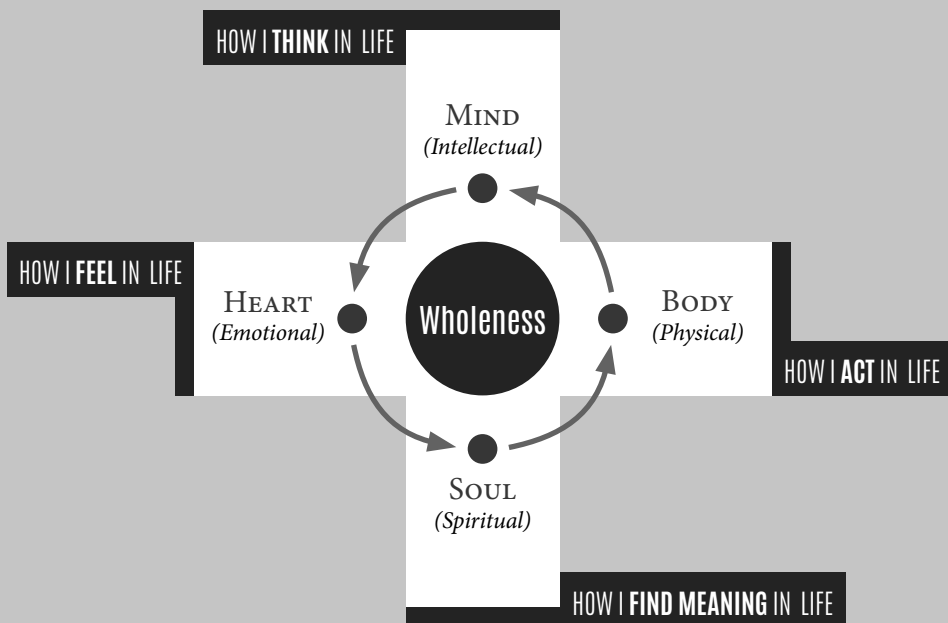
Lord, I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. I confess to You that I need Your free gifts of grace and forgiveness. I accept Your offer of salvation, and in appreciation for what You have done, I want to live every day according to Your will. Hear my prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- When did someone help you when you were in deep trouble? What was the issue?
- Who helped you, and what did they do to help you?
- What are your feelings about the person(s) who helped you? How does that relate to what Jesus has done for you?

The Spiritually Integrated Life

based on the original chart by Chaplain (Colonel) Jonathan McGraw



HOW TO FOCUS A SPIRITUAL LIFE

- 1. Stillness**
 - › Have 2 to 20 minutes of silent reflection with God at start and end of each day
- 2. Conversations with God**
 - › Talk with God for brief moments throughout day (60 sec. at 10 a.m., 2 p.m., 4 p.m.)
- 3. Acts of Service**
 - › Show love, care, and faith to those whom your life touches
- 4. Sacred Scripture**
 - › Read and reflect on Sacred Writings 20 minutes weekly, or daily if possible
- 5. Spiritual Friends**
 - › Seek friends to encourage, challenge, relate to, and grow in faith

“True silence is ... to the Spirit what sleep is to the body: nourishment and refreshment.”

—WILLIAM PENN—



THE REVERSE PARACHUTE

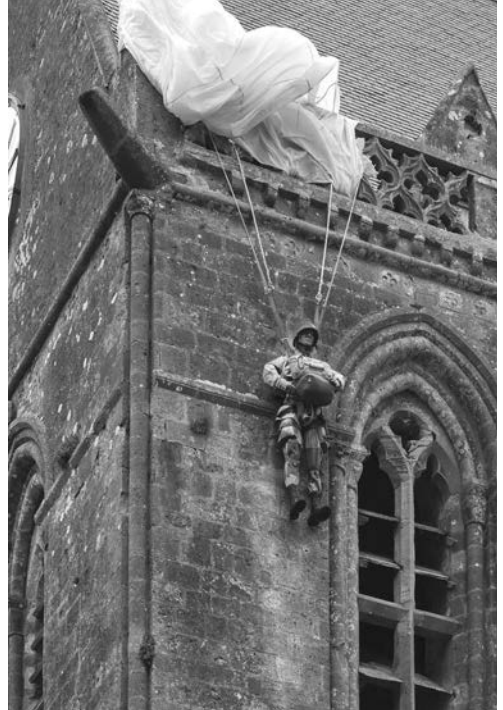
It was pitch dark in the rocking plane as paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne hooked up their static lines in preparation for jumping into France as D-Day began. The cold air whipped around Private John Steele, a 32-year-old from Metropolis, Illinois, as he exited the plane with his unit. The jerk from his parachute was a welcome feeling because it meant that the chute was fully open allowing him to drift silently to the ground. That was good, indeed.

But what he saw beneath him was far from good. It was bad. *Very* bad! The village of Sainte-Mère-Église was burning from an earlier bombing, and even though it was just after midnight on June 6, 1944, the whole town was out with bucket brigades fighting the fires. Not only were the townspeople out, but the German military stationed in the village were out in force too!

As the paratroopers were drifting down, the Germans saw them coming and opened fire on the helpless soldiers descending in their parachutes. It was like shooting ducks in a barrel. Those who were not killed descending were quickly killed when they hit the ground.

Private Steele did all he could, which was very little, to steer his parachute to a dark area of the town. Suddenly the village church loomed below him. His parachute caught on one of the spires, slamming him into the tall tower wall. He was wounded. He was stuck. He was helpless. All he could do was hang there and play dead as he watched the carnage

below him unfold, and as he watched his buddies die.



★ *Commemorative effigy of Private Steele at the village church in Sainte-Mère-Église.* ★

After two hours of physical and emotional agony, the German soldiers cut him down and took him as a prisoner of war. He was one of the few in his unit that survived that night.

Our Parachute

What a mess! What carnage and terror Private Steele experienced. But, what if there

was something that, unlike the parachute that dropped him into the battle, could have pulled him up *out* of the battle?

In many ways, we all experience the ravages of hate, hurt, death, and destruction all around us today. We, too, are in a battle—the battle between good and evil—and we, like Private Steele, would love to be lifted out of the carnage rather than be swallowed by it.

The Bible says there is a way to escape the war we are in. Let's take a look at what the Bible says about our escape process. It is worth knowing!

Look at John 14:1–3: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself.”

There it is! The answer to all chaos! Jesus has promised that He will come back for us. He will not leave us “hanging” helpless in this battlefield called Earth. He will come again, and that is great news.

The question is, “How will He come?” His followers, the disciples, were confused about Jesus' return (confusion is the norm in battle), so He helped them, and us, know.

Look at Matthew 24:1–35. The disciples wanted to know about the destruction of Jerusalem and the start of Jesus' reign on Earth. His answers shared important information on both events. Verses 6 and 7 warn them that they would hear of “war and rumors of war, that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.” There would be lots of other troubles too.

Sounds like a continuation of Sainte-Mère-Église and more doesn't it?

Even though there is warfare going on, there is a strong promise and prophecy in Jesus' message to the disciples and us: Matthew 24:14 says that when the gospel (the good news about Jesus) is shared with the whole world, “then the end will come.” Did you catch that? It will be so. There is no maybe, might, or perhaps. It will be so. That is good news for all of us who are hung up by our parachutes, watching things deteriorate around us.

It will be something to behold, and Jesus says in verse 30, “They will see the Son of Man [a title He used for Himself often] coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Just like when nations hold ceremonies to mark the end of an earthly war, the conquering Jesus will have witnesses too. John tells us in Revelation 1:7, “He is coming with clouds, and every eye shall see Him.” This is no quiet secret. It is the Winner of the cosmic war coming back to claim victory and to claim His own people.

The angels told the disciples how Jesus would come back for them. “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Now, that is exciting! The conquering Commander of the universe is coming back, in person, to deliver us from the battles of life.

The Final Victory

But like we have all heard on TV—“Wait, there's more!” It even gets better. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 says He will return: “With the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (Verse 16). Paul continues in verse 17, “Then we who are alive . . . shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet



the Lord in the air . . . and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

There it is! He is the power that takes us up, out of the battle, out of the grave, away from the warfare and carnage of sin and destruction. That is way better than the fate of the paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne who jumped into the battle.

The Second Coming of Jesus marks another spectacular victory. 1 Corinthians 15:20–26 tells us, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” The final victory is announced in verse 26: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Look at Paul’s “General Orders” for battle weary troops in 1 Corinthians 15:30–38. What promises do you see here that bring you hope? So, as weary soldiers on the battlefield of life, we are looking forward to being raised above the carnage of this world. That will happen when our Supreme Commander, Jesus Christ, returns in glory to take us home. John says it well in the closing lines of the

book of Revelation, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

You are invited to close this study with the following prayer:

Lord, Jesus, thank You for being my Commander, my Savior, my King. I give You my life today, and ask You to help me be ready and eager for Your Second Coming to deliver us from evil and to take us home with You forever. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- What has been the best reunion you have ever experienced? What was it like?
- What do you think it will be like at the the Great Reunion when Jesus comes back to earth?
- Who do you want to greet at that reunion?
- What are you doing to get ready for that reunion?



KNOW YOUR COMMANDER

It was bitter cold, and the situation was serious. Members of the 101st Airborne Division, assisted by members of the all African-American 996th Artillery Battalion and a portion of the 10th Armored Division, were hunkered down near and in Bastogne. They were critically short of ammunition and other supplies. Making matters worse, they were surrounded by German troops.

At about 11:30 a.m., forward U.S. troops saw four German soldiers approaching their position carrying a white flag. When the Germans were challenged by the guards, they replied that they had a message from the German commander that they were instructed to hand deliver to the American commander. The Germans brought blindfolds with them and said they would be willing to be blindfolded as they were taken to the U.S. commander.

After a short consultation, two Germans were blindfolded and taken to the American command post where their request was forwarded through several command layers to Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe, the assistant commander of the 101st Division. McAuliffe read the message from the German commander. In part, it said:

“To the U.S.A. Commander of the encircled town of Bastogne:

“The fortune of war is changing. This time the U.S.A. forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armored units. . . .

“There is only one possibility to save the encircled U.S.A. troops from total

annihilation: that is the honorable surrender of the encircled town. In order to think it over, a term of two hours will be granted beginning with the presentation of this note.

“If this proposal should be rejected, one German Artillery Corps and six heavy A.A. Battalions are ready to annihilate the U.S.A. troops in and near Bastogne. The order for firing will be given immediately after this two hours’ term.

“All the serious civilian losses caused by this artillery fire would not correspond with the well-known American humanity.

“The German Commander.”

McAuliffe read the letter as the staff looked on wondering what his response would be. He read the note, became visibly angry, then crumpled it up, threw it to the floor, and said, “Aw, *nuts!*”—and then walked away. When he had cooled down, the staff pointed out that time was running out and that he should give a written reply. What would that reply be? One of the staff officers, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Kinnard, commented that the General’s initial response would be most appropriate. The rest of the staff laughed and heartily agreed. McAuliffe had the response typed up and delivered back for the Germans to take to their commanding general. It was one word: “*Nuts!*”

The besieged troops in Bastogne were elated by McAuliffe’s response. Their morale was boosted, and they determined not to give in.

The threatened bombardment did not occur. As the German tanks probed the defensive



★ *Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe.* ★

positions around Bastogne, they were soundly defeated and their tanks destroyed. What did occur, on December 26, was a spearhead of General George Patton's 4th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry "Yankee" Division broke through and poured U.S. troops and tanks into and around Bastogne. The German general was more accurate than he imagined. The fortune of war had changed, just as he had said, and he lost. His threats were empty. Victory was won.

Surrender to the threats and demands of the enemy? Nuts! It is not going to happen, period. That was the message of the American commander. It is also the response of our Heavenly Commander when it comes to our spiritual enemy's threats. God will never give up on us.

Our Commander

Let's take a look at our Commander. What is He like? How can He deliver us?

For starters, God created this world, and everything in it. In the very first chapter of the Bible there are six proclamations that what God created was "good." The seventh statement in Genesis 1:31 records, "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good." Not just acceptable or okay, but "very good." That says volumes about God Himself. His goodness is seen in His original plan for us.

Look at what the military commander and leader Nehemiah says about God: "But you are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them" (Nehemiah 9:17). That same description of God is found over and over again in the Bible (Exodus 34:6, Psalm 145:8, Psalm 112:4, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, to mention just a few).

The good news is "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). Samuel recorded the same thing when he wrote, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29). In other words, God is not fickle. He is constant and dependable. That's the kind of commander needed to win any battle.

That is not to say that those who follow God will always have it easy. Far from it. There is a spiritual war going on that is just as real as any armed conflict, and sometimes things look bad. Daniel recorded in chapter 7 of his book in verses 21 and 22, "The same horn [a symbol in that prophecy for an evil world power] was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days [God] came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."

That sounds very much like the situation at Bastogne. When things seemed hopeless, the commander refused to give up. He sent help and won the day and the battle. Our spiritual Commander has done the same for us because He cares about our wellbeing. He sent His Son to be our Savior, and along with that, to reveal the very attributes of His character and divinity.

Jesus said it straight out, "Now this is eternal life; that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Jesus also said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). We are assured that, "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God" (John 16:27). That same thought is expressed again in John 14:21 when Jesus says, "He who has My

commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

The Good Shepherd

Jesus identified Himself as the “Good Shepherd” in John 10:11. He is capable and prepared to defend His sheep. Jesus continues by saying, “My sheep hear My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (verses 27–29).

Contrast that with the spiritual enemy we face. Jesus said that our enemy “does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Who wouldn’t follow a Commander like that? One who was not just willing to send us into battle, but One who also joins the battle with us because He loves us and wants us to be safe, successful, and eternally secure with Him.

In the military your commander cannot command orders if you don’t know who he is; nor is he your commander if you don’t do what he tells you to do. The same is true in the spiritual battles we all face. We need to both know and obey our Commander to find real success.

Victory at Last

The surrounded soldiers in Bastogne were understandably elated when Patton and his troops broke through and rescued them. The same is true for those who walk with the Heavenly Commander. Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “Eye has not seen, nor ear

heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” The best we can do is remember that the original creation was “very good,” as well as think about what the Apostle John shared with us in Revelation 21:4, 5: “God will wipe every tear from their eyes.... There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”

That means total victory won for us by our Commander. No more war. No more death. No more tears, loss, or pain. All because we followed our Commander who would, and did, die for us rather than surrender and give up on us. Freedom has been won for us. That’s knowing our Commander.

You are invited to pray this prayer:

Father God, sometimes I feel lost in the battles of life. I need You as my Commander every day. Help me know You more fully as I come to know Your Son, Jesus, more completely. Be my Commander, and help me be Your follower until we celebrate Your total victory together. In Jesus’ name. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- What is the best thing about knowing that God is your Friend?
- What can you do to develop a deeper friendship with God?
- How can you share your friendship with God with another friend?
- When will you share?



KNOW YOUR ENEMY

“Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight 1,000 battles without disaster.”

—Sun Tzu, 544–496 B.C.

Japanese Admiral Isroku Yamamoto, Commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, was credited with being the mastermind behind the attack on Pearl Harbor. He planned a visit to the Solomon Islands to boost the morale of the Japanese troops there. A message went out on the 14th of April, 1943, in preparation for his visit, but U.S. Navy cryptologists had broken the code. Therefore they had exact data on the flight times and routes Yamamoto and his staff would take.

Immediately the U.S. forces began to devise an interception. The plan was to race over the Coral Sea “wave-hopping” at heights below 50 feet to prevent detection, then to gain height as they intercepted Yamamoto and his staff.

On April 18, four days after the message had been sent, Yamamoto and his staff began their trip flying in two medium bombers escorted by six fighter planes. He was to depart Rabaul at 6:00 a.m. and land two hours later at Balalae airfield near Bougainville.

The U.S. aircraft selected for the mission were P-38G Lightnings because their twin hull design allowed installation of extra fuel tanks for the 1,000 mile round trip: 600 miles out from their base at Kukum Field on

Guadalcanal, and the more direct 400 mile flight back. Extra fuel and time was calculated to include dogfights with the accompanying Japanese fighters.

Eighteen Lightnings were readied for the attack with four designated as the “kill” group, and 14 more as top cover to engage the Zero fighters as needed.

In spite of several problems, the plan worked. The Lightnings encountered the two Japanese bombers as they began their approach to their intended landing site. The U.S. planes unleashed withering rounds from their 20 mm cannons and .50-caliber machine guns. Yamamoto’s plane was hit first as it tried to evade the attack and crashed in the jungle 20 to 30 seconds after being hit.

A Japanese investigation following the incident revealed that Yamamoto died instantly from a bullet wound to the head. All others on board died in the crash. The second bomber, with Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki and other members of Yamamoto’s staff, attempted to evade the attack, but were shot down and within 20 seconds crashed into the sea. Ugaki and several others survived, but the rest of the staff and crew perished.

The Lightnings turned toward home in a 400 mile race against time and diminishing fuel. All but one plane returned. One of the Lightnings was so low on fuel that it ran out while taxiing after landing. It was the longest flight of U.S. fighters during the war in the Pacific.

Success was due to knowing the plans of the enemy, and also knowing what needed to be done to prepare the U.S. aircraft for an unprecedented flight.

Preparing for Victory

Knowing your enemy, yourself, and how to prepare gives a huge tactical advantage in warfare. That is true of spiritual warfare as well. Knowing our spiritual enemy prepares us for victory over his attempts to defeat us. That is what this guide is about. Let's "fly the mission!"

Jesus was not into "political correctness." When speaking to people about Satan, Jesus said clearly that Satan was, "a murderer from the beginning ... there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44–45). That's pretty blunt, and true according to the biblical account in Genesis 3:4, where Satan told Eve that if she ate from the forbidden tree, "You will not surely die." He continued by telling her, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

Did you catch the partial truth here? Eve certainly did receive knowledge she did not have before, but it was not what she expected or wanted. She was short-changed with a half-truth, which was a flat-out lie. She was told one thing and got quite another. That's the way Satan works.

Jesus also calls Satan a thief and further says in John 10:10 that, "the thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." That's a pretty accurate description of Satan's playbook, and of his character too.



Originally Satan had been part of the host of heaven, in the presence of God. Then Satan rebelled against God and led others in a war against God. According to Revelation 12:7–9 he was "cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world." See the connection to the Genesis account with Eve? Furthermore, John reveals another characteristic of Satan in Revelation 12:10 where Satan is called, "the accuser of the brethren."

Satan's rebellion is described by Isaiah the Old Testament prophet, "How you are fallen from heaven... You are cut down to the ground... You have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12–14). Wow! That is a huge ego at work, and huge egos tend to tell lies to get what they want. Not the kind of individual you want to trust or lean on when you are in a battle.

But, even though Satan has power and is forever telling lies and distortions about what

will happen if you follow him, he can only try to lead us. We have the power of choice to believe him (remember, he is the father of lies) or to resist him.

Our Defense

James gives us a good plan to put Satan in his place. In James 4:7, we are told, “Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Look at the order of what needs to be done. First we need to submit to God; then—and only then—can we resist the devil with positive results. It is like the Lightnings in their plan. The plan had to be done step by step, in order for things to work well. If there was a deviation from the preparations or the plans, there could be no success. The same is true for us in spiritual warfare.

When the devil tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:1–11), each demonic temptation was met with the same phrase (see verses 4, 6, 7, and 10). When Jesus said, “It is written,” Jesus resisted the same way we can: by knowing the Bible and using it at a deeply personal level. The result? “Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and attended Him” (Matthew 4:11). That is what success in a spiritual battle looks like, and how we can be successful in our spiritual conflicts today.

Paul spells it out even more clearly in Ephesians 6:10–18. He tells us to, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God.”

We are to put on:

- The belt of truth (opposite of what Satan stands for)
- The breastplate of righteousness (not mine, but that of Jesus)

- Solid footing grounded in the gospel of peace (the good news about Jesus)
- The shield of faith (in Jesus, not in myself)
- The helmet of salvation (that comes from Jesus)
- Using the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (the Bible)

When Paul says we are to “put on” the full armor, he is using the language of a military commander. It is not just a nice suggestion; it is a straight-out order: “Put on the armor now. That’s an order!”

So, the question is, to whom do I listen? Is my choice to listen to the devil who is a liar, a destroyer, and has my worst interest in mind, or will I listen to Jesus who wants to see me be successful and happy?

You are invited to close with this prayer:

Dear God, thank You for warning me about the devil’s schemes, but more than that, thank You for showing me how to win the spiritual battles of life. Give me strength to resist the devil, and wisdom to follow Your plan for my life. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- Has the devil ever lied to you? What was it about, and what was the outcome?
- How can you resist the devil so he will flee from you?
- What parts of the armor of God are the most important to you right now?
- How can you help someone else put on their spiritual armor?



AWARDS, REWARDS, & RECOGNITION



★ Lieutenant Audie L. Murphy. ★

The baby-faced 2nd Lieutenant and his troops were being attacked by six German tanks and multiple waves of infantry. He ordered his troops to fall back to more defensible positions in the nearby woods. At the same time, he called in artillery fire on the advancing Germans. When one of his tank destroyer vehicles took a direct hit from the Germans and began to burn, he ordered the crew to seek cover, then ran to the burning vehicle and manned the .50-caliber machine gun and began to rake the opposing forces with deadly fire. Some of the German infantry got as close as ten yards from his position. Bad mistake. He mowed them down, and the remaining troops began to withdraw, as did their tanks. The lieutenant then organized a successful counter charge that broke the German attack.

When Lieutenant Audie L. Murphy returned to the United States just prior to his 21st birthday, *Life* magazine featured his photo on the cover of the July 16, 1945, issue. Audie Murphy had served in Germany, Italy, Sicily, and southern France. He had been awarded 33 medals, including three Purple Hearts and the Congressional Medal of Honor. He had been awarded every medal for valor the United States could bestow. He became known as, “The most decorated combat soldier of World War II.”

The *Life* magazine cover and story led him to Hollywood where he appeared in 44 movies and founded his own production company—which resulted in his autobiography, *To Hell and Back*, which was made into a movie and released in 1955. He played his own part in the movie, which was one of the most successful films in decades.

Audie Murphy seemed to have it all. Military decorations, national fame, and Hollywood success. When he died in a plane crash May 28, 1971, he was only 46. He had come a long way from the dirt poor sharecropper shack in Texas. He had seen the world, made a name for himself, but died young and absolutely broke. His widow had to take a job at a VA hospital to pay off the bad investments and gambling debts.

Fame and fortune are too often fleeting. The awards, rewards, and recognition can turn to ashes in the blink of an eye. Fortunately, God has something better in store for those who connect with Him. He has planned an unending life with Him in His Kingdom. It is worth looking into, and the best part is that it is all paid for—in full. It is free, just waiting for anyone who wants to accept it. And it is everlasting, not something that will fade away and vanish like morning mist.

Home

To any traveler, and especially those who have faced combat, the word home has a deep and special meaning. Home represents relationship, love, support, belonging. The same is true for us today regarding the Bible promises of an eternal home.

Jesus talked about home, and what it is like for us to be there. He said in John 14:1–3, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in

God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I got to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” It is not just a place; it is relationship, a connection with Him that is the best reward.

In the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a remarkable listing of people who were focused on more than just here and now. In verse 16 it is recorded that “they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

Wow! Not just a battle bunker, a foxhole, or a sharecropper shack, but a place that is custom prepared by God Himself for anyone who will receive Him and the eternal gifts He offers.

Jesus, when teaching about the end of all things in Matthew 25, says, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:34).

That makes it pretty clear: God has a plan to reward His followers. The plan goes back before the forming of the earth. That plan includes being part of His family, part of His kingdom. It means a relationship with Him that starts here and now, then continues forever. Not only is there a real plan, there is a real place.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah records what God revealed to him about that new heaven and earth, one beyond the battles of this life and planet. “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered. . . . The wolf and the

lamb shall feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. . . . They will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord” (Isaiah 65:17–25).

There is a key thought here: “The former things will not be remembered.” It is said that after returning home the heroic Audie Murphy lived his life suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He often slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow as a result. He had won awards, but he also paid a high emotional price that haunted him. Audie Murphy devoted funds and time to help other soldiers who suffered from the same trauma. The combat scenes were always playing in his mind. He simply could not forget, and those scenes and emotions ate at him continually.

The reward God gives is not just a location, a home, and connection with Him; it is the blessed ability to wipe away the destructive past, to erase the trauma of our battles, and to experience everything as new and safe. There will be no harm nor destruction.

John, the apostle who was banished by the Romans to the prison island of Patmos, paints a similar picture of the reward given to those who follow Jesus. In Revelation 21:1–4 he gives a vivid description of what that new environment will be like. In verse 4 he says, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Now, *that* is a real reward, and the award is eternal life in the presence of Jesus and those who are in His “army.”

To some, it may seem too good to be true, a fantasy like a Disney film. Paul understood that full well. That is why he says in

1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”

Eternal Rewards

Summing it all up, the rewards God gives to His people are real, new, without the baggage of the past, and eternal. His gift is completely paid for, and it is ours for the asking.

What about you? Maybe you have struggled with your own private battles, just like Audie Murphy. Maybe you are struggling right now to find a real home for your body, mind, and emotions. God’s gift is waiting for you to claim it as your own, but the decision is yours.

You are invited to pray this prayer:

Dear God, I want to be with You in Your new earth. This life has so many struggles, hurts, and challenges. Thank You for Your offer of an eternal life with You. I accept that offer, and I accept You right now. Keep me faithful until Jesus comes to take us home forever. Amen. ★

Response and discussion questions

- We all crave recognition and rewards. What have been some of the best of those for you?
- How do you show your appreciation to others as a reward for them?
- Our ultimate reward is preparing to be with Christ for eternity. What are you doing to prepare for that?



HELPFUL CONTACTS

Note: This list is provided for your convenience, and is not an endorsement of any information or service provided by any of these organizations.

PTSD Foundation of America

www.PTSDusa.org
Houston, TX
Toll-Free Veteran Line: (877) 717-PTSD

Starlight Military Program

stoningtoninstitute.com
North Stonington & Groton, CT
Toll-Free: (800) 832-1022

Service for Humanity Foundation/ Life Trauma Solutions

www.serviceforhumanityfoundation.org
www.lifetraumasolutions.com
San Diego, Los Angeles, CA
(619) 855-5445 & (619) 855-5446

Operation Family Fund

www.operationfamilyfund.org
(760) 793-0053

TAPS – Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

www.taps.org
Arlington, VA
Toll-Free: (800) 959-TAPS (8277)

Disabled American Veterans

www.dav.org
Toll-Free: (877) 426-2838

American Legion

www.legion.org
(202) 861-2700

AMVETS

www.amvets.org
Toll-Free: (877) 726-8387

VFW

www.vfw.org
(816) 756-3390

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.mil
Toll-Free: (800) 342-9647

Military.com

www.military.com



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