

Monday, May 16, 2011 – The Ravages of War

Dear Chuck,

My son David, who is 25, was raised to believe in Christ. He did drugs from a young age and joined the Army as a very young teenager! After basics and advanced individual training at Fort Lewis, Washington State, he served about 9 months in Iraq. He was injured by a face shot which entered at his jaw and exited C2 C3. Initially he was paralyzed.

He received excellent care at BAMC in San Antonio, TX. We are a large family who love David and have been there for him! Besides almost dying in Iraq he lost many close buddies who did die over there! His closest friend a civilian killed himself with David's gun this past August. David has had 3 episodes of "unintentional" drug overdose in the past year and is in his 3rd rehab at VA in Temple.

My son David survived and recovered most of the use of his body! He is very depressed most of the time, says he is tired and also, complains of boredom.

My husband and I pray for David as have so many friends and family and many persons whom we do not even know! We love him so very much and want to see him live to the glory of God! My hope gets shattered but my faith in God does not!

His choice of friends and drugs and music are very destructive! And, yet, I know in each person there is hope and that we are all formed in the image of Christ, although we do not all choose to be conformed to that image!

Please pray for our son David and for all of our U.S. military! You can only imagine their lives devastated by war and death and dying friends and loss of marriages. Perhaps a lot has to do also with the lives they have taken.

God bless you and your family and your ministry, too!

Karan

I cannot begin to understand the price, the stress, the grief, the pain, the heartache or any of the hundreds of other emotions experienced by those, and their families, who sacrifice so much to defend our country either domestically or abroad. We often see

and hear stories of the tragic physical expense that is paid by those serving. Karen mentions the physical damage that her son David experienced. Time has a way of healing physical wounds. It is the emotional struggle that is often hard to overcome.

For Christians that have, or will be, faced with the reality of deployment, the emotional turmoil of being a part of war often times is grounded in whether the role you are fulfilling goes against the very fundamental principles of Christianity. A number of respected brethren have through the years espoused what is known as the “pacifist” position that Christians may not properly serve in the military, or in any role requiring the use of force in defense of our nation. They site passages such as **Romans 12:19** where Paul wrote, “**Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord.**” These words, and some other passages, have been sometimes offered as proof that a child of God may not resort to force of arms in the national defense.

In the context of this passage, Paul is affirming basic principles of Christian living. Among these principles is the following statement: “**Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men, if it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good**” (Rom. 12:17-21).

Paul is presenting an attitude that is characteristic of Christians. The child of God does not seek revenge or retaliation. He understands that vengeance is uniquely within the Lord’s province. This concept and recognition produces a manner of life unlike most people of the world. The Christian is not motivated by a desire for retribution, even if he has been wronged.

There is a vast difference between revenge and defending your home, family or country. **Romans 13:1-7** teaches that civil government is an ordinance of God. It is God’s will that communities of men shall be governed by laws set up by each respective community, city, state, nation, etc. Civil law is an extension of the arm of God from a social perspective. Civil government is about keeping social order. Rulers have a work to do which is authorized by God. They need to keep in mind their obligation to God (**Psalms 33:12 – Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; Proverbs 14:34 – Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people**). The universality of the duty of every citizen to be in subjection to the higher powers is stressed by “every soul” (13:1).

It is the duty of men to obey (as far as possible without violating God's will) their government. WHY? The ultimate source of the government is God. God is making clear that ANY civil authority derives its origin, right and power from God. This is not to claim that it guarantees perfection of operation in government any more than it guarantees perfection of operation for the home, elderships, etc. Rulers are not infallible agents of perfection any more than parents, husbands, elders, etc. Paul recognizes the legitimate role of the government in carrying out punishment for wrongdoing, and affirms that in so doing, the government is acting as an agent for God himself. It is therefore entirely possible to defend our country without being at all vindictive or vengeful.

Governments have the right to defend its citizens. Our Lord does not demand that we be passive in the face of onslaught and danger. He does allow us to protect our lives, our family and our property. He does not forbid us to serve in the military or police forces. But Christ does command us not to seek personal vengeance for wrongs suffered.

What about the despair and depression that sometimes follows those who come home?

In **James 5:17** we are told that Elijah was just a man, "...**subject to like passions as we are.**" He possessed the same human frailties and inclinations. He was a human being just like us. He was a man who faced great obstacles in life, and while he did not always deal with them correctly, we can learn a great deal from the guidance God provided him; and it is still applicable to us today.

1 Kings 18 shows us that Elijah stood up valiantly and courageously in a marvelous demonstration of what it means to defend God and His truth against overwhelming numbers. Ahab went home and told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done to dispose of her false prophets, and she was so enraged that she put out a contract on his life and vowed he would be dead within 24 hours. The news shook Elijah up so much that he headed straight out into the desert a day's journey, sat down under a desert shrub, and began to pray that God might take his life! What a change came over him! Rather than being the courageous, confident man he was on Mt. Carmel, now he was despondent, depressed and in the firm grip of his human vulnerabilities.

How should Christians behave when adversity strikes? How can we keep from going into psychological seclusion, alienation and spiritual neutrality? What's the solution?

In this very text of Scripture lie at least five answers that we need to apply in our lives when faced with what we feel are overwhelming difficulties.

1. When Elijah retreated into a cave, we are told the Lord confronted him with the words, "**What are you doing here?**" (vs. 9).

1.1. This is the first solution to coping with life's obstacles: straight talk and direct confrontation. We need friends and loved ones to get right to the point, press us with reality, and shock us out of our inward preoccupation.

2. In order to successfully negotiate the obstacles of life, we will have to face God.

2.1. Elijah was forced to experience God's presence in the form of a series of near encounters involving a strong wind, an earthquake, a fire, and suddenly the voice of God Himself (vs. 11-13).

2.2. The application for us is that we absolutely must hear the voice of God in Scripture. We must go to our Bibles often and quit relying upon our own thoughts and our own wisdom. The only way to lean on the Lord is to encounter Him in His word and saturate ourselves with His thoughts. His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (**Ps. 119:105**). Turn to the scriptures!

2.3. Consider the direction and hope we get from the following passages"

2.3.1. **Ephesians 4:31 - Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be [put away] from you, with all malice:**

2.3.2. **Psalms 118:24 - This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.**

2.3.3 **1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 - Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

2.3.4. **Colossians 4:6 - Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each person**

2.3.5. **Ephesians 4:29 - Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.**

2.3.6. **Rom. 15:4 - For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope**

3. An important key is for us to focus on others instead of ourselves (vs. 15-16).

3.1. Get back into the Lord's work and get busy.

3.2. Occupy your mind with thoughts of other people who need to be loved and served. (**John 15:12-13, 17**).

4. Another great help in handling life's roadblocks is to make friends--comrades in the faith who will help us and support us even as we encourage them.

4.1. God wanted Elijah to enlist the aid of three individuals. These men would help Elijah in the task of eliminating idolatry and false religion. The Bible even says that one of these men, Elisha, "arose and followed Elijah, and served him" (vs. 21). Elijah needed some friends, some fellow workers who were in there pulling in the same direction.

5. Finally, a great aid in overcoming life's obstacles is to realize that we are not alone.

5.1. Elijah was lonely; he felt all alone in his efforts to oppose false religion. He honestly thought he was about the only one left who was genuinely trying to live faithfully before God. But God set him straight on that point: Seven thousand remained who had not capitulated to the subversive trends (vs. 18).

5.2. So it is for us. All Christians face obstacles in life. There are other Christians who are just as dedicated and determined to stay faithful and work for the Lord. We're not alone. Concentrate on building your faith for the journey home.

We have the decision to make in our lives as to whether we allow obstacles to manage us and how we live or are we going to manage them through lessons we learn from Elijah and others in the scriptures. As with all other aspects of our spiritual lives, the solutions are easy because God tells us how to handle all situations of life. The hard part is deciding we want to follow His direction.

I can't possibly understand the emotional toll that one experiences when he or she has been forced to take a life in war, seen comrades (or combatants) fall by the wayside or had a friend take their own life. But I do know that God is with his children and can provide the strength and comfort we need to handle all situations in life.

Consider these thoughts with me:

1. **God is much stronger than we are**

1.1. Just because a problem looks big to us, that does not mean there is nothing God can do about it

1.2. **Exodus 14:13, 14, 21, 22, 30, 31**

1.3. It is when we feel most helpless that God's ability to help us is greatest — His strength shines brightest during our times of greatest need

1.3.1. **2 Cor. 12:9, 10 - And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in**

needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

1.4. God is “able” to do far more than we imagine

1.4.1. **Eph. 3:20 - Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.**

1.5. There is nothing God wants us to do that we cannot do through Him

1.5.1. **Phil. 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.**

2. God helps us when we stand up for what is right

2.1. It frequently happens that we feel some kind of “pressure” to take a course of action we know God would not want us to take.

2.2. But it is never “necessary” to do wrong to “get ahead” in life.

2.2.1. We never have to do wrong just because somebody else says so

2.2.1.1. **Dan. 3** – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego

2.2.1.2. **Read verses 10-19**

2.2.2. When we are tempted to do wrong, God always provides a way of escape

2.2.2.1. **1 Cor. 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

2.3. Stephen – **Acts 7**

2.4. We need to learn to stand up and be counted on the Lord’s side — and trust the Lord for the consequences.

3. God will always see that we have what we truly need

3.1. One of the deepest human fears is that of being “inadequate.”

3.2. But God knows our needs before we ask Him for them

3.2.1. **Matt. 6:32-34 - For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**

3.3. It is God who supplies our “sufficiency”

3.3.1. **2 Cor. 3:4, 5 – And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God**

4. With God, we do not ever have to be afraid

- 4.1. If we place ourselves on God's side in the warfare between good and evil, we have every reason to be courageous about who we are and what we believe — and no reason to be fearful.
- 4.2. In the face of things like ridicule and reproach, we need to stand up for our convictions.
- 4.3. Whether Satan threatens us with bodily harm or more intangible dangers, we do not need to fear
 - 4.3.1. **Psalms 23:4 - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

5. God is our courage

- 5.1. The presence of God and of the Lord as our constant companions through life
 - 5.1.1. **John 8:29 - And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.**
 - 5.1.2. **Is. 59:1-2 - Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear**
- 5.2. The knowledge of God's word provides us with guidance and direction all through the course of life
 - 5.2.1. **2 Tim. 3:16-17 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**
- 5.3. The fellowship of the saints provides us with constant encouragement in living the Christian life
 - 5.3.1. **Phil. 1:3-7 - I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace**

6. With God, we are never alone

- 6.1. Christ in the Garden
 - 6.1.1. **John 17**
- 6.2. Paul in prison
 - 6.2.1. **Acts 16:19-25 - But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble**

our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe. Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Our Heavenly Father is the inexhaustible supply of everything we need to live joyous lives and do His work productively. May we always be ready to help those who are in need see the beauty and steadfastness found in God.

Please remember our troops and their families in your prayers.