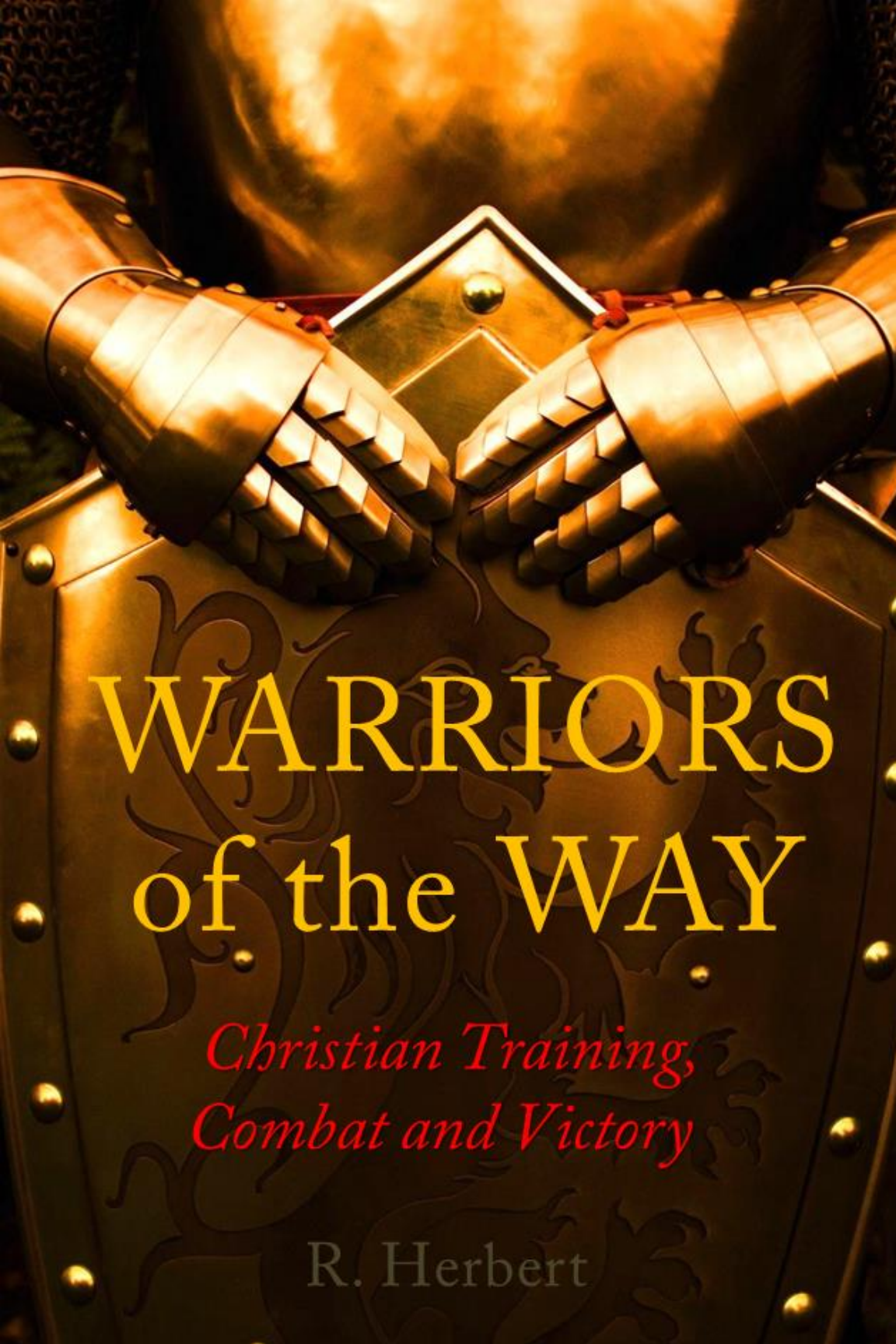




WARRIORS of the WAY

*Christian Training,
Combat and Victory*

R. Herbert

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Combat and Victory*

By R. Herbert

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INTRODUCTION

Dedicated to all the men and women who have fought the good fight, and those who continue to do so.

Does a “warrior” themed book about Christian living surprise you? Perhaps it should not – not only is God shown as a warrior figure more often than he is portrayed in any other way in the Bible, but also, directly or indirectly, the New Testament frequently uses the image of the Christian believer as a warrior. In fact, the warrior metaphor is probably used of the Christian more than that of any other occupation.

Just as God is a Father, a Helper, a Savior and a Friend to his people, he is also a Warrior (Exodus 15:3, Isaiah 42:13, Zephaniah 3:17), and Christians – although they are servants, brothers and sisters and friends – are also called to be warriors in the service of our “Captain” (Hebrews 2:10 NKJV) who is a Warrior King (Revelation 19:11-12). That is why this book looks at the Christian way of life from the warrior perspective in order to focus on some of the lessons that viewpoint can teach us.

Christianity involves many struggles which justify this concept, though the “warfare” in which the Christian warrior is engaged is spiritual rather than physical (Ephesians 6:12). Christian warriors do not war against people, of course; they fight against wrong and for good. They are warriors of “the Way” (Acts 9:2).

But what exactly does that mean? To answer this question we need to first define the word warrior itself. Dictionaries give definitions of varying lengths for the term. At its simplest, warrior just means “one engaged in combat or warfare,” but a fuller definition is more helpful: “one trained to engage in combat or warfare toward the ultimate goal of survival and victory.” That longer definition tells us how someone becomes a warrior, what a

warrior does, and why. It also provides a framework for this book, as we will see.

The Warrior Calling

Saying that God calls us to a military-like calling does not mean Christians are to be “Crusaders,” of course, but it does mean that our calling is often best understood by means of a military analogy.

The apostle Paul, for example, uses the imagery of battles, war, weaponry and armor throughout his writings – more than any other type of analogy. This may have been partly because Paul spent a great deal of time in his last years in the company of the Roman soldiers who guarded him (Acts 28:16, etc.), but his writings make it clear that he felt the analogy of spiritual warfare was one which could be applied to any Christian and in many ways. The apostle certainly saw his own life in these terms and, when his life was nearly over, asserted with calmness and courage that he had “...fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul’s metaphors regarding spiritual training, combat and victory are among the best known and most frequently quoted of all the analogies in the New Testament, but that does not mean that we cannot continue to learn from them through carefully looking at their historical background and modern applications.

And Paul is certainly not the only biblical writer to have used the concept of warfare to teach us valuable lessons. In addition to the many narratives describing battles and individual combat found in the Old Testament, military images and metaphors may be found in many places throughout the entire Bible.

But the warriors of the Bible were not all armored men carrying spears and swords. Some certainly were that, but not all were armored, not all were men, and in the biblical world, just as today, we find warriors of many types. Some, like Joshua and Gideon (Chapters 17 and 15), were front-line warriors; others were strategists who planned and directed battles, like Deborah and David in his later career (Chapters 29 and 31). Yet others were

covert warriors – “agents” as we would call them today, such as Joshua’s spies and the woman Rahab. But all of these warriors and many more servants of God – whether armored or not – successfully faced the difficulties, dangers, and struggles against which they were pitted.

Today Christians are not exempt from many of the same challenges faced by warriors of the Bible. Our battles may be different, but in the service of God, there is no place for those who wish to have nothing to do with fighting against evil and for good.

In fact, we might say we are either a warrior of God or a pagan! You may not know it, but the word pagan that we use of a “godless” person comes from the Latin word *paganus*. It originally meant “relating to the countryside,” a “villager” or “rustic.” In Roman military use a *paganus* was an “unskilled soldier,” a “non-combatant,” or a “civilian.” As a result, early Christians used the word to refer to individuals who had not “enlisted” through baptism to serve as spiritual soldiers of Christ!

Details like this form the rich backdrop of “warfare” and “warrior” images used by the Bible and in the early Church and are a part of the material on which this book concentrates. Not all of its chapters look directly at the idea of struggle or combat – that is one, but only one, of our concerns.

Using the typical dictionary definition we saw above – that a warrior is “one trained to engage in combat or warfare toward the ultimate goal of survival and victory,” this book looks first at issues of spiritual training and preparation and then at some of the struggles we all face and must undergo. But it does not stop there. Just as the goal of all warfare is survival and victory, the third section of this book looks at issues related to our goals and how they can inform and inspire us to better train, fight, and be victorious.

Part One looks closely at Christian training. As the warrior David wrote: “Blessed be the Lord my strength which teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to fight” (Psalms 144:1 ESV). This applies as much to us spiritually as it did to the ancient writer

physically, and for the Christian, spiritual training is just as important as physical training is vital for the military man or woman. In the first chapters you will see that the Christian life goes far beyond simply “confessing Christ” or “giving one’s life to the Lord,” and that vital as they are, these things are in reality only the “signing on” that every Christian does and that should be followed by ongoing training to help us better follow our Commander-in-Chief and to do the work he gives us to do.

“Training” can have a somewhat ominous tone that suggests long periods of hard work, and it is true that in many areas of life training is something that goes on for a long time and only then, when it is completed, are the trainees able to practice what they have learned. In the Christian’s case it’s a more exciting process – we can begin to use every bit of training we get the instant we receive it. Read these first chapters and you will find things you can apply today!

Part Two is labelled “Combat” and that too can have an ominous sound to it. But we must remember that to talk of threats, struggles and battles as we do here is not in any way to take a pessimistic or negative view of Christianity. Christianity is ultimately the most positive of all faiths in regard to the struggles of this life, but Christ himself warned that we would face difficulties and urged his followers to be ready for them (John 16:1-4). As is often said, those who are not aware that they are engaged in a battle are doomed to lose it. For the Christian, as any other warrior, that awareness is honed by training and is then applied in combat.

The spiritual battles Christians face today are not experienced equally by believers everywhere. If you live in one of many countries in the Western world you may experience problems and battles, but they may be nothing like those experienced by people in Africa, South America or Asia. But all Christians face battles of some type: whether internal or external, of the mind, the environment, or both. The Combat section of this book looks at ways we can successfully fight those battles.

Part Three, “Victory,” looks at the ultimate outcome of the struggles we do face and fight. Its basic premise is simple – that when the struggles we face are met with proper faith and God’s help, we are assured victory! That is something we may take for granted at one level, but it is something we need to understand deeply and be encouraged by in the course of our daily lives. There are also different aspects of victory that are important to understand – there are ways we can actually limit the victory we seek and there are ways we can be sure of ultimate victory.

Understanding what true Christian victory is and is not can help us to achieve it in our own lives. As every physical warrior knows, there are no second-place winners in combat – only winners and losers – and this section looks at how we, as Christian warriors, can be the winners.

Precisely because the sounds of battle are heard throughout the Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – we need to be attuned to them, and the lessons we can learn from stories and analogies regarding the spiritual struggle are of great importance to us all. As the spiritual warrior Paul wrote to Timothy: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1, 3) and “...fight the battle well...” (1 Timothy 1:18). So the chapters of this book aim to help the Christian be strong – to prepare, fight, and succeed in the struggles we all face. That is the challenge, the responsibility and the certain hope of the warrior of the Way.

PART ONE: TRAINING

1. SEEING YOUR CALLING

If you are reading this, it's likely that you have been enlisted. Those who hear and respond to the call of Christianity are "called up" and enlisted just as much as any enlistee in the physical military services. Yet many believers do not fully grasp the extent of the calling they have been given.

Most Christians understand that they were "called," but many do not see that rather than just a calling to be personally "saved," the call we receive is an ongoing one to active duty. That is why the apostle Paul tells us that God "... saved us *and* called us to a holy calling" (2 Timothy 1:9 ESV, emphasis added). Being "saved" is only the first part of being called, in the same way that receiving a military service draft is only the first part of being "called-up"! If you can imagine a military recruit who is called up or volunteers, but never reports for duty or does anything further, you can see the situation. Christians are called to do something – to take part in a work – to serve (Galatians 5:13, Hebrews 9:14, etc.).

But many think that that kind of "calling" is just for Christian "professionals" like pastors or missionaries. In actuality, as Christians, we all receive the same calling. When the apostle Paul wrote "For you see your calling, brethren..." (1 Corinthians 1:26 NKJV), he did not differentiate between "professional" Christians and others. So being called is not just something that happens to people who go into the clergy or go to a distant third world country on missionary or medical work. There is no part-time option in the Christian faith – we are either warriors of the Way called to active service or we are not.

But Christians clearly do serve in many different ways, and often we are called to a particular type of service. Notice what the apostle Peter wrote: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others..." (1 Peter 4:10). And Paul wrote that "...Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,

the pastors and teachers, *to equip his people for works of service...*" (Ephesians 4:11-12, emphasis added). These scriptures show both different specialties – “pastors,” “teachers,” etc. – and also the fact that *all* the people of God are called to serve – not just those doing the teaching or pastoring.

Just as there are many areas of training and occupational specialties within the military – from airmen to analysts, from cargo managers to cryptologists, from Delta Force warriors to doctors – there are many “professions” within the Christian calling, and many of them, in fact, are similar to their military counterparts. Metaphorically, those called to the mission field might be said to be the “marines” or “special forces” of Christianity, those called to study and teach are the “intelligence specialists,” those called to counsel and guide or help believers in other ways are analogous to other specialties.

Just as in the armed services, there are positions in God’s service for everyone – and whatever physical job we may do, it can often be a part of our calling if we make it so (Colossians 3:23). As a matter of fact, the word “vocation” we use to speak of our physical job in life is based on the Latin word *vocatio*, meaning “calling.” We just need to come to see it that way.

Whatever our normal day-to-day work may be, we may find that we can also serve in other significant ways. Many military or Christian specializations require a great deal of job-focused training, but we don’t have to have specialized training to support those doing those kinds of work. For example, we can support missionaries in many ways, both spiritually and physically, without going into the mission field. Is that kind of support work really that important? Ask a paratrooper if the person who packs his “chute” is doing vital work!

But whatever job we do, at work or in our own time, we need training. All military personnel undergo some type of basic training, and the Christian must undergo that kind of training, too. For the Christian, “basic training” is all about how to live and serve

– it’s training that can go on for a lifetime, but much of it we can learn and apply quickly if we set ourselves to do so.

Paul exhorts us: “...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1), and we can take that as encouragement to train – to develop the skills and abilities we were called to use. That’s why the chapters in the first part of this book aim to help you see some of the ways you can train to better fulfill your calling as a warrior of the Way.

2. ENTANGLEMENT

Anyone who has been in the military knows that one of the things made clear very early in training is that once you commit to service, the military owns you! Every Christian who has read his or her “contract” in the Word knows that is true for the believer, too:

“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

This giving up of some aspects of self-determination is not in any way a negative thing for the believer – most of us come to realize that willing service to God is the only real freedom there is (James 1:25). But the point is that just like that of the physical warrior, our service does carry responsibilities.

One such responsibility – enforced by various militaries since ancient Roman times – is that of not becoming entangled with social, legal, recreational , or any other responsibilities that might conflict with being at the command of the force to which service is owed.

That’s a principle Christians should understand also. Notice what the apostle Paul said about this specific point: “Join with me ... like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2: 3-4).

The truth realized by most militaries is that any “entanglement” that hinders its personnel from full dedicated service is a conflict of

interest that cannot be allowed. For the Christian the principle is just as true in three particular areas.

First, social, hobby or other recreational entanglements that might take up too much of our lives – encroaching on time that should be kept available for service – are things we should be careful to regulate. That is primarily what Paul had in mind in his statement to Timothy.

Secondly, if we are not careful we can also become entangled in false interpretations of Christianity that actually hold us back from true belief and service. Paul had this in mind when he wrote: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1 NKJV).

Finally, entanglement can occur and hold us back in the form of problems in our lives that we do not root out and which restrain our ability to fulfill God’s will in us through guilt or deceit. That is why the writer of the Book of Hebrews warns us “... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1).

Any of these three forms of entanglement can hold us back from the service to which we have been called as warriors of the Way, and it is vital that we come to see and understand this early in our training. God can work with us only to the extent that we are committed to him – to the extent that we believe he “owns” us. He can give us extra ability to fulfill our calling, but not more time than he has put into the day. As is so truly said, ultimately, God is not interested in our ability – he is far more interested in our availability.

3. SPIRITUAL TRAINING

“... train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come...” (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Those who undergo physical training – whether it is military “boot camp” or workouts at the gym – know that any kind of improvement involves consistent ongoing work. Spiritually, it’s the same. The old physical exercise adage of “no pain, no gain” often applies to spiritual training, also. The author of Hebrews wrote that “No discipline [Greek *paideia*] seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Although the word *paideia* is translated “discipline” here in the NIV and some other versions, it can equally mean positive training (as we see in Ephesians 6:4 and 2 Timothy 3:16 where it is translated “training” and “instruction” in righteousness).

But spiritual training isn’t intended to just build “spiritual muscles” – to make us somehow spiritually bigger, better, or stronger for its own sake. Like military training, it’s intended to enable us to do a job we have been given to do. In recent years, more and more churches have come to the understanding that it is a vital part of their responsibility to help their members use the spiritual opportunities and gifts they have been given to do the work of God.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul meant in writing that a key job of the ministry is: “to equip his people *for works of service*” (Ephesians 4:12, emphasis added). When Jesus said “anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done” (John 14:12) , there is no reason to think he was only talking about the apostles or elders of the Church. He said “anyone” – clearly meaning all of his followers.

Yet, as Dallas Willard wrote in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, we are unlikely to be able to imitate the works of Jesus without imitating his lifestyle – and that is where spiritual training comes in.

So what is spiritual training? While preparation in theology or the history and languages of the Bible may certainly be helpful, they are not *spiritual* training. If we look at the Book of Acts, we see the qualities that allowed some individuals to serve to a greater extent than others were an abundance of faith and the Spirit of God (Acts 6:3, 5).

These are gifts from God, but we increase and develop them by contact with God. As is often said, if we want to walk *like* Jesus we have to walk *with* Jesus. That requires the application of careful planning and self-discipline to ensure that our spiritual lives are not just “squeezed into” our physical lives – tucked into the small remaining spaces at the beginning or end of the day – but firmly set within our schedules to allow us to spend more time in “training.” We have only to read the Gospels to see that’s how Jesus himself stayed in training – by spending time with God (Matthew 14:23, etc.).

Spiritual training revolves around the spiritual “disciplines” (that word we saw in Hebrews 12:11) such as prayer and study of the Scriptures, and it is only as we work consistently and continually in these areas that we are effective in spiritual growth. But this is not just rote training in the way we might do fifty pushups or run a dozen laps. Spiritual training is a matter of the heart as well as the will.

Think for a minute about how Christ trained his disciples during his ministry. It was not by enforcing timed prayer sessions or by having them read a set amount of the Hebrew Scriptures each day – it was by having them spend time with him personally so they could see his attitude and his actions. It was training through “osmosis” more than through “Moses.” It was by listening to Christ’s teaching and by seeing how he applied the writings of the Bible in daily life that the disciples gained the training they needed.

It is only as we spend time training in the same manner – sitting and listening with the disciples, for example, as we read the Gospels and the letters of those who learned directly from him – that we grow further in understanding and ability.

Jesus stated clearly that he could do nothing without paying attention to the Father and closely following his lead (John 5:19). We undergo spiritual training in exactly the same way when we listen to Christ's teachings, "watch" him in the pages of the Bible, and discuss his way of life in prayer with the Teacher himself. It's a process that always leads to growth, strengthening, and transformation in our lives. The only difficulty is not letting the cares of this life crowd out our training sessions. Why not schedule some extra training starting today?

4. PREPARING TO PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:11-13).

If you have never worn it, you might not realize that the body armor used by members of the military, law enforcement personnel, and others can be extremely hot to wear and is not usually worn over jackets or other outer clothing – “suiting up” often involves “suiting down” first! More importantly, there are some things that must be avoided that will destroy or damage modern body armor, as we will see.

Now it’s interesting that in studying the spiritual armor God gives us, we tend to only look at the armor we are told to put on. We even may have memorized the descriptions of the various items of armor the apostle Paul mentions in both Ephesians 6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8 – the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the spirit, and so on, but Paul makes it clear that certain things should be taken off in preparation to putting on the armor.

Notice what he wrote specifically: “... let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12). Paul makes it very clear that the “putting off” is just as important as the “putting on,” and that the one should proceed the other. So what kind of things do we “put off” or “put away”? In Ephesians Paul reminds us of some specific examples regarding what to put off:

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;...Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body...Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:22, 25, 31).

James (James 1:21), Peter (1 Peter 2:1) and other biblical writers also give examples of things we must put off before we can put on the armor God wishes to give us, and it is vital to understand why. It is precisely those things that we are told to “put off” or “put away” from us that will short circuit the various parts of the armor we are given.

Take a single example. Ephesians 6:14 lists the “belt” of truth and it doesn’t take much thought to realize how the application of truth protects us, both doctrinally and practically; yet that protection is completely undermined if we do not first put off “falsehood and speak truthfully...” (Ephesians 4:25).

Virtually every part of the armor we are given will only work if we first put off that which would weaken or destroy it. It’s a principle everyone who wears physical body armor knows well. Certain things such as water, dirt, ultraviolet light, various chemicals, etc., will destroy the ability of body armor to protect its wearer and must be avoided or quickly removed.

As warriors of the Way, before we put on the armor we are given, we must put off the harmful spiritual things that would destroy it. That’s a fundamental aspect of our training we must never forget.

5. USING THE WEAPONS OF OUR FAITH

If you ask the average Christian what the weapons of our faith are, he or she is likely to give one of two answers: either the person may remember Paul's words from Ephesians 6:10-17 regarding the armor of God – the sword of the Spirit and its related armaments – or the individual may list the spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, meditation and fasting.

In a way, both answers are correct, but Paul's approach in Ephesians 6 is the better one, because he sees the weapons as being the spiritual *outcomes* of the disciplines we utilize – not the disciplines themselves. Although he does mention prayer in Ephesians 6:18-20, even there the focus is on its outcome. We can see this same focus throughout Paul's writings. Look at another example:

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Here again, Paul looks at the *outcomes* of the weapons we use through the working of the Spirit in us. Much as we may see the disciplines as spiritual activities, they are really behaviors leading toward spiritual goals and outcomes. The disciplines produce the spiritual weapons we must use. Understanding this fact is of great importance in Christian training and development, as it helps us to focus on using the disciplines for outcomes. Look at the following examples of biblical instruction regarding three of the most important disciplines: prayer, study and fasting.

Prayer: In Luke 18:10-14 we see that Jesus gave the example of the Pharisee and the tax collector who both prayed in the Temple, but while the ostensibly righteous Pharisee spoke to God of his religion and how frequently he utilized spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting, it was the repentant tax collector who accomplished something in his prayer, so that Jesus said: “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God” (Luke 18:14). Both men prayed, but only one had a spiritual outcome.

Study: What Paul tells Timothy regarding the value of studying God’s word also stresses outcomes: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Fasting: The prophet Isaiah records God’s words regarding fasting with and without outcomes:

“...You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:4-6).

In each one of these cases we see the same truth, that we are not really using a spiritual discipline unless there is a spiritual outcome. Put simply, this means we must ask ourselves: “Is our study just spending some time reading, or does it lead to some outcome or change in us?” “Is our prayer just spending some time talking, or does it lead to an actual change in our closeness to God?” “Is our fasting just spending time hungry, or does it lead to a change in our behavior relative to God and others?”

It's easy to think we have "put on the sword" because we read the Bible for a while, but unless we studied in such a way that the truth becomes more a part of us – and leads us to a concrete change or reinforcement of what is right – we are really just polishing the sword. And this is true of all the spiritual disciplines: we can utilize them without using them; we can access them without acting with them.

Effective spiritual training includes dedicating ourselves to study that leads us to grow in grace as well as knowledge. It involves continuing to pray till we feel a difference has come over our attitudes and intents. It involves fasting till we come to the point where we can see things we need to change and truly commit to them.

We must never forget that we are only using the spiritual disciplines as effective weapons if they produce outcomes.

6. STRENGTHENING EACH OTHER

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves”
(Ecclesiastes 4: 12a).

“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:11-12).

Becoming physically stronger takes a lot of effort – there are no shortcuts and the better the method of strengthening, the more perspiration it tends to require. Just as true, no one else can do it for us. Becoming spiritually stronger also requires determination and regular workouts, as we all know, but there is at least one surprisingly easy method we can incorporate in our training that does enable us to make each other stronger without a lot of work!

The Bible has a lot to say about becoming stronger through the patient application of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, meditation, or fasting, but it also gives us important clues regarding other ways we are strengthened. The apostle Paul’s words in Romans 1:11-12 (quoted above) regarding encouragement are a good example.

The method of strengthening Paul highlights is so simple it is easy to read over it without considering it seriously, but it can be extremely worthwhile to look at it a little more closely – beneath the surface of our English translations of the Bible.

Notice first that Paul told the Romans he wanted to impart a gift to them to make them strong; it was not a gift that was dependent entirely on the action of God – this was something he had that he could share with them. In fact, the Greek word he uses to say “that I may *impart* to you” is *metadidomi*, and it connotes the idea of sharing rather than giving all of something one might have. We see the word in Luke’s Gospel when John the Baptist says, “Anyone

who has two shirts should share (*metadidomi*) with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same” (Luke 3:11).

The idea of “sharing” is what lies behind Paul’s words “that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith,” and here we see how closely the two ideas of encouragement and strengthening actually are. The word *parakaleo* that Paul uses in saying “that you and I may be mutually *encouraged*” can mean both to encourage and to strengthen. The verse can thus quite legitimately be translated “...that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually strengthened by each other’s faith,” because the ideas of encouragement and strengthening are both there, in the same word.

But we must remember that Paul isn’t saying we will get stronger just by encouraging each other in the sense of exchanging positive remarks. He stresses that the strengthening/encouragement is on account of each other’s *faith*. We do this by exhibiting our faith in our interactions with each other – by living and walking in our faith so that others see us standing firm and are strengthened in turn by our example.

That is the sense of Paul’s words to the Corinthian church, also: “... stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13) – it is as we walk according to the way of faith and stand fast in it that we become spiritually stronger and also help each other to be stronger.

7. MEEK IS NOT WEAK

Many Christians seem to have bought into the idea that Christianity is a religion of meekness, of mildness – even of weakness. To be fair, many have absorbed this idea from a childhood concept of Christ as “Gentle Jesus meek and mild.”

Anyone who studies the life of Jesus knows that this view is in error. We cannot read a single one of the Gospels without seeing instances of Jesus telling the Pharisees, the hypocrites and the religious rulers of his day exactly what their problems were – without the slightest hint of timidity. We read of him single-handedly casting out the money changers from the Temple. We see him as a man strong enough to go willingly to his death for the sake of others – knowing it was to be one of the most painful deaths ever delivered to a human being.

Even the concept of Jesus as a man of pacifistic mildness is inaccurate. The same Jesus who, when he was arrested, told Peter “Put away your sword” also said – at the same time – “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). The Bible makes clear that the son of God commands enormous power, but that he wields that power with self-control, only using it righteously (Revelation 19:11 ESV).

So we must look more closely at biblical verses that might suggest, out of context, that Christ or Christians are defined by meekness that might be understood as weakness. Certainly Jesus said “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5); but the Greek word for meekness (*praus*) found there and throughout the New Testament has the connotation not of weakness, but of “strength under control.”

It is interesting to realize that in making the statement “Blessed are the meek...,” Jesus was almost certainly quoting Psalm 37:11 in the Greek Septuagint version. While the Hebrew Scriptures say

“The meek shall possess the land,” the Septuagint says “The meek shall inherit the land,” more closely reflecting the wording of Jesus recorded in Matthew. But the significance of Jesus quoting Psalm 37 is in the fact that the verses directly before “The meek will inherit the land” state “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath ... For those who are evil will be destroyed...” (Psalm 37:8-9a). They are then contrasted with the words Jesus quoted: “But the meek shall inherit the earth.” The meekness spoken of by David and quoted by Christ is, then, one of controlling anger and wrath – with the self-control that meekness really is.

So to be meek is not to be weak. Meekness is the gentleness of the strong. Meekness is strength under control. That is the quality exhibited by Christ and to which he calls his followers. When we understand this, we realize that there is no contradiction between this fact and the words of the apostle Paul describing the Spirit of God that is to be in every true follower of Christ: “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). The English Standard Version – translating a little closer to the Greek – says “self-control” rather than self-discipline. “Power, love and self-control” is almost a perfect definition of meekness. As we train, we learn to balance strength with love. That is the meekness we need to learn – it is power under self-control.

8. LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Modern military strategists have utilized lessons from the past, including biblical history, more often than you may realize. We find a fascinating example of this in the story of a daring raid that took place at the little-known Michmash some 3,000 years ago in the days of King Saul.

The ancient Michmash (modern Mukhmas) was set on a high area some 5 miles (8 km) north of Jerusalem. Militarily, the area was well positioned, as it was protected on its rear side by a fairly sheer cliff which rose from a surrounding ravine.

During the reign of Saul, invading Philistines took advantage of this natural fortifying aspect of the site and made it the camp for their troops. The Bible tells us that many of the Israelites fled and only a small force stayed with King Saul (1 Samuel 13). As a result, the situation looked grim, but without telling his father, Saul's young son Jonathan and his armor bearer carried out a daring raid by way of the protecting cliffs of the Michmash ravine.

This was no easy task: "On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh" (1 Samuel 14:4). Bozez appears to mean "slippery" and Seneh means "thorny" or "jagged." But Jonathan was undeterred. The Philistines had naturally posted guards on the protective cliff edge, but when they saw the two Israelite warriors they only arrogantly called down insults, daring the two lone figures to climb up to them.

This is exactly what Jonathan and his armor bearer did, and after scaling the cliffs they dispatched the guards and attacked the Philistine camp, killing some twenty of the enemy. Panic struck the confused Philistines and they began to flee from the site, thinking they were surrounded. As a result, the much smaller Israelite force camped nearby was able to pursue and defeat the invading army (1 Samuel 14:15, 20-23).

Some one hundred years ago, during World War One, General Allenby, along with his Sixtieth British Division, entered the plain near Michmash in a plan to attack nearby Jericho and drive out the Ottoman Turkish army. But the Turks held the protected site of Michmash and blocked any successful advance. One night, however, one of Allenby's Brigade officers, Major Vivian Gilbert, was reading his Bible and found the story of Jonathan's attack from the nearly impregnable cliffs.

Gilbert woke the commander and they planned an attack based on the same strategy. They sent one company through the ravine under cover of darkness and after silently taking out the posted Turkish sentries, they attacked. The Turks woke in confusion and, like the Philistines of thousands of years earlier, they fled – thinking they were surrounded by Allenby's forces. As a result of this success, the combined British and Allied forces were then able to capture the strategic city of Jericho and eventually rout the Turks from Palestine in a victory which profoundly influenced the subsequent history of the Holy Land.

The story of Michmash provides us with a graphic reminder of the importance of knowing the Bible for the warrior of the Way. The Christian warrior may not need its historical details for physical tactical applications, but just as Allenby may not have captured Michmash without Major Gilbert's knowledge of the Bible, Christians need to know the Bible's stories well if we are to profit from them.

The example of Gilbert's application of the story of Jonathan and his armor bearer also teaches us the importance of being able to apply the Bible's stories to our own situations. Christian training involves both true familiarity with our training manual – and ongoing thought as to the application of its ancient stories in our lives today.

9. LEARNING LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a big part of combat training – whether Christian or otherwise. We only need look at some of the examples found in the Bible to see its effects. Most military and other leadership is based on authority – which is the way it has to be in many physical circumstances – but the Christian is called to learn a different style of leadership altogether.

It helps our understanding of this to realize the New Testament doesn't stress authority as part of Christian practice. In the ancient Greek language authority was signified by adding the prefix *arch-* to words (as in our term "archbishop"), but although the world's rulers are often typified by the use of this word in the New Testament, it is never used of the disciples of Christ (the one seeming exception is in 1 Corinthians 3:10, where Paul refers to himself as an *architekton* – a "leading builder," but this is not in terms of authority).

On the contrary, Jesus clearly placed more emphasis on the serving role of his disciples than in their leadership by rule. In fact, he chastised his disciples for wanting to be "first" in authority and warned them about rulers who use leadership to "lord" it over their subjects (Matthew 20:25-28). This teaching was later faithfully followed by the apostles who, although they could claim to hold great authority within the church, describe themselves as servants rather than leaders (1 Corinthians 3: 5, etc.).

But leadership is still needed in Christian churches, organizations and families – so how do we address this seeming problem? The answer, of course, is that Christianity does not demand a leadership vacuum; rather it teaches leadership exercised through example and inspiration (1 Peter 5:1-3). This is not to say that authority should not be recognized or respected (Romans 13:1), but rather that Christian leaders should aim to lead by "going first" rather than "being first."

This principle is actually seen in some of the most inspiring stories of leadership found in the Old Testament as well as the New. Of the many examples that could be given, remember the story of how King Saul's son Jonathan led his armor bearer on a highly dangerous two-man mission that could easily have resulted in their deaths when he proposed climbing the sheer cliffs that rose behind an encampment of the enemy Philistines in order to surprise them. Although it was within his authority Jonathan did not command his armor bearer to accept the task. Rather, 1 Samuel tells us he encouraged the junior soldier to act with him:

“Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, ‘Come ... Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.’ ‘Do all that you have in mind,’ his armor-bearer said. ‘Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul’... Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him” (1 Samuel 14:6-7, 13).

The armor bearer's reply shows the young warrior was more than happy to back up Jonathan. He was involved in the plan because Jonathan had inspired him – as the armor bearer's words, “I am with you heart and soul” clearly show. Jonathan's style of leadership is just as clear from the fact that he climbed up first with his comrade following after.

Dozens of examples such as this one of leading by example rather than by commanding can be found in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. They can repay our study well – and they should be part of the basic training of every warrior of the Way.

10. WARRIORS OF WORD AND DEED

“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said ... ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God’” (Acts 10:1-4).

Two aspects of Cornelius’ faithful walk before God are shown in these verses – twice over: his generous gifts to the poor and his prayer. Perhaps we cannot prove it, but given the fact of Cornelius’ evident concern for those with needs, the final verse in this section of scripture may well indicate he was praying for the poor as well as giving to the poor. Doubtless the poor were not all Cornelius prayed about, but the story of this centurion reminds us that prayer and giving are both important in helping others and in learning the spirit of true giving ourselves. Just as we can give without concerned prayer, we can pray without actual giving, and in either case our concern is limited as well as our effectiveness as warriors of the Way.

This is a point the apostle James makes so clearly in his Epistle: “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15). It’s a vital combination. James doesn’t suggest that our words of comfort are not important, just that they should not be alone: we should not speak without doing. This applies as much in terms of our words spoken in prayers, of course, as it does in our direct relations with others.

Cornelius clearly understood the importance of both speaking and doing. He reminds us of that other centurion, at Capernaum, who told Jesus:

“... just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (Matthew 8:8-9 and Luke 7:1-10).

We do not know the name of this other centurion, but Christ honored his understanding that if this soldier said something, there would be action to back up his words and he believed the same would be true of Christ.

Both these professional soldiers had been trained to understand the relationship between speaking and doing – both understood that speaking of itself is not enough. They knew that any announcement must be followed by action. But while the one centurion’s story stresses what God does as a result of our requests (God hears and acts), the other story stresses what is the expected result of our words (what we say needs to be followed by action).

We must train ourselves to see that words and deeds are always interrelated, in prayer as in other areas of Christian life, and the more we learn that, the more we can accomplish.

11. IT TAKES PRACTICE

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9 ESV).

Ask any athlete, ask any warrior, ask anyone who had to train in order to learn to do something — even after the training is over, the practicing continues. Most initial training is done by watching or listening to those who are competent in the skill we need to learn (as we saw in Chapter 3). After that we learn by practicing the skill ourselves. Spiritual training is no different. We train to learn what it is we need to do, but knowing the right way isn’t always the same as doing it. That takes practice.

It’s ironic, but true (as even the ancient philosopher Aristotle remarked), that the things that have to be learned before we can do them, we learn by doing them! Spiritually, we develop the ability to do the right thing through doing the right thing. We learn to apply the lessons we have learned from the examples we have followed; and as we practice doing what is right, it becomes second nature to us. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis gave an example of this regarding Christian love:

“Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”

The truth Lewis touched on in these words is simply that of practice. The apostle Peter also talked about going beyond our initial commissioning and training and developing the Christian qualities we need by simply doing them: “Therefore, brothers, be all

the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” (2 Peter 1:10 ESV).

The word “practice” that Peter used is the Greek word *poieo* which can also mean to “make,” “produce” or “construct,” because the basic idea is that of producing something that wasn’t there before. The more we practice, the more the desired trait comes into being and becomes a reality.

This fact applies in every area of the Christian life – which is why the author of the Book of Hebrews tells us that those who become spiritually mature must “... have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14 ESV). In fact, the beloved disciple John even put it this way: “...let no one deceive you; whoever practices righteousness is righteous...” (1 John 3:7 ESV). If we aren’t *practicing* what we know to be right, we may be warming a seat in church, but we aren’t going anywhere.

That is what the apostle Paul told his protégé Timothy: “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress” (1 Timothy 4:15 ESV). If we want to see real progress in our spiritual lives – if we want to reach the level where we become active warriors of the Way – that is the answer for us, also. Training must always be followed by practice – and practice must be followed by more practice!

12. REPORT TO THE FRONT – ANY FRONT!

Once a Christian has received basic training and is practicing the skills learned, he or she soon realizes that being called is like being “called up” in a time of war - training may continue, but once basic preparation is accomplished, we are needed on the front lines.

Militarily, of course, a “front” or “battlefront” is the contested frontier between opposing forces, such as the “Western Front” in Europe during World Wars I and II. The front is where the opposing sides meet head on, and in Christian terms it’s where the struggle to do good occurs.

In one sense, we all fight on our own front in the struggles we undergo in our own lives, but we should never stop there. That is the equivalent of being pinned down by the enemy in our own local bunker or foxhole - we have to be able to participate in the larger front if progress is to be made. Think how different modern history would be if the Allied troops who overthrew the terror of Nazism in the Second World War had only concentrated on staying put and surviving on the beaches of Normandy, France, where they first came in contact with the enemy. It is only because those soldiers realized they were part of a connected front and pushed themselves to advance that the evils of Nazism were finally overcome.

That understanding applies directly to us in our lives, too. It’s easy to settle into a safe, comfortable routine of Christian life which is satisfied with prayer, Bible study and going to church and occasionally helping out in local church or community projects. These things are all vital, but they are at best the safe and secure “home front.” Our calling is really to move beyond that.

It is often said that Jesus just concentrated on the problems in his immediate vicinity – helping those he actually came in contact with. That’s only true to a point. He certainly did help those around him, but he fought on a much greater front – his sacrifice was the

victory in a battle that affected all of humanity for all time – the largest front possible! And his parting words to his disciples were not to “stay safe in the bunkers” but to go and do the work he had given them to do in all the world (Acts 1:7-8).

Today, there are many fronts we can join, and in this modern age we can often fight on multiple fronts, even distant ones, without ever leaving our own neighborhood. How about the front of slavery, where it still exists? What about the front of human trafficking and the child sex trade? Persecution and refugees? Malnutrition and starvation? Medical help for illness and deformity? Substance abuse and addiction? Gangs? All these fronts and many more exist in addition to the primary front of getting the truth to a world lost in its own darkness.

There are really so many fronts where we are needed that it is impossible to serve on them all – but in addition to the good we try to do in our own neighborhoods, among the people whom we meet and interact with each day, we can all choose one or more fronts where we can fight and make a difference. Think of it this way, at the end of the war – the end of our individual lives – do we want to look back and realize that we used our training only to help people get rides to church – or do we want to know that we played a part, no matter how small, on some vital front in the relief of human suffering and the growth of the Kingdom of God?

There are so many worthwhile fronts – so many battles we can join where a difference can be made. All we need do is commit ourselves to a front and then educate ourselves as to what can be done – physically as well as spiritually – to serve there. The main thing is that we move beyond training, get out of our personal bunkers, and report to the front – any front!

PART TWO: COMBAT

13. BASIC BATTLE PLANS

In Deuteronomy 20 we find the instructions God gave to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land and engage their enemies. These instructions were the “Operational Orders” – the plan to conduct the military operations given to Israel’s fighting forces by the One who was their supreme military commander.

In the modern United States military, Operational Orders (OPORD) are given in a standard five-point format and, coincidentally, God gave Israel five points to guide them in their mission. At first sight the commands may seem simple, but they are deceptively so; they represented vital information Israel needed for successful conquest.

Today, those same tactical instructions can be applied in our own lives and offer us some timeless guidelines for the spiritual battles we must fight – as we can see in each command point and the lesson it carries.

COMMAND 1: “When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God ... will be with you ... the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory” (Deuteronomy 20:1, 4). LESSON: God first reminds Israel – and us – that if we focus on the physical circumstances surrounding us, we will often fail because the problems look too big, too insurmountable. God tells us that he has brought us this far (vs. 1b) and that we must remember the forces we do not see are greater than those we do see (read 2 Kings 6:17 for an example). We must never fight by sight alone – our battles are won by what is not seen, and faith is a weapon our enemy does not have.

COMMAND 2: “The officers shall say to the army: ‘Has anyone built a new house and not yet begun to live in it? ... Has anyone

planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? ... Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home'..." (Deuteronomy 20:5-7). LESSON: Although there is a humane aspect to this particular command, excusing those who might not want to fight, the clear tactical reason is that we cannot fight with distractions on our minds. Don't ever allow physical distractions to get in the way of the spiritual fight.

COMMAND 3: "When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to labor and shall work for you" (Deuteronomy 20:10-11). LESSON: In this command God shows that we should be willing to work with people if they are willing to work with us and the relationship does not interfere with our obeying God. This principle applies in many areas – we need to be firm in our beliefs, but still interact with others. Our lives can be a witness to others to the degree that we interact with them.

COMMAND 4: "However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you ... Completely destroy them ... as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). LESSON: God shows clearly that we will ultimately fail if we compromise with sin in any way. The nations around Israel not only enticed the Israelites to sin, but they also personified sin which must be destroyed. Make no compromise with sin – no matter how attractive it may look, the enemy that would destroy you must be destroyed.

COMMAND 5: "When you lay siege to a city... do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls" (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). LESSON: Finally, God shows that in fighting the battles we fight in life we must use wisdom. We should not make battles where there are none ("Are the trees people

that you should besiege them?”), but in other cases we need to carefully use the resources that are available in the spiritual warfare we wage. Use wisdom, do not focus on things that are not the main problems in life – but use all available resources in the fights that matter.

Rather than supernaturally destroying Israel’s enemies (or in our case, our problems), God let Israel (and now lets us) fight the fight, but gave the guidance needed to do it. Simple as the instructions may appear, each one of them deserves thought and meditation as to how they might apply in our own lives.

When we combine these principles with the advice given to us throughout the Bible, we have a spiritual “manual of war” which can be of great help to us as we go into combat. It is to the degree that we apply these lessons that we will be successful in the spiritual battles we face in claiming the promises that God has given us.

14. WHERE'S YOUR INTEL?

Every fighting unit, from small squads to whole divisions and armies, needs reliable intelligence on which to base their actions. Fighting without “intel” is called “fighting blind.” It has always been that way. Even the most ancient empires had individuals known as the king’s “eyes” or “eyes and ears” who gathered needed information. But can you imagine modern military leaders engaged in warfare sitting down to read the newspaper or to watch a news update to get the intel they need? Modern military and agency intelligence specialists do utilize “open source” information, but that has to be enhanced, of course, by much more detailed information gained through the dedicated work of often unsung heroes who collect, assess, and present the information their leaders need.

The idea of generals and other warriors getting their information only from newspapers or other mainstream news media might seem far-fetched, but in the warfare to which the believer is called, how many Christians are content to get their intel on the problems that rage around the world only from occasionally looking at the available news media? The answer is probably that *most* are.

But just as a military commander could not really fight the battles in which he or she is engaged by means of occasional news summaries, we can’t really know what is happening to the degree to do much about it without more specialized intel. What many Christians do not realize is that specialized intel for Christian use is available. There are a number of Christian aid agencies and news sources, such as *Christian Today*, *Christian Post*, and the website persecution.org, that do an excellent job of reporting issues – in detail – that affect Christians and their battles around the world.

One source worth mention that puts out free non-commercial updates is the Barnabas Fund (Barnabas Aid in the U.S.). You may have heard of this organization which is actively engaged in helping

persecuted Christians in over 50 countries around the world. For example, just recently – as was even reported by some mainstream news sources – they helped fly out a number of persecuted Christians whose lives were threatened in areas of the Sudan, and others who were in mortal danger in Syria.

The Barnabas group also produces and makes available “actionable intel” for Christian use. Their publications and websites give detailed summaries of threatened areas and peoples around the world. In addition, the group emails situation updates and also provides daily prayer guides with current information you can utilize. The articles are well researched and can transform both your understanding of immediate and dire problems around the globe as well as your ability to effectively pray and help in whatever way possible.

Good intelligence reports assess the nature of the problems they examine and also suggest what can be done about them. The information produced by Barnabas Fund and many other Christian aid and news organizations does exactly that – it provides both threat assessment and action assessment enabling believers to fulfill part of their calling effectively and with knowledge. The warrior of the Way cannot afford to “fight blind” any more than warriors of this world can. Are you getting the intel you need for effective Christian combat? Where’s *your* intel?

15. ALWAYS AWARE

The Book of Judges gives us a simple story you no doubt remember, but it is one which carries an interesting lesson. During the wars fought by ancient Israel in the time of Gideon, God decided the Israelite army was actually too large to clearly show it was his power that was giving Israel victory, so he told Gideon to diminish the size of his army!

“So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, ‘Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.’ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The Lord said to Gideon, ‘With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home’” (Judges 7:5-7).

In this story God separated out those soldiers whose behavior would make them more aware of their surroundings and who would be less likely to be ambushed or slow to respond if attacked. Ultimately he could have separated the soldiers in any way – by those with short hair, those with longer arms, or whatever – but the fact that when God selected his warriors, he chose those who would be more alert perhaps carries a lesson for us. Jesus and Paul both stressed the need to watch and be constantly aware, and particularly in three specific contexts where spiritual tactical awareness can help us in our Christian lives.

Surprise Attacks – None of us expects to be spiritually ambushed at any given time, yet we all know it can happen. Someone says something that makes our temper flare, or something happens that unexpectedly begins to incite lust, greed or any other negative aspect of our human nature. Jesus spoke specifically

about the only way to avoid this scenario: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Notice that Christ put watching, being aware, on a par with prayer regarding controlling our human nature. Paul shows that this kind of attack can occur even when helping others: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

The key is clearly being aware in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. If we can learn to look for the first small signs of trouble with our human nature – and to act accordingly when we see those signs – we can often defeat the “ambush” before it defeats us.

Slow Attacks – Sometimes it’s not the sudden ambush that defeats us; it’s the insidious attack that slowly creeps up on us that is hard to spot. “Be careful,” Jesus warned, giving a specific example of this, “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (Mark 8:15). Here Jesus is talking about the negative effect some people can have on us. Like yeast the influence may work slowly, but it is there and grows in time. Sometimes these slow attacks may even be camouflaged – they may come from within our group of friends or even our church.

Such attacks may be made through sincere individuals, and we have to be particularly aware to spot them. When Jesus said “Watch out that no one deceives you” (Mark 13:5), he didn’t necessarily mean people with evil intent, but to watch for any type of deception we might experience.

In a similar manner, Paul warns us to stay aware of divisions which may creep in and finally destroy even those of the church (Galatians 5:15). Christ also gave another example of this kind of attack: “So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them” (Luke 17:3). Here it is the root of bitterness that we are warned of – a root which may grow slowly, but eventually, if we are not aware of it, it is a root that can strangle our spiritual growth.

Sidetrack Attacks – Another kind of attack, and one that happens all too often, is an attack that ultimately we ourselves have a part in creating. It's all too easy to get sidetracked in life by family, health, financial, or other issues. We all have things that seem to demand more and more of our time – and sometimes it's not even problems, but pastimes or hobbies that can sidetrack us, though the end result can be the same. Notice Jesus' words in this context:

“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch” (Mark 13:33-34).

The ones keeping watch at the door in this short parable may be the servants that God gives to guard his congregations (Acts 20:28 and also Hosea 9:8), but ultimately, this warning applies to all of us, and we must be alert in guarding our own “doors.” We have this same responsibility relevant to our own lives, just as Paul commanded in I Timothy 4:16a: “Watch your life and doctrine closely.”

Staying aware of all these types of attack can help us to fully respond to Christ's words in Mark 13:37: “... I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

16. DO YOU NEED RAPID RESPONSES?

Elite troops and emergency services personnel are judged by how quickly they respond to emergencies, presidents are often judged on how quickly they respond to crises, companies are judged on how quickly they respond to customer service requests, and kids are often judged by their peers on how quickly they respond to computer game prompts. In the age of now, speed is king in many areas of life and rapid responses are desired everywhere.

Unfortunately, fast reflexes and rapid responses are not always good things. When it comes to character and personality traits in everyday life, rapid responses are often counterproductive and harmful. That's something that is stressed time and again in the Book of Proverbs – the Bible's book of distilled wisdom for everyday living. Notice these few examples:

“To answer before listening...is folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13).

“...one who acts hastily sins” (Proverbs 19:2b HCSB).

“...haste leads to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5).

“Don't take a matter to court hastily” (Proverbs 25:8a HCSB).

“Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool...” (Proverbs 29:20).

It can be a valuable study to look through the verses mentioning “haste” and “hurry” in Proverbs, but it's not just that biblical book that decries hasty thoughts, words and deeds. Notice what the apostle James says in the New Testament: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19 NKJV).

Why is this – why does the Bible so often condemn rapid response behavior? The answer is simply because our first reactions

are almost always our most human ones – the ones based in our own human nature; and as a result, our rapid responses can sometimes be rabid responses! (Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:19).

The right response often needs time for us to get over our primary emotional reaction – time to get our brain in gear and to remember our training and the principles we have learned of God's way of life. It's only then, after we have taken the seconds, minutes or even hours we may need to arrive at an appropriate response, that we can be confident that our reaction is the right one – and in most of our interactions with others, a right response is better than a rapid response every time.

So take heart – even if you don't have the super-fast response times of an action movie hero or a game console warrior – you may be better off with slower responses! In fact, it can often be a good decision to leave rapid responses to those who need them in their work. In our own personal lives we need *right* responses so much more!

17. “DEFUSING” MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The Book of Joshua records a powerful example of how misunderstandings can become deadly dangerous and then need to be “defused” with extreme care. The story, like all the recorded events of the Scriptures, is written for our guidance, and from it we can learn some important lessons.

Joshua tells us that as the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh asked permission to stay on the eastern side of the Jordan as their own area of inheritance. Joshua gave the two and a half tribes permission to do this on condition that they fight alongside the rest of the Israelite tribes till the Promised Land was occupied, and then they could return to claim the area granted to them (Joshua 22:1-9).

When they eventually returned to their chosen home, the two and a half tribes built a large altar-like structure next to the Jordan, on their own side of the river (Joshua 22:10). It was at this point that the potentially fatal misunderstanding occurred. The other tribes were immediately incensed at what appeared to be the rapid apostasy of the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh into their own system of worship rather than honoring the main altar of God which was with the rest of the tribes. The Israelites were acutely aware that they had only recently been punished by God for disobedience (Joshua 7), so the Book of Joshua tells us that “the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war” against the eastern tribes (Joshua 22: 11).

This is the point at which tempers flared, and many were calling for the destruction of the apparently apostate tribes. But due to the wisdom of Israel’s leaders, an effort was made to defuse the situation. The priest Phinehas, along with ten tribal elders, bravely went to confront the eastern tribes and to tell them:

“The whole assembly of the Lord says: ‘How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? ... And are you now turning away from the Lord? If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God’” (Joshua 22:16-19).

The eastern tribes then explained that they had not built an altar in disobedience to the commands of God, but had built a structure to serve as a “memorial” to remind their descendants and those of the other tribes of the connection between them and the shared heritage of the tribes on both sides of the Jordan (Joshua 22:24-29, 34).

Fortunately, war was averted – but only narrowly. Had the ten tribes simply moved on the misunderstanding they had, there would have been great bloodshed and lasting animosity between them and their eastern cousins. But we should notice how this catastrophe was averted by the skillful defusing of the situation. The account tells us a number of important things.

First, we should notice how Phinehas and the tribal elders presented their case clearly, giving all the facts they knew, but then asking: “... are you now turning away from the Lord?” (Joshua 22:16). This *asking* rather than *accusing* was probably the primary reason the negotiations were successful in defusing the potential disaster. Notice that the discussion was framed from this perspective throughout. The Israelites said “If you rebel against the Lord...” (Joshua 22:18), not “You have rebelled against the Lord....” This is treading lightly on the already heightened emotions of those with whom the misunderstanding had occurred.

The other aspect of the story that we should clearly note is the way in which Phinehas and the elders did not back the eastern tribes “into a corner” in the process of dealing with the situation. They did not pronounce judgments or rebukes or issue ultimatums before they had heard the other side of the story. Notice how they left a way open to still be in harmony with the eastern tribes, even if they were guilty of what they suspected: “If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us” (Joshua 22:19). This is handling things very carefully so that the situation does not blow up in terms of open accusation leading to angry denial and reaction.

The analogy of bomb disposal “defusing” is a useful one in studying this account. Like Phinehas and the ancient elders of Israel, the brave individuals who take on great personal risk to defuse actual bombs in today’s world have only two basic rules: they tread lightly and they handle things very carefully with a soft touch. Those basic rules have saved many lives in the course of disarming live munitions and bombs; and they can save a great deal of heartache if we apply them to “defusing” misunderstandings and other tense situations in our lives, too.

18. INCOMING!

They hurl toward us at thousands of miles a second; if it were not for the earth's protective magnetic field, life on this planet would suffer massive amounts of radiation from the charged particles emitted from the sun. Also, if it weren't for our planet's magnetic field, our atmosphere would be gradually "worn away" by those solar particles knocking air molecules out into space.

Thankfully, as it is, the earth's magnetic field acts as a giant shield from which most of the charged solar particles are deflected. Some, however, do stream down into the funnel-like weak fields at the magnetic poles, and those particles then collide with atmospheric molecules causing the surreally beautiful auroras we know as the "northern lights" and "southern lights." Next time you see a photo of those auroral lights or see the lights in the sky, be thankful for the invisible shield we have!

They streak through the sky at rocket-propelled speeds, and if it were not for the invisible overarching coverage of the anti-missile system known as the "Iron Dome" employed in Israel since 2011, the rockets fired by Hamas would strike many cities and other occupied areas, randomly killing thousands over time. It is a two-stage process. Carefully monitored radar batteries detect the incoming missiles and then protective counter-missiles are launched to intercept them. When Israelis see the effects of their Iron Dome system in action, they are thankful for the shield they have for protection from the fiery missiles of their enemies.

They can flash into our minds at the speed of thought itself – wrong attitudes and specific thoughts of anger, or perhaps lust or greed. The apostle Paul tells us that we need a shield against these incoming threats as well: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). The shield of faith is the Iron Dome and the magnetic field of Christian life. Like them, it is an invisible

shield, but one without which, spiritually, we would be severely injured. Unlike the earth's magnetic field, however, our spiritual shield doesn't just sit there protecting us effortlessly. In that sense it is like the Iron Dome system that relies on careful radar monitoring of incoming missiles and then countermeasures to destroy them. For us it is the active exercise of our faith that is our protection. This involves the same kind of continuous alertness to warnings and then action. We do this through regular study to be able to identify the real nature and threat of "incoming fire" on our spiritual "radar screens," and then the application, in faith, of God's help to rout the attitudes and thoughts that are contrary to God's way: "... taking every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5b HCSB).

"Incoming!" is one of the most urgent warnings in military life. Our mind's warning of wrongful incoming influences should be a signal to us, too, that defensive action is necessary. It needn't be stressful, however. The more diligent we are in utilizing the shield of faith, the more it becomes learned behavior; and we can concentrate on enjoying life and accomplishing what we need to do. That is after all the purpose of the magnetic field, of the Iron Dome, and of the shield of faith.

19. EVERYONE IS FIGHTING A BATTLE

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.”

It's a common saying – you can see it everywhere from online tweets to printed wall hangings. In online collections of quotes it's often attributed to some of history's great thinkers like Plato and Philo of Alexandria. But the truth, as is so often the case, is more interesting. The quote “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about” is actually a modern version of something written by a little-known British clergyman named John Watson over a hundred years ago.

Watson was born in 1850 in Essex, England, and after studying theology at university he became a minister in Edinburgh, Scotland. He later travelled to the United States where he lectured at Yale University for a while and actually died in the US in 1907. Watson wrote several books under his own name, and a number of other books under the name of Ian Maclaren.

It was as “Ian Maclaren” that Watson seems to have penned the quote we now know only slightly differently. A short piece mentioning the origin of the quote was printed in a periodical in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1898:

“‘Ian Maclaren,’ along with other celebrities, was asked to send a Christmas message to an influential religious weekly in England. He responded by sending the short but striking sentence: ‘Be pitiful for every man is fighting a hard battle.’ No message is more needed in our days of stress and storm, of selfish striving and merciless competition.”

The expression “Be pitiful” would now be “Take pity” – or “Be kind” as the quote is usually reproduced today – but its message is clear and certainly biblical. The apostle John wrote: “If anyone ... sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17).

But Watson’s words speak not only regarding those in need, but also of those facing any kind of struggle. In 1903, he expounded on his own words in a section of one of his books – *The Homely Virtues* (pages 168-69): “This man beside us also has a hard fight with an unfavorable world, with strong temptations, with doubts and fears, with wounds of the past....”

These words speak of the battles and struggles we all experience in life, as well as the battle scars we accumulate. They also imply what our response to that universal fight should be – something the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2 ESV, NKJV). Watson himself put it this way:

“And when this occurs to us [that we see our neighbor’s struggle], we are moved to deal kindly with him, to bid him be of good cheer, to let him understand that we are also fighting a battle; we are bound not to irritate him, nor press hardly upon him nor help his lower self. We must feel as a brother towards the man beside us ...”

It’s an everyday application of the good soldier’s attitude, a “Main Street” enactment of the “He’s not heavy, he’s my brother” way of the battlefield. In fact, when Paul tells us in Galatians 6:2 that we should help carry each other’s burdens, the word translated “burdens” (Greek *baré*) was often applied to the pack carried by a soldier on the march and in combat. We are all fighting battles at some level. The warrior of the Way strives to keep that in mind.

20. GUARD DUTY

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Not all combat is present-tense action. Much of the warrior’s time may be spent in combat readiness – in case something happens, in case combat occurs. Some of that waiting may be structured and it may seem to go on a long time without anything happening at all. In that case, it’s called guard duty!

It can sometimes seem boring and repetitive, but guard duty can be a huge responsibility. Those posted on watch may be responsible for making sure hostile elements do not break into a given area or dangerous prisoners break out. If a warrior fails in guard duty – if he or she lets dangerous elements slip by – it can lead to disaster. In bad situations guard failure can lead to the endangerment of whole squads, platoons, or worse.

Spiritually the warrior of the Way is frequently assigned guard duty, too. In fact, that aspect of Christian combat readiness is necessarily a constant one. The orders we are given regarding guard duty are clear – as we see in the following examples from the words of Christ himself:

“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come” (Mark 13:33).

“...Be on your guard against all kinds of greed....” (Luke 12:15).

“Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3 HCSB).

These orders from our Commander-in-Chief can be added to many others that were inspired throughout the Bible. Notice just a few of the examples we find:

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23).

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

“... be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position” (2 Peter 3:17).

“...guard yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21 HCSB).

“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit...” (2 Timothy 1:14).

As the last example indicates, the biblical writers understood that often we need direct help to fully obey these orders, and they did not hesitate to request support to do so. Notice the words of the warrior David in this regard: “Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). David understood that although he, like all of us, was assigned to this particular guard duty, he needed significant help to do the job properly.

In the New Testament we see the apostle Paul knew that kind of guard support was promised to those who request it:

“... the Lord is faithful; He will strengthen and guard you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3 HCSB).

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds...” (Philippians 4:7).

These are reassuring scriptures, indeed. But we must always remember that the Christian responsibility of guard duty is not just intended to protect us as individuals. Like any warrior called to keep watch, our responsibility is not only to guard our own selves, but also our families and fellow warriors – as Paul made clear: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock ...” (Acts 20:28 HCSB).

21. OFFENSE AND DEFENSE?

We have to think defensively in combat or we suffer the consequences. But sometimes it seems we may concentrate too much on defensive tactics and strategy in our Christian warfare. Defensive thinking is necessary, of course. If you are a warrior you don't want to go into battle without body armor, and a defensive attitude is necessary in many areas of life. We wear seat belts when we drive automobiles and we don't climb a mountain (at least most of us don't!) without anchors and ropes. But if we are not careful, all too often the tactical stress in our spiritual lives is on defense.

If we consider the biblical stories of some of the great men and women of God, we see a frequent theme of being willing and ready to go on the offensive. Take Abraham, for example. We tend to remember many of the stories of the great patriarch, but often forget the details of the narrative telling how he rescued his nephew Lot who was captured and carried away by an invading army (Genesis 14). Abraham pursued Lot's captors with his own group of over three hundred "trained men" (vs. 14). These trained men were not simply shepherds and other workmen hastily handed a sword or other weapon. The Hebrew word *hānīk* used of them means an "armed servant" and was used of men whose primary function was to provide military protection. These men were essentially a small private security force in full-time service to Abraham. The patriarch had trained his men and did not hesitate to go on the offensive in order to rescue Lot.

We can see this offensive stance in many biblical stories, but how does it apply to us? Consider just a few examples. Generally speaking, how much more time and energy do we put into praying for people (ourselves and others) to be healed than we spend in praying for work being done to wipe out severe and crippling illnesses? Isn't that defensive thinking? How much time do we

spend thinking about proactive things we can do to help those who suffer get back aspects of their lives they might not otherwise have?

The economy is bad, but do we respond only defensively, praying for friends who are out of work, or do we pray also for the national and local economic situation? (Read Jeremiah 29:7 if you don't think that's a topic for prayer). Focusing on the broader issues as well as the specifics of which we are aware is focusing on offense as well as defense, and the principle can be applied in dozens of areas of our lives if we think it through.

The main thing is to practice thinking offensively as we go through life, or at least to constantly keep that half of the equation in mind. You can see exactly this duality and the need for offense as well as defense in many of David's psalms. Look carefully at the duality of what the psalmist is saying in psalm 144, for example:

“Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me” (Psalm 144:1-2).

In these verses, God is likened to a Rock, shield, fortress and stronghold or refuge (all defensive). He is also said to be a God who figuratively trains us for war, for battle, to subdue enemies. The active offensive aspect of spiritual life is just as present in these verses as the static defensive aspect. The offense is as necessary as the defense. We need defense to survive combat, but to move toward victory we need to think offense.

22. CHARLIE MIKE!

Sometimes military missions go wrong. It may be just a small mishap, or it may be a major problem that endangers the success of the mission and the lives of those involved. At other times the mission may be faced with the need for ongoing exertion that leads to a level of exhaustion almost at the limits of endurance. At times like these, the response from officers and from encouraging comrades alike is often “Charlie Mike!” – military speak for “C” “M” – the acronym for “Continue Mission!”

Every Christian knows that things can go wrong in the Christian life and in Christian missions, too. It’s not all a bed of blessings and roses as some might try to make it out to be. Sometimes the Christian fighter can also be exhausted to the extreme, just in different ways to what may be found in many military ops. It’s a slower, psychological exhaustion that can come from fighting the odds in an ongoing situation that doesn’t seem to let up.

Maybe that’s why the word of God exhorts us repeatedly to continue in the mission we have been given. Notice what the great ancient military commander Joshua told those fighting with him: “Be very strong and continue obeying all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you do not turn from it to the right or left” (Joshua 23:6 HCSB). King Solomon put it another way: “Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day” (Proverbs 23:17 ESV).

Sometimes the encouragement to continue is something we need to ask for – especially when things go wrong. When Peter and John and the early Christians came under persecution, help to continue the mission is precisely what they asked for: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29 ESV).

The Bible makes it clear that that is exactly the attitude God wants to see in us. Solomon, at the height of his wisdom, before his own downfall (1 Kings 11:11), recognized that God is with us to the

degree that we continue: “... there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way” (2 Chronicles 6:14).

It’s a central fact about walking with God and striving to complete his mission for us that we must not forget. God will continue to equip us to persevere, but we have to discard any and all thoughts of discouragement and exercise faith in the One who sets the mission parameters and who empowers those he calls to the mission.

Ultimately it is continuing that defines the true warrior as opposed to the short-term soldier or follower who falls by the way. We have that on the authority of the greatest Commander-in-Chief, who said specifically: “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples” (John 8:31 HCSB). That’s the goal and encouragement we all need to focus on. That’s the ultimate “Charlie Mike!”

23. A MILITARY MANTRA

The four men were clearly guilty of breaking and entering – yet God blessed their actions. The instance of forcibly breaking into a domestic dwelling was a fairly outrageous one which involved considerable structural damage to the dwelling place – a crime in almost every culture – yet God rewarded the temerity of the individuals concerned.

Mark tells the story:

“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people ... gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:1-5).

In this case the motives of the individuals concerned were clearly good ones. Breaking and entering usually constitutes a crime because it involves entry into a building for the purposes of committing an offense such as stealing. Here, the four men broke into a domestic dwelling not to take by force, but to ask for help and their actions certainly were rewarded.

There is also an interesting lesson in this small story that we often overlook. Mark tells us that “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” It was apparently the faith of those helping the sick man, rather than the faith of the man himself, that Jesus rewarded. The story prods us to ask ourselves a question in relation to these men of faith: To what extent do we go in seeking God’s help for others?

While we may have true concern for the needs of others and may regularly take those needs to God on their behalf, just how dedicated and “extreme” are our efforts? Do they approach the dedication of the four men of Capernaum?

Another example of this kind of dedication is the “No one left behind” mantra of military units operating on battlefields or in hostile territory which has led to many examples of heroism where individuals and groups have gone to extraordinary lengths to help those unable to help themselves.

It is a mantra that we might well apply in our Christian lives – the principle of “No brother or sister left behind on life’s battlefield.” It is perhaps only rarely that heroism may be involved, or extremes such as “breaking and entering” on behalf of others who need help, but the principle applies if the need is present. It is, after all, a principle that God commends – we are told to strive to enter the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:24 ESV), and we must strive to help others in fulfilling their calling, too.

In the biblical example the four men guilty of breaking and entering in the city of Capernaum acted with amazing dedication, and many examples of the “No one left behind” mantra show the same. Such stories urge us to ask ourselves: “Would we go to such lengths to help someone in real need?” The answer is probably as close as the next need we see.

24. HOSTAGE RESCUE

*“The individuals opposing you may not be the enemy.”
– Hostage rescue principle.*

A number of military branches and law enforcement agencies have highly trained and specialized Hostage Rescue Teams. The HRT of the American FBI is one of the most well-known, but many countries have such military or paramilitary groups dedicated to saving the lives of people taken captive by hostile forces.

Hostage rescue teams don't simply arrive and announce their credentials to all, of course – they usually work covertly and carefully until close to the time the rescue with which they are tasked is executed. At that point they may infiltrate or storm the area where the hostages are being held to capture or neutralize the hostage takers and give the hostages their freedom.

Christians understand that spiritually a similar hostage rescue situation – affecting all humanity – occurred through the life and death of the Messiah Jesus.

The apostle Paul explained it this way: “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people’” (Ephesians 4:8). Paul's remark is based on Psalm 68:18: “When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious ... ,” but notice that the apostle changes the sense of some of the words of the psalm to fully apply the saying to the work of Christ.

While David spoke of God ascending to Zion, Paul shows the words apply ultimately to the ascent of the resurrected Christ. And rather than God taking “gifts” or tribute from the people as in the psalm, Paul stresses that in Christ's case he did not take gifts, but gave them. In overthrowing the spiritual enemies of humanity Christ rescued human captives from sin and death and gave them the gift of their freedom.

Although the enemies of humanity were beaten in Christ's rescue operation, the overthrow of the forces hostile to humanity is not yet the final one (Revelation 20:1-15). For the present time, it is an initial victory, and the divine rescue mission is an ongoing one. The rescued become the rescuers. It is similar to a hostage or captive situation in which the rescuing team neutralizes the enemy guards and forces open the doors confining the captives – but each captive, in each generation, must individually decide that he or she wants to flee captivity, and it is our job to help them.

In physical hostage situations, captives often unconsciously succumb to what is called the “Stockholm syndrome” or “capture bonding” – they begin to identify with their captors or their ideology and may not want to leave their captivity. Spiritual captivity is no different and humanly, until a person's mind is opened, he or she may not see their captivity as such. So Paul, writing to Timothy, stresses this very fact – and the role of the warrior of the Way in helping others understand what has happened to them and to escape the captivity they do not even realize holds them:

“Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

Notice Paul reminds us that this rescue work must never be done belligerently. Even apparent “opponents” must be treated as those needing rescue when it comes to their opportunity to turn to the light – just as Ananias treated the formerly murderous Saul (Acts 9:17).

We must always remember that no matter how individuals may fight against the good, they are not the enemy – they are often captives held in the grips of a syndrome they themselves do not understand.

PART THREE: VICTORY

25. LIMITING VICTORY

“... they ... limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41 NKJV).

Looking back over history we find some things just don't change much. Perhaps the details change, but the overall picture is often the same (Ecclesiastes 1:9). For example, most studies of the Vietnam War agree that it was a war destined to have no victory because the American leaders held back. The military knew they could not win in such a self-limiting situation and, sure enough, political concerns rather than military strategies determined the outcome of that sad and costly war.

Looking at the biblical record we find ancient wars that were also lost through limiting victory – not through political lack of will, but through lack of spiritual integrity. One particular biblical chapter – Psalm 78 – looks at this fact directly.

The 78th Psalm was apparently written by or for an individual named Asaph. We know little about this person, but – like King David – he appears to have been a man who understood military action well. Twelve of the psalms are ascribed to Asaph, but Psalm 78 is particularly interesting from the perspective of this book because it analyzes military success and failure – defeat and victory – from a spiritual perspective.

Like the Chinese thinker Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, Asaph's psalm summarizes important principles gleaned from the military history of which the author was aware. A key principle is found in the ninth through eleventh verses: “The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them” (Psalm 78:9-11).

The men of Ephraim (a type of all Israel), Asaph tells us, had the latest and most powerful weaponry of that age, and yet they were “turned back” (the Hebrew can mean overturned or overthrown)

and failed to find victory because they limited God in two specific ways. First they did not obey God, and second they did not remember his power. Put simply, these soldiers failed physically because they failed spiritually. They failed because they lacked both obedience and faith, as we see repeatedly in this psalm. As Asaph put it: “In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe” (Psalm 78:32).

This proved to be a deadly combination for ancient Israel. The Book of Judges shows us that whenever the Israelites consistently fell down in terms of obedience and faith, they also consistently fell in defeat. In Psalm 78 Asaph tells us that if they had only believed and obeyed, they would have gained numerous victories because: “...they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands” (Psalm 78:7).

This is a basic truth that also applies in our lives today. Some things just don’t change much. Just as was the case with ancient Israel, God has given us a number of blueprints for victory in the spiritual battles we fight – but there can be no victory without our best efforts of sincere faith and obedience.

Ancient Israel limited a limitless God and in so doing they limited themselves to fighting without victory. We don’t have to do that. As we move through the final part of this book we will examine a number of positive ways in which we can be assured of gaining victory in the Christian fight, but we must always remember to avoid the things which – now just as then – will limit our victory.

26. WHY SETTLE FOR SECOND PLACE?

As the twelve tribes of ancient Israel neared the land they had been promised, two and a half tribes – Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh – looked at the land where they were on the eastern side of the Jordan River and compared it to the wilderness they had come through (Numbers 32).

Viewed from their new standpoint on the edge of the Promised Land, the eastern side of the Jordan looked good. Perhaps it wasn't exactly flowing in milk and honey, but it certainly seemed better than the desert through which they had come. Moses tried to dissuade the two and a half tribes, but they insisted that it was what they wanted, so he allowed them to stay on the "outside" of the Promised Land, except for fulfilling their responsibility to help the other tribes in the conquest.

So, as we saw earlier in this book, under Joshua's leadership the men of the "Transjordan" tribes had to leave their wives and families and go with the other tribes to fight the inhabitants of Canaan (Joshua 1:12-16). When the dust settled, the men of the two and a half tribes were able to return to their homes, but they had seen first-hand the choice areas they could have inherited had they not chosen second best. Ironically, they still had to fight even though they had relinquished any part of the "first place" prize. But worse than that, the area they had chosen was not as well protected and was on the border of several of Israel's enemies, the Ammonites, Edomites and Moabites. Their prize just wasn't as good as it could have been.

In what areas of our lives do we accept "second place" without pushing for the best prize? In school or college we can accept less than what we could accomplish in assignments or grades if we just pushed a little harder, and the pattern continues through life. In marriage, we take second in one of life's most important areas if we

stop trying to develop our relationships with our mates and children. And as older people we take second best if we presume we are past doing anything much productive with our lives. We can be unconsciously accepting second best in any area of our physical lives if we accept what is “OK” but not great.

Just as importantly, in our relationship with God, do we settle for second place in being content with where we feel we are in our development at any particular point, just maintaining a comfortable routine? Or do we continue to look for ways we can keep growing, helping, pushing to accomplish more of what really matters?

Every runner knows that as a race progresses, if you stop pushing harder, you start falling back. Perhaps that analogy is worth keeping in mind. In the ancient Olympics and other athletic games and contests, there were no “second place winners” – only the first place finisher for each event was considered a victor. The names of those achieving second and third place were not even recorded.

That is why the apostle Paul wrote: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24). It’s an analogy every Christian remembers from Paul’s writings, but it’s not just an athletic metaphor. Paul immediately followed it up with an analogy of fighting: “Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air” (vs. 26 NKJV), because Paul knew that in combat, just as in the ancient races, there are no second place winners.

We too, should run our Christian lives, and fight, as though there were only a first place prize; we should live as though we will not settle for less. Like the ancient two and a half tribes of Israel, we will still have to keep fighting even if we do settle for less. So why not run and fight that bit harder, as Paul urges us, for first place? And remember, in the Christian race we are really only competing against ourselves – so why settle for second place when everyone can win?

27. HOW GREAT VICTORIES ARE WON

Sometimes the biggest source of discouragement in the Christian life is not the knowledge that we slipped and lost a battle along the way, but the sense of how slowly we seem to move and how far there is to go to where we want to be. Acknowledging this is not failing to recognize the salvation already accomplished for us in the work of Christ, but a deep desire for the resulting loving obedience that is at the core of Christian growth and transformation. Our steps in the right direction may often seem miniscule, but we can turn that fact around with the understanding that even though we may have far to go, the necessary steps we need to take are really only very small ones.

As J. R. R. Tolkien wrote, “Little by little, one travels far,” and in *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis put this thought directly into the context of Christian warfare:

“Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of.”

The big victories in the Christian struggle, like any other area of life, are won not so much by brilliant tactical thought and strategic planning, but by patiently continuing to do the right things one small step at a time. In fact, if we extend Lewis’ military metaphor a little further, military history shows us just how well the analogy applies to Christian life.

Humans are capable of travelling incredible distances if they set their minds to the goal and persist in moving forward, no matter how slowly. In 218 BC the Carthaginian general Hannibal patiently

marched his army from North Africa to Italy via Spain and the Alps – a distance of almost a thousand miles. In our own era, the 1934-35 "Long March" of the Chinese forces covered 6,000 miles in 268 days of movement; but perhaps the best example comes from the biblical era.

The Roman army of New Testament times was the most formidable fighting machine in the world, and it was renowned for moving its troops great distances to accomplish its aims. How did it do this? Roman foot soldiers patiently kept up a steady pace and in so doing they were able to march 20 miles – or even further – in a five hour march, despite the heavy loads they often carried.

Naturally, horse mounted cavalry could travel further in a short time, but a fact that few realize is that a trained foot soldier can out-march a horse. Although the man may be slower, by the end of the day the slow moving man can often have travelled further. Horses must be rested frequently and often die in adverse conditions, while men continue to move because of the will to persist. That is why the military equipment and supplies of the Roman army (and many others) were pulled not by horse-drawn vehicles, but by oxen and mules which were slower than horses but more persistent.

By their willingness to tirelessly put one foot in front of the other, the Roman legions gained great conquests which were often simply a result of getting to their chosen destination. That is what the apostle James meant when he wrote about the Christian life: "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4). The word translated "perseverance" (*hypomonē*) also means "patience" or "endurance," and James knew what every warrior who sees victory also comes to know: that patient endurance is how the great victories are won.

28. I WANT THAT MOUNTAIN

Today, Chomolungma, known around the world as Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is regularly climbed due to the availability of modern equipment and our cumulative knowledge regarding its possible climbing routes. But throughout most of human history, the 29,029 ft. (8,848 m.) giant – along with several huge neighboring peaks – remained unconquered.

It was only after attempts by many others that the dedicated, unrelenting attack of New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary and his Tibetan guide, Tenzing Norgay, resulted in the mountain finally being summited in 1953. A humble and unassuming man, Hillary's name lives on – and always will – among slayers of giant mountains.

Thousands of years ago another climber and giant-slayer, an old man of 85, exhibited the same kind of unquenchable desire to conquer a mountain region that had proven unconquerable well after ancient Israel entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Notice the story:

Then the people of Judah came to Joshua... And Caleb the son of Jephunneh ... said to him ... “I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart ... And Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.’ And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses ... I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. So now give me this hill

country [“give me this mountain” NKJV] of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said” (Joshua 14:6-12 ESV).

Not only had Caleb served fearlessly as a warrior and spy in his youth, but now after many years – at age 85 – he still remained full of desire to accomplish the goal he could see set before him. And it was a daunting goal – not only to take over the rugged hill country area, but also to displace the giant Anakim who lived there. Although he insisted he was still physically able to do the job in his old age, he exhibited humility in stressing that “It may be that the Lord will be with me” (vs. 12) and that it would be by God’s help that he would triumph.

Seeing Caleb’s determination, Joshua blessed him, and he gave him permission to take the mountain area for which he asked. And we learn that Caleb was, in fact, successful in his attempt to claim the unconquered mountain (Joshua 14:14).

Our goals may not always seem as tangible as climbing the world’s highest mountain or conquering Caleb’s mountain of giants, yet God has called us to even more lasting victories than Hillary and Caleb gained. What matters is that we go after our goals with the same determination that won those great heights of history. We, like the warrior Caleb, will be empowered to reach our goals if we stick with them, but – again like Caleb – no matter how long we live, we must never forget our part – we must want that mountain.

29. THE NEED FOR DECISIVENESS

Most people have heard the expression “Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee!” – but ancient Israel’s most famous woman warrior, whose name in Hebrew means “bee,” can be said to have “flown” like a bee and “stung” like one, too!

Deborah led Israel for 40 years (Judges 5:31) as the fourth “Judge” of the pre-monarchial era around the 12th Century BC (a century or so after Israel’s settlement in the Promised Land) when Israel was ruled primarily by warrior leaders. She was, in fact, the only recorded female Judge, and it is easy to see why she qualified for the position. Deborah was not only a prophet used by God to foretell things such as the outcome of battles, but also she was clearly a strong, competent and inspiring military leader who acted quickly and decisively.

In the Book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5 tell us that Deborah lived in the hill country of Ephraim, which was in an area controlled by the Canaanite King Jabin of Hazor (perhaps a descendent of the Jabin Joshua fought), who had oppressed the Israelites for 20 years. The Book of Judges states that Deborah received instruction from God and summoned one of Israel’s great warriors, named Barak, telling him to deploy 10,000 Israelite fighting men on Mount Tabor to confront King Jabin’s general, Sisera, who led an army including 900 iron chariots. We do not know how many foot soldiers Sisera commanded, but the chariot was the tank of ancient warfare, and Sisera’s force was vastly superior by that fact.

Nevertheless, Deborah did not hesitate: “Then Deborah said to Barak, ‘Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?’” (Judges 4:14). Despite the apparent odds, on Deborah’s unflinching command the Israelites met and completely defeated the Canaanite force, and the victory is celebrated in Judges 5, often known as the “Song of

Deborah.” The Bible itself gives few details of the battle, though Jewish tradition has it that torrential rains bogged down the heavy Canaanite chariots in mud, rendering them useless against the attacking Israelites. This providential help may be implied in Judges 5:4, and the Bible does mention another detail of the battle. The defeated Sisera fled his army on foot and came to the tent of the woman Jael and her husband. Jael was able to trick Sisera into letting down his guard, then struck him through the temple with a sharpened tent peg (Judges 4:17-21).

What is clear from the biblical record is the reluctance of many of the Israelites to act when the time was long overdue to fight, and the hesitancy of even the leading warrior Barak who would not fight unless Deborah accompanied the troops (Judges 4: 8). These details contrast starkly with the bravery and willingness to fight of both Deborah as military leader and Jael as front-line fighter. Both women are portrayed as warriors who led and fought without hesitation. If there is a lesson to be learned from the story of Deborah, it is exactly that.

Battles of any type, physical or spiritual, are lost by hesitation. Had Deborah not been close enough to God to receive His guidance and then been willing to go to war immediately when she knew what had to be done, she would not have been able to seize the opportunity to rout her enemies when they could be defeated.

It is a spiritual principle as basic and true as the physical principle of battle - delaying what we know we must do only allows our enemy to become stronger. Deborah knew and fought by that rule and, as a result, with God's help she was victorious and gave Israel forty years of peace, security and freedom – some of the very qualities that spiritual victories bring as well.

30. THE PEACEMAKERS

“Blessed are the peacemakers...” (Matthew 5:9). *“Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness”* (James 3:18).

Christian combat is ultimately about victory, of which peace is a vital component. Without peace there is no true victory! We see this in the memorable words of Isaiah who spoke of the Messiah as “Warrior God” (a better translation than “Mighty God,” for a number of reasons) and “Prince of Peace” in the same breath (Isaiah 9:6).

But there are different aspects of peacemaking – and of peace itself, as the apostle Paul intimated: “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and *in every way*” (2 Thessalonians 3:16, emphasis added).

In the obvious sense, peace is the successful avoidance or termination of hostility, hatred and strife. That is always a good thing, of course, and all Christians are encouraged to be peacemakers in their own interactions and, where possible, in the interactions of others.

Paul used the example of ancient Jewish-Gentile animosity to show that this kind of Christian peacemaking is rooted in the work of Christ himself:

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one ... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Paul says here that there can be no unity with God without unity with others (see also Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 3:15, etc.). That is the theological understanding that underlies all Christian efforts

toward peacemaking, and it has daily application in the lives of all of us, as Paul also writes elsewhere:

“... Live in peace with each other” (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

“... as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18 NKJV).

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace ...” (Romans 14:19).

“... be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

These verses, and many others, all relate to the primary meaning of peacemaking, but there is also another aspect to the concept that we need to keep in mind. The Christian concept of “peace” is often seen as a kind of trying to get along with everyone no matter what – a “peace at any price” mentality. But the biblical concept of peace is very different and is often much closer to the concept of victory than many realize. In fact, the biblical concepts of peace and victory are often synonymous, because the establishment of peace frequently requires the struggle against evil.

This understanding of peace helps us better understand the broader implication of being called to be peacemakers. Peacemaking is a massive mission. It involves not only the Christian’s active work to cease from and to help avoid strife, but also working to do away with any form of evil and to institute good wherever possible. This understanding of the second role of what peacemakers are and what they do helps us to better comprehend scriptures relating to the nature of God himself.

In the Book of Judges we see a clear physical example of this second aspect of peace in the interaction of God with the warrior Gideon. When God heard the prayers of the Israelites who were being starved and oppressed by the Midianites, the “angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon and greeted him: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12). God then commissioned Gideon to lead the struggle against the evil oppression and Gideon in turn

built an altar to God – not as the God of strife and warfare, but as *Yahweh shalom*, the God of Peace! (Judges 6:24).

With God's help, Gideon led Israel throughout the campaign of freedom, and as a result of the struggle we are told "the land had peace forty years" (Judges 8:28b).

This example clearly shows the correlation between strong active involvement in overthrowing destructive forces and peace – something we see repeatedly in scriptures regarding God's nature:

"The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace" (Psalms 29:11).

"... Mighty God ... Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6b).

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20).

So, being a peacemaker is often far from passive inaction. It is actually one of the toughest missions the Christian warrior is given. It involves doing the work of the God who is the ultimate peacemaker – the God who puts down evil and institutes good. Our responsibility as warriors of the Way is not only to avoid hatred and strife, but also to actively work against evil where we have opportunity to do so. Both roles are part of being a true peacemaker.

Just as there can be no victory without peace, there can be no peace without victory!

31. CREDIT TO WHOM IT IS DUE

Every year people around the US, and even many around the world, turn to the Academy Awards ceremony to see credit being given to leading Hollywood actors, actresses, directors, producers and a host of others who work behind the scenes.

Not only are the awards intended to give credit, but those receiving them frequently take a great amount of time (while basking in the spotlight) to thank everyone who supported their work – and if you have ever watched them, you know that sometimes means a long list of people!

This on-stage giving of credit is all well and good, though it can often seem artificial when we compare how infrequently most people tend to give credit to others in everyday life situations.

But there is plenty of biblical precedent for giving appreciative credit where it is due to others for successes and victories in our daily lives. A great example is found in 1 Samuel where David insisted that all who had helped him in a military campaign should receive credit and proper reward. Speaking to his followers who wanted to give credit only to those directly involved in the fighting, we find:

“David replied ‘No, my brothers ... The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.’ David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this” (1 Samuel 30:23-25).

Not only did David credit all who had taken part in the campaign, whether front line fighters or base support personnel, but also he sent some of the captured goods to the elders of Judah in recognition of their support, saying, “Here is a gift for you from the plunder of the LORD’s enemies” (1 Samuel 30:26). Further,

Samuel tells us, David sent some of the spoils of victory to a great number of towns in the kingdom recognizing their past help and support. The list is long (and almost Oscar like!) as David gives credit to:

“...those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa and Rakal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athak and Hebron ...” (1 Samuel 30:30).

Notice that even this long list is not complete as vs. 31 adds “and to those in all the other places where he and his men had roamed.” So David used the opportunity to give credit not only to all who had helped him directly or indirectly in his military campaign, but also to all of his friends and supporters who were not even involved – but who had supported him up to that time.

It’s a viewpoint worth remembering. David gave credit for his victories widely and generously. It was clearly part of his character and something we can remember in our own relationships with the people with whom we live and work and who help us to succeed.

There is also another side to this. If we try to conscientiously give credit to those who have helped us or worked alongside us in any of life’s endeavors, we will perhaps be more likely to be aware of, and to give credit to, the One who so often helps us behind the scenes and to whom credit is always due!

32. OPERATION PEARL

Victories of biblical proportions did not end with the completion of the Bible.

In one night in June, 1981, a clandestine Christian operation successfully smuggled a staggering one million Bibles into China, where they were distributed and gratefully accepted as great treasures by those who longed for Bibles, but had no way to obtain them.

The mission, code named “Project Pearl,” was primarily organized by a former Marine and carried out by Christians during a time when the Communist Party was actively trying to destroy Christianity in China, and the level of success achieved by Project Pearl was nothing short of astounding. Reporting the incident later, *Time* magazine called it “the largest operation of its kind in the history of China.”

The story is a fascinating one. On the night of June 18, an innocuous-seeming tugboat churned its way across the sea near Shantou, China. The twenty crew members on board were all taking a great risk. They were not Chinese. They were from Australia, Canada, Holland, New Zealand, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States. And this was no ordinary tug. It pulled a specially built barge loaded with 232 one-ton waterproof packages of Bibles.

Interception of the cargo would have led not only to the destruction of the Bibles by the Communist authorities, but also to serious repercussions for the crew members. But the tug continued, undetected, past the ships of a Chinese naval base to a position just off a secluded beach where a group of Chinese Christians were waiting. The specially built barge was then partially submerged so that the packages of Bibles floated off its deck and were carried by the waves to the beach.

There, the assembled Christian team hurriedly opened the packages and carried the Bibles off to distribution points in cars, on motorcycles and bicycles, and by foot in backpacks and other containers. From each distribution center the Bibles were carefully released to avoid the suspicion of the authorities. Helping in this process, the Bibles had been bound with red covers and made to the same size as Chairman Mao's famous "Red Book," so that they were easily mistaken for that.

Some containers of the Bibles not moved from the beach in time were found by Chinese guards who threw the Bibles into the sea, but even these copies were retrieved by fishermen who dried them on the roofs of their houses and they were then passed on to others. Several hundred copies that were found by the authorities were thrown into a cesspool only to be later carefully retrieved by Christians who thoroughly washed them and sprayed them with perfume. Even these so-called "wet" and "perfumed" Bibles were accepted just as gratefully by Christians who had no other access to the word of God.

Although conditions have changed in the years since this daring mission was accomplished, and printed Bibles are no longer the most effective manner of getting the Scriptures into China, Project Pearl remains a wonderful story of what was accomplished by the dedication of Christian warriors who, with the help of God, were able to accomplish a truly astounding victory. We cannot even begin to calculate the total effect of this project, which placed Bibles in the hands of one million people who did not have access to them. But one thing is sure, Project Pearl played no small part in the revival and spread of Christianity in China – where there are now more Christians than in any other country in the world.

33. WHAT HAVE YOU ACCOMPLISHED?

The journals of U.S. Army Captain Meriwether Lewis and his second-in-command, William Clark, recording their epic journey of discovery of the American West, are full of amazing details about the hardships they endured and their great accomplishments. The perilous journey lasted from May 1804 to September 1806, and in his August 18, 1805 journal entry Lewis wrote:

“This day I completed my thirty-first year. I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation.... I resolved in future, to redouble my exertions ...”

Lewis wrote this at the point when he, Clark and the expedition members had not only reached the source of the Missouri River, but had also finally crossed the almost impenetrable Rocky Mountains. He and the others with him had immeasurably advanced the knowledge of the American West and had done a great deal toward opening up vast areas which would further human success and happiness on the continent. Yet he felt he had done little, if anything. The story reminds us of the words of the apostle Paul who, after incredible accomplishments for the work of God, wrote in his letter to the Philippians:

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on

toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

This phenomenon is easy to see in our own lives. The more important a task to which we commit ourselves, the less we sometimes feel we are succeeding in it. Yet there is encouragement in this if we realize we often simply do not see, ourselves, what we are accomplishing in the work God gives us to do. This is probably especially true in work which shows no immediate or obvious tangible results.

But the success of any spiritual venture is in God’s hands, not ours, if we are doing what we can do. I know of many servants of God who have felt a total lack of success after preaching a sermon or writing something which they felt in retrospect would probably not really help anyone – only to be told by someone that the particular message was of great personal help.

The truth is, like Captain Lewis, we may not fully see the significance of what we do. Although physically we may not have accomplished anything like Lewis did, if we continue to rededicate ourselves to the mission we have been given, time will show that the work done through us did in fact make a difference.

34. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

The Gospel of Luke recounts how Jesus fulfilled the words spoken by the prophet Zechariah as he entered Jerusalem in a “triumphal entry” during the final week of his ministry (Luke 19:28-44). Luke tells us how Jesus instructed two of his disciples to go to a nearby home where they would find a young donkey and to bring it to him. He told the disciples that if anyone challenged them, they were to simply say: “The Lord needs it” (Luke 19:31). The disciples did this – explaining to the donkey’s owners what Jesus had told them.

Jesus was, in effect, invoking the ancient principle of *angaria* (from a Babylonian word meaning “mounted messenger”) by which kings, rulers and other individuals with official responsibilities could requisition property for official use. *Angaria* originated in the earliest postal systems in the ancient Persian, Greek and later Roman cultures where an animal could be “requisitioned” from its owner to carry the mail on the next stage of its multiple-staged journey, somewhat equivalent to the “Pony Express” of the American frontier.

In the Judea of Jesus’ day, under Roman rule, animals could be commandeered in this way for the emperor’s service, and the right was also expanded to include the needs of the king, and even magistrates and rabbis.

This incident was, then, the “royal” prelude to the actual triumphal entry in which the crowds provided what we would call today a “red carpet” entry for Jesus by covering the road with their capes and the branches of trees to welcome him as he rode on the donkey into the city (Luke 19:35-37). The scene was actually not

unlike a humbler version of the great Roman “Triumphs” in which the grateful citizens celebrated the procession of heroes who had served the people. In fact, the similarity with a Roman Triumph is more than superficial, because the Triumph was a civil and religious ceremony which was held to publicly “celebrate and sanctify” the success of a commander who had led his forces to victory in the service of the people.

It is clear that Jesus rejected the aggrandizing nature of the pagan Triumphs which fed the cult of personalities in Roman and other cultures, and he did this by riding humbly on a young donkey – the antithesis of the great horses of conquering kings and heroes – while fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 in every detail. Yet Jesus did accept the people’s praise (Luke 19:40), and the details of the story from beginning to end show that a triumphal entry – a symbolic victory celebration – was intended.

The words of the crowds who welcomed Jesus in this triumphal entry are important. Luke tells us that they quoted from the great Messianic Psalm 118 (Luke 19:38) – which is why the Pharisees attempted to silence them (Luke 19:39). This is the psalm that contains the statement so significantly quoted by Jesus: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22), but it also contains the clear references to the triumphal entry of the Messiah:

“I look in triumph on my enemies” (vs. 7),

“I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done” (vs. 17),

“Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord” (vs.19),

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar” (vs. 26).

Although Luke only cites a few of the words from Psalm 118, the psalm is in fact a full prophetic description of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

But if this was a triumph, what was the victory? Jesus had not yet defeated sin and death on the cross, he had not yet completed the work he came to accomplish in this regard, yet there was one way in which a victory was surely celebrated. The primary purpose of the *angaria*, by which Jesus obtained the donkey on which he rode, was to deliver a message. And at this point, at the end of his ministry, Jesus had successfully delivered the news of the Kingdom of God to the point that it was now established and would continue to spread throughout the world. He had also lived the perfect life needed in order that he could give himself as a sacrifice for all people.

In that sense, Jesus had fully triumphed in his work as he came to Jerusalem as "... your *king* who comes to you, righteous and *victorious*, lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9, emphases added).

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem prior to his death was indeed a triumph. Even though it preceded his final victory, he had delivered the only message that in the end really matters. In our own lives we must never be discouraged that the Kingdom of God is "not yet," that victory seems distant. If we are living the life to which God calls us and delivering the message we have been given, we are also part of the triumph which precedes final victory.

35. THE VICTORY OF SACRIFICE

Most Christians understand and rejoice in the fact that Christ's sacrificial death – a seeming defeat in human terms – was, in fact, history's greatest victory. As believers we come to understand what was accomplished through that sacrifice and we see it as it is – a great spiritual triumph for the plan of God. Yet despite our understanding of the victory accomplished through Christ's sacrifice, how many of us clearly see and believe the fact that our own sacrifices are victories, too?

Sometimes Christian sacrifice is total, when Christians literally give their lives for other believers. There are many examples of this throughout history, but don't ever think they are something of the past. Just this year (2015), on March 15th in Youhanabad, Lahore, Pakistan, two Christian churches were attacked by Christian-hating suicide bombers. Both bombers detonated their explosives in the churches they attacked, but thankfully only a few people died out of the 2,000 or so believers meeting in the combined congregations. This was because in both churches the bombers were stopped in the entrances by church volunteers doing security duty.

In sacrificing their lives, those courageous volunteers in Youhanabad exemplified Christ's teaching that "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13) – a teaching repeated by the apostle John, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16).

But laying down our lives thankfully does not always have to mean physically losing them. The expression "to lay down" something, which is used to record Jesus' words "to lay down one's life," can also mean to place something in position for a purpose (as in Matthew 5:15 where a candle is "placed" on a stand).

When we come to understand, through the experiences of Christian training and combat, that our calling to sacrifice is to be

“placed for use,” we come to see what the apostle Paul meant about the ongoing Christian walk much more clearly: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1). But in what ways do we find victory in everyday sacrifice?

There are many ways we can sacrifice to accomplish good and thus achieve victory, and it makes a profitable Bible study topic to search out and think on the Scriptures that talk about giving in this way. For example, Hebrews 13:15 speaks of the sacrifice of praise and giving thanks, Hebrews 13:16 speaks of the sacrifice of doing good and sharing with others. But in every example where something is said to be a sacrifice it involves loss. To sacrifice we lose some aspect of our lives – whether time, money, energy, security, acceptance or whatever. But in reality that loss is always a victory. This is part of what Christ meant in saying “...whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

The phrase “All gave some, some gave all” is often used of the sacrifices made by our veterans and fallen service members, but it should be true of every Christian, also. In both cases, something is given, lost, denied oneself in order to accomplish something. That is why every sacrifice we make is a victory. Whether it is a victory over some blatant evil in the world or just over a part of our own inherently selfish natures, it is a victory.

Next time you find it difficult to give up something – whether time, resources, or anything else, remember that in the Christian walk there is no victory without sacrifice, but that every sacrifice is, at whatever level it is made, a meaningful victory.

36. ULTIMATE VICTORY

“... thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

What is ultimate victory? To fully understand the answer to that question, and to fully live it, it helps if the warrior of the Way understands an ancient Greek word used of combat and warfare. Actually, it's a word most believers already know, but one with a significance they don't always realize. The word is *nike*.

In ancient Greece, Nike was the name of the goddess of victory. It's the word we all know, of course, from the athletic shoes of that name (though the Greek word is actually pronounced “nee-kay”), and those with military background will know that Nike is also the name of a number of the United States' antiaircraft missiles.

But what does any of this have to do with understanding the concept of victory in the Bible? Simply that many believers who are all too aware of their present failures read biblical verses which talk about victory (translated from *nike*) and see it as a somewhat ethereal concept – a distant victory, perhaps only fully realized in a future life in the Kingdom of God.

But it helps get things in biblical perspective to realize that Christian victory is something experienced in the present just as much as in the future. The words translated “overcome” many times in the New Testament are actually forms of *nike*, and these words are usually in the present tense. So when we read, for example, in 1 John 5:4: “... everyone born of God *overcomes* the world. This is the *victory* that has *overcome* the world, even our faith” (emphases added), the words “overcome,” “overcomes” and “victory” are all from forms of *nike*.

This verse shows that our overcoming – our victory – is largely a present occurrence, not some future event. John is telling us that

everyone who has been “born” or “begotten” by the Spirit of God is now victorious through faith in Christ.

Just as Jesus told his disciples “... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33), our faith in Christ’s conquest is the basis for our conquest, too. When we become spiritually one with Christ and become a part of his righteous life, his death and resurrection (Romans 6:4-5), so we also become part of his conquest, his victory.

Spiritually then, the believer is already a victor! This does not mean that we do not have to keep fighting and struggling, that we will not have failures and downfalls – as Christ said “In this world you will have trouble,” – but we can still “take heart” because the ultimate victory is already won and we are part of it.

That is exactly what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote: “...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). Notice the present tense – that we *are* victors. The context of this transcendent statement is one of the most encouraging sections of the word of God:

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:33, 35).

These thoughts regarding the battles and skirmishes we may occasionally lose at this time (vs. 33), just as much as any other problems we may experience (vs. 35), are the real-life backdrop to Paul’s words that “...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (vs 37).

We see this principle throughout the New Testament. In the climactic Book of Revelation, each letter to the Seven Churches closes with a promise that “The one who is victorious” will be richly rewarded, and toward the end of the book we also read that “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.” (Revelation 21:7). In all these cases, the

word to be “victorious” is not future, but a present active verb – it is something happening now. John stresses that this present-time victory is not winning a one-time battle, however. The reward of the true victor is given “To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end...” (Revelation 2:26). Our part in true overcoming, true victory, true *nike*, is persistent obedient faith that continues despite temporary setbacks, defeats and downfalls.

The victorious warrior of the Way understands that although the battle may sometimes seem to never end, persisting in the struggle is all that matters – because, as long as we never give up, the ultimate victory is already won.

AFTERWORD

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