



GHOST WARRIORS

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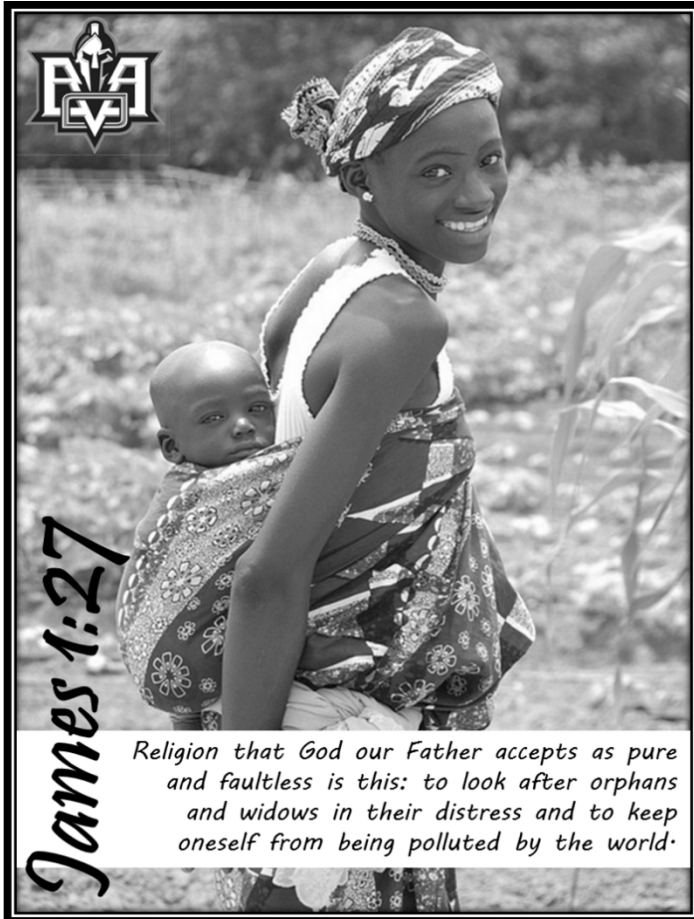
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“True prayer is the trading of the heart with God, and the heart never comes into spiritual commerce with the ports of heaven until God the Holy Ghost puts wind into the sails and speeds the ship into its haven.” - Charles Spurgeon



MORE THAN JUST A MEN'S MINISTRY...



The “**James 1:27 Initiative**” of Band of Brothers is our effort to make a global impact through each of our local Platoons. 100% of all our profits from the sale of our study guides will go directly into helping fund “Family Preservation” ministries across the globe.

Simply by purchasing this book, you are potentially changing the life of a mother, a child, or even a whole family! So **THANK YOU** for joining us on this worthy cause!

To find out more about this initiative, please check out our website.

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BAND OF BROTHERS

Phase 2: Ghost Warriors Introduction



Welcome to the Phase 2 study of the Band of Brothers Global Men’s Ministry! We are so thankful that you are a part of this study, and we pray that God would use it in a mighty way to transform your life as you follow after Him!!

The purpose of this introduction is to hopefully clear up any questions you might have, and to center our focus towards one singular goal:

The alignment of our heart with that of the Holy Spirit, so we may advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ with power and with passion, to the praise and the glory of God.

Sound like a worthy goal? We hope so!! Let’s dig right in...

QUESTION 1:

This is Phase 2 of Band of Brothers. What is Phase 1, and do I need to go back and do that study before I go through this one?

“Phase 1: Combat Training” is a 10-part study designed to get you and the men in your Platoon (small group) back to the “basics” of what it means to be a follower of Christ. In the Phase 1 study, we tackle subjects from being disciplined in your walk with the Lord, to addressing your fears, to overcoming sin, to finishing the race strong. And **SO** much more.

If you have not been through Phase 1 of BOB, take some time to visit our website, www.bobmensministry.org. There you’ll find a free eBook version of the study that you can look through at your convenience.

While it would definitely help you to go through Phase 1 with a group of brothers, it is **NOT** required. There will be a few references back to some topics from Phase 1 in this study, but, for the most part, this study will stand

by itself just fine. In fact, by the end of this study, if you have begun to earnestly submit your life to the direction of the Holy Spirit, you might find it very beneficial to go back and tackle Phase 1 with your Platoon, now that you have tapped into the power that He provides.

But, you've got a few weeks before you need to think about that. For now, we are excited to see what God has planned for you as you dig into Ghost Warriors!

QUESTION 2:

This study is about the Holy Spirit, so do we finally get to start praying in tongues now? Or, on the other end of the spectrum, am I going to be all weirded out by what happens in this group?

Well, no. And yes.

For the majority of people out there, when we hear the words "Holy Spirit", we tend to think of people speaking in tongues, prophesying over each other, healing people from sickness and diseases, etc. The Apostle Paul describes it in this way,

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines." 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Some of you may have grown up in a Church where these gifts of the Spirit were practiced and encouraged. You may be in a Church now that does the same. It is a natural part of your Church services, and maybe even your daily life.

For others, you have been brought up to believe that most of those gifts, while they served a purpose in the early Church of the Bible, are no longer a part of the Christianity of today, and should **NOT** be practiced or encouraged.

Probably for most of you though, you haven't ever experienced things like speaking in tongues or prophecy or miraculous healings, **BUT** you aren't necessarily opposed to them in today's Churches.

Here's what we would say to each of you:

If you believe in speaking in tongues and prophecy and other gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the Scriptures, then use it for the common good of the Church. But remember, it is a gift given to you from the Spirit. It does not make you more "Spirit-filled" than your brother who does not speak in tongues. You didn't do anything to earn those gifts, just as your brother who does not prophecy didn't do anything to have them withheld. The Spirit **CHOSE** to give it to you. Now use it to build up the Church. **IN LOVE.**

If you believe that most of those gifts have faded in usefulness and importance for today's Church, then find **YOUR** role in building up the Church. Maybe God has given you the gift of teaching or serving or encouragement. Pursue those gifts with everything you've got. And love your brothers that speak in tongues and prophecy. Regardless of whether you agree or not. Pursue unity in Christ. Focus on the cross. And lock shields with your brother, even if you do think they're a little strange!

BUT, in an effort to squash any arguments that may begin to rise up within your Platoon regarding these gifts, let us say now that this study is **NOT** about any of those gifts.

For the purpose of this study, we will distinguish between the "gifts" of the Spirit, as Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 12, and the "fruits" of the Spirit, as he wrote about in Galatians 5,

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

For the next few weeks, you and your brothers will be pursuing what it looks like when a man of God loves others by willingly laying down his life so they might come to know Christ better.

You'll find out what true joy is – not the cheap, momentary happiness that the world is trying to push off onto you, but a joy that is firmly grounded in the knowledge of your salvation.

You'll discover a deep peace within your soul, regardless of the circumstances that surround you – a peace that cannot be explained in any other term than 'supernatural.'

You'll find a patience to endure the suffering that has been promised to all true believers. Yes, you read that right – it has been **PROMISED** that you **WILL** suffer. The question is, will you do it patiently?

You will begin to reach out to the lost and those cast aside – not just by society, but by the Church as well – with sincere kindness and compassion, pouring out to them the same degree of mercy that Christ poured out onto you.

You will learn what it means to have a righteous anger that is rooted in a strong desire to see God's goodness and justice proclaimed in dark places – and you will let it drive you to action.

You'll begin to long for a radical faith, the faith that the Bible says will 'move mountains.' The faith that is willing to say "YES!!" to God, no matter what He asks of you.

You'll learn to walk in a gentleness and meekness and humility that stands in stark contrast to the pride and ambition and self-promotion that saturates so much of our culture today.

And you will finally realize the incredible freedom that can be found only when you **CHOOSE** to submit to the Spirit and live your life in self-control.

And we will strive for all of these "fruits" of the Spirit together, alongside our brothers, and on our knees.

QUESTION 3:

So, what will the “Ghost Warriors” study look like?

Simply put, **PRAYER** will be the defining characteristic of this study.

Personal, private prayer throughout each week, and uncompromising, corporate prayer when you and your Platoon come together as a group.

We **WILL** commit to prayerfully seeking out the power of the Holy Ghost for the duration of this study. Why? Because you **WILL** fail if you try to do it on your own.

It doesn't matter one bit how long you have been a Christian.

Maybe you were born and raised in the Church, and you have never **NOT** known a time that you considered yourself a follower of Christ.

Maybe you just accepted Him as your Lord and Savior last week.

Maybe you're somewhere in between.

Maybe you don't believe in Jesus at all (we'll speak to that in a few pages...)

It does not matter where you fall on the spectrum. Without the guidance and direction and the power of the Holy Spirit, you will **NOT** see any kind of lasting success in any of the areas we'll be studying.

And you cannot tap into His power in any other way but praying.

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to THOSE WHO ASK HIM!” Luke 11:11-13 (emphasis added)

If Phase 1 of Band of Brothers could be summed up into one central theme, it would be the need for us to **DIE** to ourselves, every day, so others may live.

Phase 2 is about **LIFE** in the Spirit.

It is about living in a state of continual reliance upon the Holy Spirit, asking Him to fill us with His fruits, so we can turn around and pour them out onto others.

It is about getting past our irrational fear of talking to God, and saying “Lord, I am here. Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Because of the sacrifice paid by Jesus Christ, we now have access to the throne of God and His grace.

**“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
Hebrews 4:14-16**

How amazing is that???

And yet we choose to not pray because it makes us uncomfortable.

Or we won’t pray in a group because we’re afraid we’ll say the wrong thing.

And we throw aside the opportunity for a deeper, more intimate relationship with our Creator, in exchange for what a bunch of other screwed up brothers might think about us. It is foolishness to not pray. And you will miss out on **SO** much of what God has to offer you if you don’t.

Read these words Jesus spoke to His disciples. Let every word soak in...

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, AND THEY WILL DO EVEN GREATER THINGS THAN THESE, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” John 14:12-16

They will do even greater things than Jesus? Surely that must be a mistake, right??

How can **THAT** be possible?

It is possible because He promised to send the Spirit to live inside of us. Forever.

That is just an incredible promise.

And, if Jesus is truly your Lord and Savior, it is a promise you can grab hold of at any time.

BUT, only through prayer.

So, we will not compromise in this area.

QUESTION 4:

How long will this study last?

Ultimately, that is up to your Platoon to decide. There are ten chapters in the book, so, if you're in a time crunch, you could go through it in ten weeks.

HOWEVER, we would challenge you to go twenty.

This study is not meant to be an easy one. Each chapter is designed to challenge you, and push you to shift your life in a new direction.

You've already looked at the verses in Galatians 5:22-23 that set the framework for this book, Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit. But check out the verse immediately following that list:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24

In order to truly experience the fruits of the Spirit in your life, you will need to “crucify you flesh with its passions and desires” every single day.

And that will take time.

So, our suggestion for you guys is, spend a couple of weeks on each chapter.

Spend your Platoon Time that first week on your knees together, praying that the Holy Spirit would fill each of your hearts with a greater love or joy or peace, or whatever chapter you’re on. Come up with an action step for each man to take away from that week’s topic.

Then come back together the next week and follow up. Have the guys share their testimonies of how the Spirit is beginning to change their hearts.

Celebrate with each other, and give God the praise for the guys that have begun to follow through on the Spirit’s leadings.

Surround the guys that are still struggling to get to that point, lay hands on them, and pray that the Spirit would give them courage and resolve.

The Spirit does not move according to our timelines.

Give Him the freedom He needs to strip away all of those “passions and desires” we have let shape our lives for so many years. As you guys are planning out this study for your Platoon, ask **HIM** what **HE** wants you to do!

QUESTION 5:

Why hymns?

As you get into this book, you’ll find at the beginning of each chapter an excerpt from an old hymn that ties into that week’s topic.

Our challenge for you is, when you have a few minutes during your week, get online and do a search for that hymn. Listen to the song. Maybe put it on your playlist if it is available. Do some research on the history behind the song.

Many of the hymns written in the 1800's and early 1900's have a powerful story behind them.

These were written by men and women that lived through times of intense despair and struggle. For most people during those times, life was not easy at all. They didn't have all of the modern-day conveniences that we have today, so when things got difficult, they had no other choice but to turn to the Lord.

Sure, there are plenty of powerful, and Spirit-led, worship songs that are written during our time now.

But there is a depth and richness to these old hymns that is sometimes hard to find in today's music.

Take the time to study them. You might be surprised what God stirs in your heart as you do!

“This is what the Lord says: Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths; ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16

.

So, if you decide that pursuing the fruits of the Spirit and all of the amazing benefits that come from that are worth getting uncomfortable, then you are ready for this study.

If you decide that you are done being concerned with what others think about you, and that you are willing to be bold in prayer – by yourself **AND** in a group – then you are ready for this study.

For some of you, however, you're already mentally throwing in the towel and saying, “No thanks. This isn't the study for me...”

But here are a few final questions for you:

If God has made the way open for communication with Him through the sacrifice of His Son, why would you **NOT** take it?

If the power of the Holy Spirit has been made available to you, power to even dare to do greater works than Jesus, and the only thing you need to do is pray and obey, why would you **NOT** pursue it?

What is the point of going to another Bible study or men's accountability group, and just talking about Christianity? If you have the chance to actually **DO** it, then why would you **NOT** take a step of faith and just **PRAY???**

Don't let irrational fear keep you from all that the Spirit has to offer.

Don't let the lies and deception of our enemy keep you from getting on your knees and humbling yourself before God in prayer.

Step into the uncomfortableness.

Embrace the awkwardness.

Choose the harder road.

Choose to follow the path of the Ghost Warriors that have gone before you.

SO OTHERS MAY LIVE!!

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost..." John 20:22 (KJV)

IF YOU ARE NOT A CHRISTIAN...

There is a strong possibility that one or more of you reading this book are not truly a follower of Jesus Christ.

Sure, maybe one overly emotional Sunday at Church or Friday night at Church camp, you raised your hand and repeated someone else's prayer, but in your heart, you know that you are still just chasing after your own desires in this life.

You might call yourself a Christian.

Or you might be unashamedly atheistic in your views.

Wherever you land in your beliefs, we are thankful and excited that you are checking this study out. We invite you to engage with the guys in your Platoon. Ask them tough questions. Ask them **WHY** they believe what they believe.

Whether you agree with us or not, we believe that your willingness to be involved in this study with a group of Christian men is evidence in itself that the Holy Spirit is beginning to work on your heart.

And that is a **GOOD** thing!!

At the very least, you'll come away from this study with a group of men that will love you and come alongside of you in your journey, wherever it might lead you. That alone is worth sticking around for.

But, at the very best, God may have it in His plan for your life that this will be **THE** turn-around point in your story. That, over the course of these next few weeks, you will come to see your great need for a Savior, and you will find that Jesus Christ is the only one that will meet that need.

That is our prayer for you!

Stick around for a few weeks. Have an open heart. We promise it will be worth your time!

MEMORY VERSES

Memorizing scripture is one of the main elements of our Band of Brothers studies. Every verse you can memorize and “hide in your heart” (Psalm 119:11) becomes a weapon you can use in the fight to advance the Kingdom.

In Churches across the world, we encourage our children to memorize verse after verse after verse on Sunday mornings. We reward them with prizes, or badges, or candy. And they are faithful and **EXCITED** to do it!

But, for some reason, once we hit adulthood, we decide we’re good, and we don’t need to devote any time or effort in that area anymore. It’s too hard... I’m just not good at memorizing stuff...

And most men will not put in the hard work to better themselves.

We will not be like most men.

Make the commitment, **RIGHT NOW**, to have all ten of these Scriptures memorized by the end of this study. Have your brothers hold you accountable. Push each other. Don’t let up. **IT IS WORTH IT!**

CH 1 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

CH 2 “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

CH 3 “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.” Psalm 51:12-13

CH 4 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends

all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

CH 5 “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5-6

CH 6 “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Titus 3:4-5

CH 7 “With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11

CH 8 “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” Hebrews 11:1-2

CH 9 “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:1-2

CH 10 “Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.’” John 14:23-24



Ch 1

GHOST HUNTING

MEMORY VERSE:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

“Come, Holy Ghost, eternal God, proceeding from above, both from the Father and the Son, the God of peace and love;

Visit our minds, into our hearts, Thy heav’nly grace inspire; That truth and godliness we may pursue with full desire.

Thou in Thy gifts art manifold; By them Christ’s Church doth stand; In faithful hearts Thou writ’st Thy law, the finger of God’s hand.

- Rhabanus Maurus,
“Come Holy Ghost, Eternal God” (800)

attendance
 memory verse

Ghost hunting.

That title is actually a little misleading.

Hunting for something implies that it is lost or it is hard to find.

“I spent the morning hunting for my car keys that ended up being right where I left them, in the deadbolt in my front door from yesterday...”

Or, “I’m taking an entire week off of work to go hunting for that big buck that I keep seeing on my video camera I left out in the woods...”

You hunt for things that are difficult to find.

That’s not exactly the case with the Holy Ghost.

While it’s true that it is often difficult, or even impossible, to see any evidence of the Holy Spirit in so many of our Churches today, the evidence of His presence throughout the Bible is overwhelming. From Genesis to Revelation, we see the Spirit at work, testifying to the glory of God, sustaining and empowering God’s people, and sealing and guaranteeing our salvation through Jesus Christ.

He is an equal and essential person within the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

Yet, as Francis Chan writes in his book, “Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit”,

“There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today.”

If we’re willing to be honest with ourselves, we’ll see that there is, painfully, a lot of truth to that statement.

We devote countless hours developing new and trendy programs and ‘hooks’ to make people feel more comfortable while they’re at our Church.

We spend hundreds of thousands, sometimes even millions of dollars on our big, fancy buildings, our state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment, and

our cappuccino machines that will brew the perfect cup of coffee, all so the overall experience is sensually pleasing to everyone.

A myriad of books line the shelves of our Christian bookstores, claiming to be the latest and greatest method on church-growth strategy, written by Church leaders who have finally 'figured it out.'

We have become experts at manufacturing circumstances to attain certain outcomes within our Churches.

And it is to our own harm.

Why would we need the power of the Holy Ghost, if we can do it all ourselves?

Could it be that this is **THE** most successful and ongoing scheme ever implemented by our enemy, Satan? If he could convince us that we are smart enough and clever enough to do all the right things to make our Churches grow, and that we don't really need to get on our knees every single day to ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide and instruct us, wouldn't that be one of the most damaging tactics he could unload on followers of Jesus?

And it doesn't stop with the Church.

We have become just as skilled out in the world with manipulating circumstances for our own benefit.

We do it in our marriages when we try to fix problems and arguments in our own strength, or at the opposite end when we just choose to walk away, rather than embracing our wives, loving them as Christ loved the Church, and praying together and asking the Spirit to draw us closer together in Him.

We do it with our kids when we yell at them and use our anger to try to influence them to make right choices in life, rather than sitting down with them in love and patience and humility, and praying with them that the Spirit would fill their hearts and minds.

We do it in our jobs when we choose to pursue ambition and recognition and more money, and we compromise who we are called to be on our climb to the top of the ladder, rather than seeking the power of the Spirit each

morning and asking **HIM** what **HE** wants us to do and where **HE** wants us to be.

Again, we have become experts at manufacturing circumstances to attain certain outcomes.

But, if we are willing to slow down for just a few minutes, and truly acknowledge the condition of our hearts, we would find that we are completely exhausted, probably more than a little frustrated with life, and we have little or no real connection with our Father in Heaven.

Living this life without the power of the Holy Spirit is nothing more than a waste of your days.

Even worse, you cannot live your life in a way that pleases God without submitting to the Spirit's authority.

We are a people who desperately need to go Ghost hunting.

Are you ready???

Let's get after it then!

"It is never a question of how much you and I have of the Spirit, but how much He has of us." – Billy Graham

EVOLUTION1: pray

As we warned you in the introduction, the number one goal of this study is to get you to pray – in private, **AND** within your Platoons. One of the best ways to start praying, or to go deeper in your prayer life, is to write down your prayers. Not only does this help to focus your thoughts and eliminate distractions, but it also gives you a written record to see all that God is doing in your life as you pursue more of Him.

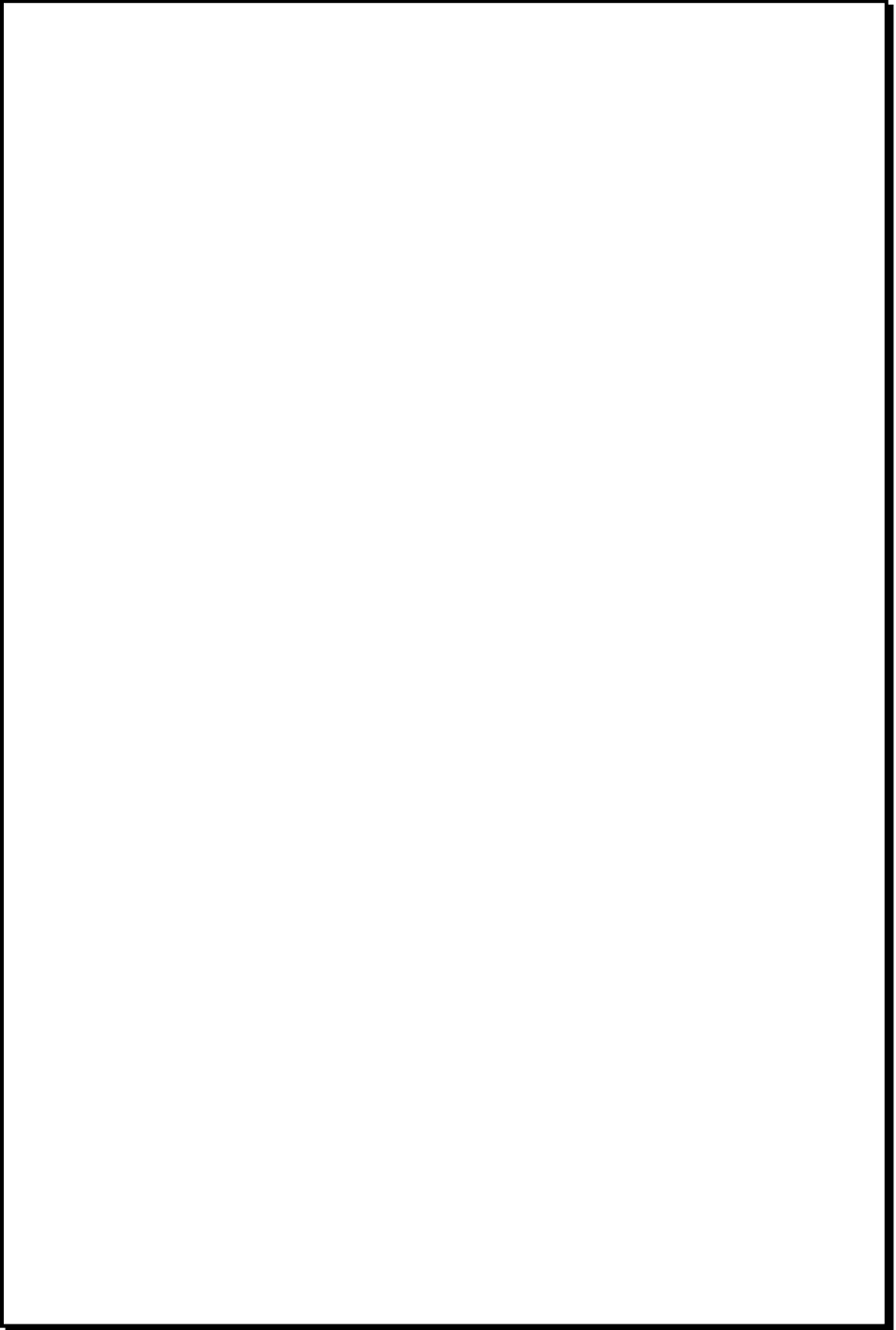
So, write down your prayer in the space provided. When it comes time to pray in your Platoon, if you are completely uncomfortable with doing that, then just read your prayer you wrote down in private. Over time, the Spirit **WILL** help you fight through the fear and awkwardness. Give Him time to work on your heart. But always **CHOOSE** to walk in obedience.

So, for this first evolution, we are simply praying that the Spirit would open our eyes and our hearts to see Him more clearly.

As we begin to dig into God's Word in our hunt for the Holy Ghost, we want to understand His heart, His character, and above all else, His mission.

Pray that He will give you understanding. Write your prayer down. And be **BOLD** and pray in your Platoon.

(there's more space on the next page...)



Awesome. Our prayer for you is that you will make the choice, every week, to **NOT** just skim over the prayer sections. As we said before, this study doesn't work without prayer, so decide **NOW** that it will be your top priority as you go through this book. If you didn't pray, or if you didn't write down your prayer, **GO BACK AND DO IT NOW!**

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So this chapter will look a little different than all the other chapters. In order to learn more about the Holy Ghost, we're going to have to do some good old-fashioned Bible study.

The first section of this chapter will look at the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, and obviously the second section will look at how He moved through the New Testament. Our recommendation would be to break these two sections up into two different weeks of study so you can really soak in all of the Scriptures. But again, do what fits best in your Platoon's time frame.

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1. THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As we start to study God's Word to discover who the Spirit is, it's important to remember the context of each Testament of the Bible.

The Old Testament was written by the Jewish people (inspired by God), for the Jewish people. It served as a collection of not just their laws and regulations that were handed down to them by Yahweh, but also as an extensive record of the history of their people, as God called them out as His own, and molded and shaped them into His favored nation.

What's interesting is that the Jewish people of that time had no concept of the Trinity as we know it today. They worshiped and served the Lord God, Elohim, but at that time they had no knowledge of Jesus Christ.

They knew that a Savior was to come – someone who would rescue them from their oppression under the Egyptians, and the Babylonians, and the Greeks, and the Romans – but they had no idea that God would send His very own Son in the way that He did.

They also did not have a firm grasp on who the Holy Spirit was either.

We have to remind ourselves that we have the benefit of hindsight and history to help us understand God’s Word. The Hebrew people were actually living it out, day to day.

They understood that there was some force, some kind of outward influence that came from God to guide and direct and inspire them, but at that time they could not wrap their heads around what it was.

We now know that it was the Holy Spirit that was doing these things.

Although the word for Spirit, or spirit, occurs many times throughout the Hebrew Old Testament as the word “ruach”, it is those times that it is partnered with the name of God that it most signifies the actual Holy Spirit.

So “ruach Elohim” or “ruach YHWH” are examples of the Holy Ghost moving through the Old Testament.

Yeah, that’s all a little boring and technical, **BUT** we cannot read the Bible and simply assume that the men and women of those times had the same awareness and knowledge that we possess today. That is the kind of attitude that causes us to be harsh and judgmental towards their actions, as they struggled time and time again to follow the Lord with their whole hearts, and we start to think to ourselves, “What fools they must have been to do the things they did...”

Historical context is one of the major keys to understanding the Word of God.

With that in mind, let’s start the hunt for “Ruach Elohim” ...

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and _____ was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:1-2

You cannot get two verses into the Bible before we encounter the Holy Spirit for the first time. And this first meeting is by far **THE** most important one.

One of the areas Christians tend to struggle with these days (just as the Jewish men and women of the Old Testament did) is the idea of the Trinity. The idea that God is three distinct persons, yet each person is God as one, is impossible for us to completely wrap our minds around, so we typically just don't think about it much.

The problem with that is that it makes it too easy to discard one member of the Trinity as less important, or on the other end, to elevate one as more important than another.

For example, in some Churches, you hear a lot about God the Father, the righteous Judge, the Creator of the Universe, the One who we will all stand before and tremble at the end of our days. Well, that is all true, but what is too often missing in these Churches is the grace and mercy and forgiveness that is found in God the Son, Jesus Christ. So their theology is incomplete, and is too often harsh and legalistic and driven by performance.

Other Churches may choose instead to focus more on God the Son, continually preaching about grace, unconditional love, and acceptance for all who would believe in Him. That is also some great, foundational truth. But what is often missing in these Churches is the holy and reverent fear of God the Father – that awesome and terrifying feeling as you face the One who rightly pours out judgement on all sinners who stand in defiance against Him. These churches also tend to practice an incomplete theology – they're really kind and loving and accepting, but there isn't a whole lot of importance placed on the pursuit of holiness and purity as they follow Christ.

And then there are our more “Charismatic” friends. These Churches choose to focus more on God the Spirit, passionately and whole-heartedly pursuing the gifts of the Spirit we discussed in the Intro chapter. They worship with

an emotion and enthusiasm and joy that many other Christians could greatly benefit from. Yet, for so many of these churches as well, their theology is out of balance, and too often the focus shifts more towards the outpouring of the Spirit – prophesying, healing, speaking in tongues – and these become the main emphasis, rather than having a balance of the entire Trinity.

God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit.

Three distinct persons.

Yet all three are One.

It's possible that, when we get to Heaven, we will be granted the ability to fully comprehend and understand how that works. Maybe. But until then, it is a mystery of the Bible that we must accept by faith. And if we choose to neglect or overemphasize one part of the Trinity over another, then our theology will be incomplete.

The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. He was right there, in the beginning, alongside God the Father as He created **EVERYTHING** that surrounds us. And if you read John 1:1-4, you'll see that God the Son, Jesus Christ, was there as well.

The Trinity is **ALWAYS** the Trinity.

Since before there was time, the Trinity has existed.

And they will exist together, apart, and as One, throughout all eternity.

That should bring us great encouragement and excitement as we begin this study on God the Spirit!!

.

“Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on _____,

and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.” Judges 6:33-35

The time of the Judges was a dark and depressing era for the Israelite people. For forty years, they had had the wisdom and leadership of Moses, as he guided them through the wilderness, and served as the mediator between God and His people.

Shortly before Moses’ death, he transferred his power and authority onto his apprentice, Joshua, and Joshua led the Israelites into the conquest of the Promised Land, and the acquisition of all of the kingdoms God had given to them.

Sadly, though, after Joshua’s death, the Israelite nation literally fell apart. Each of the twelve tribes went off and did their own thing. Many of them failed to drive out all of the people from the nations they had conquered. As a result, the tribes of Israel began to intermingle with those people, adopting the worship of their idols, and living according to their standards, instead of the laws that God had given to them through Moses in the desert.

And God, in His righteousness, took His hand of favor and protection off of His people. They were quickly overtaken by the nations they were meant to destroy.

Then God began to raise up judges – men and women who, although they often had great flaws and weaknesses of their own, stood up and led the Israelites back to the Lord.

One of these men was Gideon.

In the midst of an occupation by the Midianite and Amalekite people, when the Israelites had become consumed by the worship of the false god Baal, God called Gideon out of hiding, and the “Ruach Yahweh” came upon him – the power of the Holy Ghost.

Gideon stood before his people, destroyed the idols they had given themselves over to, and challenged the tribes to rise up against their oppressors and regain all that had been taken from them.

And, in a battle more epic than anything you have ever seen come out of Hollywood, with the power and might of the Holy Spirit upon him, Gideon led an army of three hundred men against a hundred and twenty thousand enemy soldiers, and put them all to the sword.

Ruach Yahweh has power we cannot even begin to comprehend.

And He pours that power out on His humble servants when they walk in faith and obedience to God's commands.

.

“The Spirit of God came on _____ son of _____. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them...’” 2 Chronicles 15:1-4

After the time of the Judges, when God's people went back and forth between worshiping Him and falling back into idolatry, they cried out for Him to give them a king to rule over them like all the other nations had.

God gave them what they wanted, and for many years King Saul ruled over the Israelites. If you have read his story, you know that he basically went crazy, turned his back on the Lord, and the kingdom was stripped from him and his family and given to a young shepherd, David.

David reigned over his people for many years, in strength and might and wisdom, and yes, with some disastrous failings as well. But God blessed that time of David's rule, and gave him a son, Solomon, who would sit on the throne after him.

Solomon ruled with great wisdom for a time, and the nation of Israel became one of the wealthiest and most renowned kingdoms in all of the world. Until Solomon began to cherish women and riches and fame more than serving his God.

And, shortly after King Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel was split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and war, violence, and idolatry consumed both nations.

As the fall of both kingdoms became more and more unavoidable, there were occasional sparks of the old kingdom and the old worship of God that they once had known.

One of those times was during the reign of Asa, King of Judah.

And that was due in large part to the prophecy given in the verses you just read by Azariah son of Oded.

Azariah is just one of many examples of the Holy Spirit falling upon various men of the Old Testament, as He filled them with divine words of prophecy to sometimes encourage God's people, but more often than not, to challenge and rebuke them for their idolatry.

The Holy Spirit filled _____ with words of power and encouragement for King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, and they fell to their knees in worship as the Lord destroyed the massive armies of their enemies, without the people even having to lift a sword. (2 Chronicles 20:14-30)

He filled the priest _____ with bold words of condemnation and reproach for the people under the reign of King Joash, and the people stoned him for it. (2 Chronicles 24:17-22)

The Ruach Yahweh filled the prophet _____ with His power, and Ezekiel prophesied over a valley of dry bones and watched in amazement as God brought them back to life. (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

And Ruach Elohim gave _____ the power to speak his prophetic words of hope and encouragement to the people of Israel. Words that were written down on a scroll for the people to remember and meditate on. And hundreds of years later, Jesus would pick up one of these scrolls, read the words of the prophet, and say, "Today these Scriptures have been fulfilled!" (Isaiah 61:1-11, Luke 4:16-21)

EVOLUTION2: think

OK, so hopefully you've spent some time digging through God's Word, reading each of these Scriptures in context, and letting them begin to sink into your heart.

So what are your thoughts? What insight do these handful of examples give you regarding the movement of the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament? How do they impact your life today?

"O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart. Enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling and scatter there Thy cheerful beams." – Saint Augustine

The Holy Spirit isn't hard to find in the Old Testament, is He?

When you read the Old Testament as an entire book, and you see the Spirit weaving in and out of the story of God's people, even though they didn't really know who or what He was, it should deepen your awe and appreciation for the breadth and scope of the Trinity.

We can't just say, "Well, the Old Testament is all about God, then Jesus comes onto the scene in the New Testament, does His job, goes home, and then it is the Spirit's turn..."

No, the Trinity is clear and evident throughout all of the Scriptures, if you are willing to look!!

2. THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now comes the fun part! It's good and necessary to study and meditate on the Old Testament, so you can see the history of how God has formed and led His people throughout the centuries, but we can all admit that it's always more exciting to read about the parts that directly apply to us today, right?

There is clear evidence of the Holy Ghost working in and through the lives of the men and women of the Old Testament, but He certainly comes crashing onto the scene in the New Testament. Let's start with the first time He shows up, perhaps the strangest occurrence in the entire Bible...

**"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant _____
_____." Matthew 1:18**

So let's just be honest here... that's more than a little awkward, isn't it!?

Seriously, if we were going to write a book that would shape the course of history, one that would point millions of people towards an eternal

relationship with the Creator of the Universe, we probably wouldn't start off the second half of the book with, 'The Holy Spirit is going to get a girl pregnant, and the baby will be the Savior of the world...'

That's just weird!! And it's OK to admit that.

We need to not be afraid to discuss passages in the Bible that seem strange to us, or that run contrary to what we think makes sense. The Bible is the God-inspired, infallible, inerrant basis for our entire faith.

All of it.

So when the New Testament opens up with Mary getting pregnant by the Holy Spirit, let's not rush past it and look the other way!

The Virgin Birth is one of the central tenets of Christianity. The 'Apostles Creed,' the statement of faith that the early Church built our foundations on, states,

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Church fathers affirmed Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit as not only true, but imperative to our faith. The reason why we must accept and

embrace it is that it is a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In the book of Isaiah, he tells us,

**“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”
Isaiah 7:14**

How will that happen? **BY THE SPIRIT.**

Remember, the Old Testament writers didn't have a full understanding of the Holy Spirit, so they couldn't fully wrap their minds around the "how" – they just believed that it would happen.

During Jesus' lifetime, **EVEN FROM CONCEPTION**, He fulfilled over three hundred prophecies given in the Old Testament. Is that not crazy??? For those that are willing to study the Bible with a truly open heart and a desire to learn, Jesus left **NO** doubt that He was the Messiah, the Son of God come down to save the world.

And it was all kicked off with the "Immaculate Conception" by the Holy Ghost.

So **HOW** does the Holy Spirit get a girl pregnant?

Well, we're just gonna agree to leave that one to our brother Jesus to explain when we meet Him in person!!

.

**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in _____, and in all
_____ and _____, and to the
_____.” Acts 1:8**

Jesus was on His way back home to His Father. He had fulfilled His mission. He had humbled Himself, left His throne in Heaven, came down to earth –

not as the righteous King He deserved to be, but as an insignificant son of an unknown carpenter in an obscure village – and He died a painful and brutal death to pay the price for **OUR** sins.

But then the miraculous happened. He was raised from the dead on the third day, and His Father called Him home, to be forever exalted as our Savior and King!!

If, as you are reading that, you realize you really haven't reflected much on all that He did for you, then stop reading for a few minutes and put this book down.

God sent His one and only Son to this earth to become the sacrifice that would pay for **YOUR** sins.

Jesus paid a price that, even on your best day, you could never even come close to being able to pay, all so **YOU** could enter into the service of the King, for the glory of **HIS** name.

If you haven't reflected on that truth lately, then this study is **NOT** what you need to focus on right now. Spend some time praying that Jesus would refocus your heart and remind your soul of all that He did, **FOR YOU!**

Back to our verse...

So, right before Jesus leaves His disciples, He makes sure to remind them that Someone even greater was on His way (John 14). Not "greater" as in He has more power or more authority than Jesus, but "greater" in the fact that Jesus was a man. He walked and talked beside the disciples. He ate and drank and joked around with them. He taught them the Scriptures and performed miracles in front of them. But He was still just a man.

The Spirit would be "greater" because He would come and live inside the Disciples' hearts, filling them with supernatural power and courage to be witnesses of all that they had seen.

How so many Christians today have missed the weight of that promise, and have chosen to try to live this life in our own strength, is an utter mystery.

The Holy Spirit, or the 'Pneuma' of God, as they called Him in the Greek language, is a promise for **ALL** believers.

And He shows Himself in powerful ways.

.

“When the day of _____ came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. _____ of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:1-4

Not a very subtle entrance, was it?!

The disciples knew, without a doubt, that the promise Jesus had given to them had come at last.

And if you read on in Acts 2, everyone around them knew as well. The Bible says that a great crowd came together, utterly amazed by what they were hearing from these men. And, after a scathing, very “un-seeker friendly” message from Peter, about three thousand people were added to their numbers. Three. Thousand. In one day.

When the Holy Spirit has the freedom to move in a believer’s heart, you will know it!!

In fact, the whole book of Acts is a written record of the amazing “acts” performed by this eclectic band of brothers – fishermen that were probably still a little ‘rough around the edges,’ former tax collectors who were despised by their own people, doctors, lawyers, tent-makers, scholars, even soldiers of the occupying force of Rome – these men began a revolution in

the midst of an incredibly hostile environment, where followers of Christ were often strung up on poles and lit on fire to provide light in the streets.

And they changed the world.

Through the power of the Holy Ghost.

And that same power is available to **YOU**.

.

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for _____ and _____ and for all who are far off – for _____ whom the Lord our God will call.’” Acts 2:38-39

The Word of God leaves no room for doubt or confusion.

If you are truly a follower of Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit is already inside of you.

You don’t need to say a certain prayer, or get anointed by special oils, or have some preacher hit you in the forehead and make you fall to the ground, ‘slain in the Spirit.’

He is in you.

Right now.

If He was capable of getting impatient, He’d probably be a little irritated that you’ve been ignoring Him for so long.

But that’s not in His nature. He is patiently waiting for you to be ready. For you to get to that point in your life when you are exhausted from trying to

do everything on your own. For you to stop thinking you can muscle up enough 'goodness' inside of you to live how Christ commands.

You can't do it.

And that is **WHY** the Holy Ghost has come. The Ruach Elohim, the Pneuma of God, is...

The Author of the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Our Advocate and Comforter (John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7)

The One who convicts us of our sins (John 16:7-11)

The Guarantee of our Salvation (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

The Intercessor on our behalf (Romans 8:26-27)

And the One who reveals to us the truth of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:15-18)

The Spirit is a living and active and **EQUAL** member of the Holy Trinity that we worship.

When we begin to come to an understanding of that truth, and we begin to passionately and earnestly seek out the power of the Spirit **THROUGH PRAYER**, then we will begin to show the fruit of an authentic follower of Christ.

If you don't know a whole lot about trees – what each tree's leaf structure and branches and roots all look like – then it's hard to tell what kind of tree you're looking at.

Until you see the fruit.

Then it becomes clear that you're looking at a peach tree, or an apple tree, or a mango tree.

And if that fruit is ripe, you pluck it from the tree and enjoy its sweetness, and you come away refreshed and energized.

The world is watching the Church.

And, to be completely honest, the reason why so many are turning away and saying, 'No thanks...' is because they are not seeing a whole lot of fruit from the Christians.

Sure, we put on a smile and play a great game on Sunday mornings, but where is our fruit the rest of the week?

Are we setting the example to our families, our neighbors, our coworkers of love and joy and peace and patience?

Are we modeling to them what it looks like to have a Christ like kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness?

Are we showing by our words and actions how a self-controlled believer should live?

When we are living in submission to the Holy Spirit, the world will see the fruits of that relationship.

And they will long to taste the fruit that **YOU** have to offer.

But there is a flip side to that as well.

If we are **NOT** producing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, has strong words for us...

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'"
Matthew 3:7-10

God paid a high price for your forgiveness.

And in return, He demands your life.

Do not think you can say to yourselves, "I go to Church, so I must be a Christian."

The evidence that you have truly given it to Him is the fruit that you provide to the world.

We say with our mouth's "So **OTHERS** may live."

They will live when they see your fruit.

They will live when they see the evidence of Jesus Christ inside of you.

They will live when they see you walking in full submission to the Holy Spirit.

They will live when you become a Ghost Warrior.

"A church in the land without the Spirit is rather a curse than a blessing. If you have not the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else's way; you are a fruitless tree standing where a fruitful tree might grow." – C.H. Spurgeon

EVOLUTION3: pray again!

Now that you've spent some time in the Bible as a whole, take some time to talk to the Holy Spirit you've been studying about. You wouldn't read a manual about an extension cord – learning about how it works, what it's purpose is, and all that it can do – and then leave it lying on the floor, unplugged. That would be a complete waste of your time.

To read about the Holy Spirit and study how He has moved throughout time – and is still moving today – and then choose to not seek Him out in prayer would be even more insane.

Quiet your heart. Pray to the Holy Ghost. Write it down. And pray **IN YOUR PLATOON.**

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1 & 3, go back and do it now.
- This isn't an exhaustive study on the Spirit – take some time to do some research of your own. That will be time well spent!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8



Ch 2 LOVE

MEMORY VERSE:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

**“Eternal depth of love divine,
In Jesus, God with us, displayed;
How bright Thy beaming glories shine!
How wide Thy healing streams are spread!**

**With whom dost Thou delight to dwell?
Sinners, a vile and thankless race:
O God, what tongue aright can tell
How vast Thy love, how great Thy grace!**

- Nikolaus L. von Zinzendorf,
“Eternal Depth of Love Divine” (1726)

- attendance
- memory verse

OK, so before you get too worried about starting off this study with a sappy chapter on love and romance, let's talk about what this chapter is **NOT** about.

This is not a chapter about bringing your spouse or girlfriend roses or a puppy or enduring through "The Notebook" or some other cheesy Nicholas Sparks movie.

This is not a chapter about being able to quote romantic poetry, or writing a love song, or even just being brave enough to ask a girl out.

Those are all **GOOD** things. Well, except maybe the Notebook...

But those are not what this chapter is about.

Take a look at your memory verse for this chapter. John 15:13 says,

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Let those words sink in. If you need to, set this book down for a few minutes and think about what that looks like in real life.

What would it look like to "lay down one's life" for your friends?

How about for your spouse?

What about your brothers in your Platoon?

How about for someone you hardly even know?

In the movie "Saving Private Ryan", Tom Hanks' character, Captain Miller of the US 2nd Ranger Division, is charged with taking 8 men on a mission through Nazi occupied territory in WWII. Their mission was to save one man, Private James Ryan. Ryan was the last remaining brother out of 4. The other 3 had been killed in battle.

Imagine the heartache that the Ryan brother's mom would go through upon hearing the news that 3 of her boys were dead.

Imagine how devastating it would be for her to lose all 4 sons.

In an effort to save Ms. Ryan's one remaining son, Cpt. Miller and his 8 Rangers go deep behind enemy lines to rescue Private Ryan.

And men died so James Francis Ryan could go home to his family.

Even Cpt. Miller struggled with the mission.

But he understood that there was more at stake than his comfort...

"Sometimes I wonder if I've changed so much my wife is even going to recognize me, whenever it is that I get back to her. And how I'll ever be able to tell her about days like today. Ah, Ryan. I don't know anything about Ryan. I don't care. The man means nothing to me. It's just a name. But if... You know if going to Rumelle and finding him so that he can go home. If that earns me the right to get back to my wife, then that's my mission."

Read John 15:13 again,

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

That kind of love is exceedingly rare in today's world. Most of us are (**BY CHOICE**) ignorant of the bigger picture.

Why? Because, by our nature, we are a self-centered people. Ultimately, so many of our choices in this life come down to this one question: "How will this benefit me and make me the least uncomfortable?"

It's true, isn't it? Especially when it comes to relationships. We are willing to love others, but in most cases, it is only to the degree with which that love is reciprocated, right?

I promise to love my spouse. But if she doesn't give me the respect or attention I deserve, I'm outta here...

I love the guys and girls at my Church. But when they say something I don't agree with, or gossip about an area where I screwed up, I'm done with those hypocrites...

I love my kids. But when they are disobedient or disrespectful I'm just ready for them to get out of my house...

I love my neighbors because Jesus told me to (Matthew 22:39), but man, they sure get on my nerves...

Any of that sound familiar?

How about this: "Well of course I love _____, I just don't like them very much..."

Can we all agree that that line is one of the biggest cop-outs running through the Church today? Does that sound anywhere close to the words of John 15:13 about laying down one's life for someone else? Does that sound anything like these words from Oswald Chambers,

"Once 'the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,' we deliberately begin to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ's interests and purposes in others' lives (Romans 5:5). And Jesus has an interest in every individual person. We have no right in Christian service to be guided by our own interests and desires. In fact, this is one of the greatest tests of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The delight of sacrifice is that I lay down my life for my Friend, Jesus (see John 15:13). I don't throw my life away, but I willingly and deliberately lay it down for Him and His interests in other people. And I do this for no cause or purpose of my own..."

That's a hard truth, isn't it? Does it bring to mind any particular phrase?

"So **OTHERS** may live" maybe?

That is why we are here, isn't it? If you went through the **Phase 1: Combat Training** study of Band of Brothers, surely you understand that this life is no longer about **YOU**, right?

It's hard though, isn't it? It doesn't matter how much Scripture we memorize, or how many studies we go through telling us we should love others unconditionally – it still goes against everything we **WANT** to do, doesn't it?

And that is why we need the power of the Holy Spirit.

The kind of love that Jesus **DEMANDS** from His followers isn't a love that we can build up and sustain in our own strength.

It doesn't matter how much we'd like to love those around us with that kind of depth and sincerity – at some point we will get burned and decide to drop out of the mission.

That whole story about saving Private Ryan – yeah, it's loosely based off of a factual person, but the story of the mission and the heroic rescue by Cpt. Miller and his soldiers is just fiction.

But there **IS** an actual, historical rescue mission that **DID** happen that we can look to as our one great example. John 3:16 says,

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

It is love that caused the Creator of the Universe to send His Son on a mission to die for **YOUR** sins.

It is love that motivated Jesus to leave His heavenly throne and come to live among us, fully knowing the pain and rejection that awaited Him.

It is love that empowered Him to hang upon a cross – naked, beaten, and bloody – and ask His Father to forgive those who put Him there.

And it was the Holy Spirit that walked alongside Him every step of the way to give Him the strength to stay focused on His mission.

After the story of Jesus' birth, and the story of his parents losing Him at the temple when he was twelve (they'd get bashed on social media for that today, wouldn't they??), Jesus disappears from the scene for about 18

years. The next time we see Him is on the banks of the Jordan river at a baptism service being put on by His cousin John. John baptizes Jesus in the river (what else would you expect from John “the Baptist”?), the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove, God gives His Son His affirmation, and Jesus begins the most intense 3-year ministry ever seen.

You’d think that Jesus would go straight up to the Temple and start preaching the Gospel, but God rarely works in the ways we expect Him to, does He?

Instead, the Spirit sends Jesus out into the wilderness for **FORTY** days to be tempted by Satan Himself. Check out Luke 4:4-15,

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’

Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.’

Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

‘He will command his angels concerning you

to guard you carefully;

they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered, ‘It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.”

Did you catch who was with Jesus in the first and the last verses of that passage?

Jesus was “full of the Spirit” when He went into the wilderness, and He returned to Galilee in ‘the power of the Spirit.’ He **KNEW** that without the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through Him, there was no way He could accomplish the task set before Him.

Jesus understood that His flesh would fail Him if He attempted to obey the commands of His Father in His own strength.

He got it.

How about you?

Take a few minutes and make a mental list of all those people God has put into your life over the years.

Your spouse. Your parents. Your kids. Your crazy uncle John. The neighbor that complains about your music being too loud. The coworker who is always being lazy and cutting corners, but still gets paid the same amount you do.

The list could go on and on...

So, do you love them with a John 15:13 kind of love?

“Of course I love them, I just don’t like them ve...” **STOP.**

If that is your attitude, then it is obvious you are not walking “in the power of the Holy Spirit.” Be encouraged though – that is why God has you **RIGHT HERE!**

So, let’s get into your first evolution of this chapter. It’ll look the same for the next 9 chapters, so drop your guard and get used to being uncomfortable!

EVOLUTION 1: pray

(Remember, this is to be done privately **AND** in your Platoon. If you are by yourself, getting ready for your small group time, don't just skip past this part. And if you are in your Platoon, well, we've already told you that **EVERYONE** prays, so you know what's expected!)

Ask the Holy Spirit to begin filling you with His love, so you can begin pouring it out on others.

Write down your prayer.

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth..." John 14:15-17

Awesome. Now here's where we have to be **VERY** careful not to put the Holy Ghost into a box.

As we read in the first chapter, if there is anything the Spirit is **NOT**, it is predictable.

There's a great line in the movie "Rudy", where Father Cavanaugh, the priest at Notre Dame who takes Rudy under his wing, is trying to encourage Rudy after he's tried and failed to get admitted to the University multiple times. Rudy says to Father Cavanaugh, "Maybe I haven't prayed enough..." And Father Cavanaugh's short, yet profound, reply,

"I don't think that's the problem. Praying is something we do in our time, the answers come in God's time."

As you prayed that prayer you just wrote down, the Holy Spirit may instantly fill you with an amazing, overwhelming love, where you go out from here and immediately begin pouring yourself out for others, sharing the hope you have in Christ, and covering them with a completely irrational grace and compassion.

Or, He may give you just enough love to go give your wife a hug, even though you've been in a fight the past two days.

Don't get discouraged if you are not miraculously transformed in an instant.

Everyone talks about the Apostle Paul's amazing conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), but they often forget that there were three whole years between his conversion and his joining up with Peter and John and the other disciples of Christ. (Galatians 1:15-18)

All we know about those years is that he was in "Arabia" by himself. Many Bible scholars believe those three years were Paul's "wilderness preparation," similar to the forty days Jesus spent out in the desert.

God was taking zealous Saul, who had risen through the ranks of the spiritual "elite" of Jerusalem, speaking out against and persecuting the followers of Christ – and He was humbling him out in the wild.

The Spirit had work to do on Paul's heart.

And He is patient to do what is necessary. Annoyingly so, sometimes. But He knows what needs to be done in **OUR** hearts.

Allow the Spirit to do the work that is needed. Ask Him to give you patience along the journey.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to us. You just need to ask!

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:9-13

.

Alright, so it's time to get specific.

Accountability is one of our 3 core values within the Band of Brothers men's ministry. And that starts with getting your junk out in the open and sharing with your brothers where you are struggling.

If you went through Phase 1, you know that the guys sitting next to you in your Platoon most likely have the same issues as you do, **OR** they have had them in the past and they're now in a season of victory and growth.

Lean on each other.

Drop your guard.

THAT is how brotherhood begins.

EVOLUTION 2: who do you need to love?

Earlier in the chapter, you made a mental list of the people you interact with on a regular basis.

How are you loving them?

You know the answer in your heart. Be honest with yourself. Admit your weaknesses and your need for the Spirit's power.

Write down the top 2 people on your list, and **HOW** you believe God is calling you to lay your life down for each of them. And then share it with your brothers.

1.

2.

How you love others **MATTERS** to God. It is **THE** defining characteristic of those who claim to follow Him. John 13:34-35 says,

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In the next eight chapters, you will be digging into and pursuing all of the other fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5.

But if you do not have the love of God in your heart, the rest of this book is a waste of your time. Don't believe us? Check out Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13,

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

The greatest of these is love.

One final thought for this chapter.

Jesus was (and is!!) the greatest warrior of all time.

He led the charge into the darkness of this world, endured suffering and heartache and rejection like none other had ever done.

And then He **WILLINGLY** went to the cross so that **YOU** could have life.

And it was **NOT** because He was some macho, full of testosterone, not afraid of anything tough guy.

It was His irrationally devoted love – first to His Father, but then for us – that motivated Him to finish His race with excellence. You cannot disconnect the beauty of the Gospel from the love that Jesus had in His heart.

One cannot exist without the other.

Can we all agree that we live in an increasingly lost and hurting world? Turn on the news for five minutes, and you will quickly become overwhelmed by the pain and suffering that is going on all around us.

Go back to the movie “Saving Private Ryan.”

If you’ve seen it, you know that the opening scene, as the soldiers land on the beaches of Normandy, is one of the most gruesome battle scenes that has ever come out of Hollywood.

Guys getting shot in the head. Others getting their legs or arms blown off. Many of them wandering around in complete shock and confusion. Blood everywhere.

It is tough to watch.

Yet, spiritually speaking, the same thing is happening all around us, each and every day.

People we know and interact with on a daily basis are simply wandering through this life, completely unaware that they are in the midst of a bloody, gruesome battle. They’re getting shot at from every angle, parts of their

lives are blown away, and yet they keep stumbling around trying to make sense of it all.

They need **YOU** to be their Captain Miller.

They need **YOU** to point them to Jesus Christ.

Even more, they need **YOU** to walk alongside of them – to do life with them. That is what it looks like to make disciples.

The world doesn't need a bunch of Christians simply inviting people to church and making converts.

They need soldiers who are willing to get into the trenches. Men who are willing to get bloody and dirty and uncomfortable. Brothers who will be in it for the long haul.

And it is only **LOVE**, empowered and sustained by the Holy Spirit, that will give you the strength and the discipline and the courage to stay in the battle when things get messy.

Nothing else will keep you motivated.

The greatest of these is **LOVE**.

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So, here's our prayer for you:

That when people look at **YOUR** life, they won't be impressed by how often you attend or serve at Church. That they won't be moved by how faithful you are with your tithes and offerings. That they won't be in awe of the amount of Scriptures you've memorized.

But instead, that they would see the depth of love that you have for them and for others, and that they would be drawn to Jesus Christ as a result.

You cannot do it in your own strength.

Only the power of the Holy Spirit can get you on that road to sacrificial love, and **KEEP** you there.

Ask Him to fill you with His love.

Lean on your brothers for support and encouragement.

And may the name of Jesus Christ be lifted high because of your example!

“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.” – Saint Augustine

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- Loving others may be awkward at first – embrace the awkwardness. Be intentional. Be consistent.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” John 15:13



Ch 3 JOY

MEMORY VERSE:

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.” Psalm 51:12-13

**“Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,
Praising Thee, their sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
Drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day!”**

- Henry J. Van Dyke,
“Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” (1907)

attendance
 memory verse

joy (noun) / 'joi /

1 a: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; delight

b: the expression or exhibition of such emotion; gaiety.

2 a state of happiness or felicity; bliss. (merriam-webster dictionary)

Sounds exactly like your life, right?

Every morning you probably wake up early, with a big smile on your face, full of joyful anticipation for what lies ahead. As you walk out the door, you're most likely humming some happy tune, excited to head to that job you love so much. Your interactions with your co-workers, your boss, or your clients are surely full of encouragement and words of praise and affirmation. When you get home, it's all hugs for the wife and kids, and joyful bliss until your head hits the pillow...

OK, back to reality.

The fact is, joy is a pretty elusive thing to come by in our lives, isn't it?

Rarely are we as men characterized as being "delightful" or in a state of "felicity" or "bliss."

Instead, the more accurate picture probably looks something like this: most mornings we hit the snooze button ten times, so by the time we finally roll out of bed we are already stressed about getting to work on time. The commute to work is mostly full of grumbling about the guy that just cut you off on the highway. When you get to work, your boss is already nagging you about everything that needs to get done that day, your co-workers are just as irritated and annoyed to be there as you are, and the clock seems to grind at a painfully slow place. Your evening commute is just as unenjoyable as in the morning. When you get home, all you want is some peace and quiet to watch the news or ESPN, but your wife needs help with the kids, the kids need help with homework, and before you know it your evening is gone and all you want to do is go to bed...

Sound familiar?

How can anyone be joyful about **THAT???**

But joy **IS** a fruit of the Spirit. The man who is walking “in the Spirit” should have as one of his primary defining characteristics, joy.

So how do we find joy in the midst of all the monotony, the frustrations, and the irritations of our daily lives?

Well, the obvious answer in this study is that you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you joy. We’ll get to that in just a little bit.

But the first step we want you to take in this chapter is to **REMEMBER**.

Look at your memory verse for this chapter:

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.” Psalm 51:12-13

Psalm 51 was written by King David during one of the lowest times of his life. 2 Samuel 11 and 12 recount the tragic season of David’s life when he made the **CHOICE** to be apathetic, which led to his **CHOICE** to give in to lust, which led to his **CHOICE** to commit adultery, which ended in his **CHOICE** to order the murder of one of his finest warriors.

*(side note: **ALL** sin is a choice. It is choosing your flesh, your wants, your desires, over the commands of God. We need to stop with the language of redirection and minimizing the part we play in sin when we say, “Well, the Devil made me do it...” **YOU** chose selfishness over selflessness. You chose momentary pleasure over holiness. Own it. OK, back to King David...)*

At a time when King David should have been leading his troops into battle against their enemies, he instead stayed behind and let them do the fighting for him. One night, when he was most likely bored, he ended up getting into trouble – kind of like us when we get bored, right? He saw Bathsheba bathing, decided he needed to have her, and ended up sleeping with her and getting her pregnant.

And then, in an effort to cover up his sin, David planned an elaborate scheme to get rid of the evidence, which eventually led to him ordering the murder of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah.

It is a terrible, tragic story.

But the pain doesn't stop there.

After Uriah is killed, God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David for what he has done.

*(side note #2: God knows **EVERYTHING**. He is God. The other ridiculous thing we need to stop doing as Christian men is acting like we can actually keep our sins hidden. He **KNOWS** what you are doing late at night on the computer. He **KNOWS** your selfish thoughts and your disgust for people that don't measure up in your world. He **KNOWS** the image of yourself that you present to everyone on Sunday mornings is just a whitewash to cover the real "you" that you don't want everyone to know about. And the evidence that He knows about all that is the cross. The cross is God's statement to you, saying to you, "Son, I know about your sin. And I am offering you freedom from all of it. Can we stop playing this game and start to walk in victory over the enemy that I have already defeated?" God knows **ALL** of your deepest and darkest secrets. And He loves you more than you could ever know...")*

If you'll remember, back in the section on Fasting in the "Phase 1: Combat Training" study, the consequence for David's long list of betrayals was the death of his and Bathsheba's son.

And it tore David up when he realized his sin had caused all of it.

Set this book down for a moment and grab your Bible. Read all of Psalm 51. It is nineteen verses from a man who has become desperately broken because of where his life has ended up.

And if we're really honest with ourselves and our brothers, his words echo a lot of what is in our own hearts.

And it explains why so many of us struggle so much with having any kind of consistent joy in any area of our lives.

EVOLUTION 1: read & meditate

Read all of Psalm 51. What stands out to you as you read these verses? What is God speaking to **YOUR** heart about right now? Write it down...

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath...” Ephesians 2:1-3

King David, the man who slayed Goliath and established the kingdom of Israel through many victorious battles, was completely broken.

But, he knew what it would take to get his heart back to where it needed to be.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” Psalm 51:10-12

Only through the power of the Holy Spirit reminding him of David’s salvation could his joy truly be restored.

Only by remembering all that God had saved him from in the past, could David **JOYFULLY** move forward in the future.

Maybe in his mind David was thinking back to when God delivered them from the enemy that had plagued them for so many years, the Philistines, through a miraculous, supernatural victory (2 Samuel 5:17-25).

Maybe he was remembering that triumphant time as he led his soldiers home after their victory, with the Ark of God at the front of the procession, as David leapt and danced before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:12-19).

Maybe he was thinking of all the joy that was in his heart when his own wife ridiculed him for his behavior, and his response to her was basically, “I don’t care how foolish I look in front of everyone else, for...”

“It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord’s people Israel – I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.” 2 Samuel 6:21-22

David’s heart was overflowing with joy because God had saved him from **SO** much.

And he could care less what anyone thought of his exuberance.

Isn't there a part of **YOUR** heart that cries out for that kind of joy? Isn't there something deep within you that longs to leap and dance with all your might before the Lord?

It is time for you to be reminded of the joy of your salvation.

It is time for you to recall all that God has done in your life to rescue and deliver you from an eternity without Him.

It is time for you to pray!

**“Then his people recalled the days of old,
the days of Moses and his people—
where is He who brought them through the sea,
with the shepherd of his flock?
Where is He who set
his Holy Spirit among them,
who sent His glorious arm of power
to be at Moses’ right hand,
who divided the waters before them,
to gain for Himself everlasting renown,
who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in open country,
they did not stumble;
like cattle that go down to the plain,
they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord.
This is how You guided your people
to make for yourself a glorious name.”
Isaiah 63:11-14**

EVOLUTION 2: pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to begin to restore in you the “joy of your salvation.” Pray that He would remind your heart of all that you have been delivered from, and the **HOPE** that awaits you in Heaven.

Write down your prayer, **AND** write down what He shows you.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:4-7

The movie, “The Rookie,” is based off of the true story of Jimmy Morris. Morris grew up with one passion and one dream: to play major league baseball. Unfortunately, injuries kept him from fulfilling those dreams, and he ended up having to settle for something more “realistic” – a job as a high school chemistry teacher and baseball coach.

But he still had a gift lying deep within him.

He could throw a baseball faster than almost any professional pitcher.

Through a series of events, all started by a bet he made with his students, Coach Morris, at 39 years old, gets drafted to play minor league ball.

And after months of grueling late-night bus rides, heckling small-town crowds, and barely any pay to show for it all, Jim Morris lost the joy he had for baseball, and was on the verge of giving it up and going back to teaching.

But something changed his heart that night.

It wasn’t a coach or a teammate giving him a pep talk.

It wasn’t Morris telling himself to pull himself up by his bootstraps and grind it out.

It was a little league baseball game being played down the street from his hotel.

As Morris watched those young boys play ball, with enthusiasm and excitement and a simple, genuine love for the game, he remembered.

He remembered the joy he felt growing up when he would spend hours pitching to an empty backstop.

He remembered the feeling of stepping up onto the pitcher’s mound, winding up, and letting that ball fly.

He remembered that baseball was supposed to be fun.

And the next morning, Morris walks up to his teammate and friend, with a renewed love for the game that meant so much to him as a child, and said with a big grin on his face,

“You know what we get to do today, Brooks? We get to play baseball!!”

And shortly after, Morris was called up from the minor leagues to make his debut as a professional relief pitcher, and his dreams of playing pro baseball were finally realized.

But first Morris had to remember the joy he had in the past.

He had to remember that not many people got the opportunity to do what he did.

He had to remember that it was supposed to be fun.

How desperately we need to remember how special our calling as Christian men is.

How eternally important it is that we remember that, even though our mission was never meant to be easy, it should, at the very least, bring us joy!!

Go back to the definition at the beginning of this chapter. Joy is “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires...”

The prospect of possessing what one desires.

Could it be that we have forgotten that the salvation given to us by the sacrifice paid by Jesus Christ is, **BY FAR**, the greatest thing on earth that a man could desire?

Could it be that we have become quietly, yet effectively, distracted?

Distracted by toys and trinkets and shiny things...

Distracted by ambition and drive and recognition...

Distracted by pain and hardship and loss...

Distracted from the fact that the **ONLY** thing in this life that is capable of bringing us true and **LASTING** joy is the salvation given to us by Jesus Christ?

As the men of the Church, we get the amazing privilege of being called God's sons. Through the price paid on the cross, we have been given a truly undeserved gift – the gift of salvation through the grace of God. As so many people in the rest of this world wander aimlessly through this life, with no greater purpose other than their own comforts and temporary pleasures – **YOU** have been given the hope of eternity, and the calling to go out and share that hope with everyone else.

If you would just stop and slow your life down for just a moment, and think about how incredible it is that God has freely given that to **YOU**, how could you not be overwhelmed with gratitude and praise and **JOY???**

It is because we have forgotten our calling that we find it hard to be joyful.

We need to **REMEMBER**.

Joy is a defining characteristic of a follower of Jesus.

But it doesn't just stop with our personal gratification of a joy-filled life.

It is meant to fuel a greater cause...

When we begin to regain that joy within in our hearts, we will find a strength we never knew we had,

“Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, ‘This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Nehemiah said, ‘Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.’” Nehemiah 8:9-10

When we begin to pursue the joy we can have in Christ, we will spend all we have in this life to experience more and more of this treasure...

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” Matthew 13:44

And when we begin to understand the indescribable joy that awaits us in Heaven, we will cast off the things that are holding us back, and we will willingly and **JOYFULLY** pick up our own crosses, so others may live...

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:1-3

YOU have been chosen by the Creator of the Universe to be adopted into His family.

Forever.

NOTHING can tear you from the grip He has on your life, nor all the promises that He has for you – in this life and the next.

That should overwhelm your heart for joy.

And that joy is what will propel you to **GO** to all nations and be a light for **HIS** name.

David longed for the joy of his salvation to return to his heart.

But he understood that it wasn't meant to just stop with him.

The greater purpose of the joy he longed for was to share with other “transgressors” the hope that could be found in His God.

And as a result, sinners would turn back to Him.

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.” Psalm 51:12-13

The joy of the Lord can be your strength.

The joy of the Lord will help you endure the trials and hardships of this life.

And the joy of the Lord in your heart, overflowing for all to see, will begin to turn the lost towards Jesus Christ.

Do you want to truly live your life, so others may live?

Then pursue **JOY**.

With all that you’ve got, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with His joy.

Who knows, it may not be long before **YOU** are the one “leaping and dancing before the Lord” in the streets.

May we all become even more undignified than that!!

"If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere." – Billy Sunday

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 2, go back and do it now.
- Remember, joy is NOT based on your external circumstances – it is found in the condition of your heart!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

**“Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.” Psalm 51:12-13**



Ch 4 PEACE

MEMORY VERSE:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.**

- Horatio G. Spafford
“It is Well With My Soul” (1873)

- attendance
- memory verse

In 1873, Chicago lawyer Horatio Spafford planned a trip to Great Britain with his wife, Anna, and their four daughters. It had been a rough past few years for Horatio and his family.

Two years earlier, the Great Fire of Chicago destroyed much of the city, and along with it, most of Horatio's investments that he had built up over the years. And just months after the fire, Horatio and Anna's 4-year-old son passed away from the scarlet fever.

Imagine the heartache that the Spafford family would have been going through during that time.

So, in an effort to get away from it all, Horatio sent his wife and their four daughters on a ship to Great Britain, while he stayed behind to finish up some last-minute business. The plan was for him to join them in just a few weeks.

But, on November 22, 1873, the ship that carried his wife and daughters was struck by another vessel, and 226 people lost their lives. Including all four of Horatio's daughters. **ALL** four of his daughters.

Soon after, Horatio received a short telegram from his wife with two words: *"Saved Alone."*

Can you imagine what was going through Horatio's heart and mind upon hearing of the tragic disaster?

Can you imagine the anguish that this faithful servant of Christ must have felt, losing all five of his children, along with a large portion of his finances – in just three short years?

Those are the kinds of things that will crush a man's spirit.

Those are the life-altering events that will destroy the peace of even the strongest of men.

Men like Job in the Bible.

Job was also a wealthy, righteous, God-fearing man. According to tradition, he lived between the time of the death of Jacob's sons and the time of Moses, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Job 1:8 says,

“Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’”

Job was one of God's all-stars.

In a time in history when God's people were being oppressed, and had lost their hope and their faith, Job stood strong in His convictions, and he was blessed with many children, a prosperous business, and fame and recognition in all of the neighboring communities.

But, if you've been a Christian for even just a short time, you know that we have a very real enemy that seeks to steal, kill, and destroy every good thing in our life.

And in a conversation that is hard for us to grasp, God allows our enemy, Satan, access into Job's life...

“One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’

Satan answered the Lord, ‘From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.’

Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’

‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ Satan replied. ‘Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.’

The Lord said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.’

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.” Job 1:6-12

And from there, in what appears to be the span of just one day, Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and killed all **TEN** of Job's sons and daughters, wiped out his flocks and herds of **THOUSANDS** of sheep and camels and oxen and donkeys, and took the lives of most of his servants as well.

In one day.

In one day, the Prince of Darkness destroyed almost everything Job had.

In one day, Job's life was ripped out from underneath his feet.

His sons. His daughters. His servants. His means of income. All of it, gone.

But Satan wasn't done...

“On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’

Satan answered the Lord, ‘From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.’

Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’

‘Skin for skin!’ Satan replied. ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.’

The Lord said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.’

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes...” Job 2:1-8

And in one of the great examples in the Bible of how **NOT** to encourage your spouse, Job's wife looks at him and says, “Why don't you just curse God and die???”

Unbelievable devastation.

And even though Job didn't follow his wife's worthless advice to curse God and throw in the towel, Job's peace was most definitely taken from him.

For sighing has become my daily food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." Job 3:24-26

So how about you?

How is the peace in **YOUR** heart?

Most likely, your circumstances are not as horrific as Job's or Horatio Spafford's, but that doesn't mean life is all fun and games, does it?

There are **HUNDREDS** of things, each and every day, that rob us of our peace.

Maybe it's your financial situation. The bills are mounting up. Rent or mortgage is coming due in just a few days. There's just not enough money in the account to cover it all. As the "provider" of the house, stress like that keeps you up late into the night, and literally eats away at your gut, doesn't it?

Maybe it's your marriage. The love you once had for your spouse has died off, and now it seems like all you ever do is argue and fight, and the threat of divorce is looming on your horizon. You never imagined it could get this bad, yet here you are. And turmoil consumes your heart.

Maybe it's your job, and the boss that seems hell-bent on ruining your day.

Maybe it's your kids that don't respect your authority and are willfully choosing the wrong path for their lives.

What is it for you?

What is stealing your peace and filling your soul with stress and anxiety and fear?

EVOLUTION 1: find the roots

Can you say that your heart is at peace right now? If not, then what is causing that lack of peace in your life? Take some time to go before the Lord. Ask Him to help you get to the root of your stress or anxiety. Maybe your marriage is on the rocks. OK, but **WHY** is it in that condition? **HOW** did it get there?

Dig deep on this evolution. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of your circumstances.

You get an extra page on this evolution, because roots are sometimes hard to get to. If you've done any kind of gardening, or weeding of your lawn, you know that the most tenacious weeds have roots that are difficult to remove. **PRAY** to the Holy Ghost. Ask Him to take you **DEEPER**. If you are leaving this evolution blank, you **ARE NOT PUSHING YOURSELF**. Find the roots. Pray the verse in Psalm 25 below. Be **HONEST** with yourself and your Platoon.

**“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.”
Psalm 25:16-17**

OK, so yeah, this has been a pretty heavy chapter so far, hasn't it?

It's hard for us as men to stop and acknowledge the depth and the severity of the stress and fear in our lives. We'd rather just plow on through, get the job done, and move on to the next task.

We are experts at compartmentalizing stress and pushing it to the backs of our minds. We're not gonna be some little pansy whining and crying in the corner, are we?

But that's not helping our heart much, is it?

We have to be willing to go deep.

We have to be willing to slow down the pace every once in a while, and examine our souls.

We have to pursue peace. Or the lack of it in our lives will literally kill us.

High blood pressure, heart attacks, obesity, diabetes, ulcers – these things are running rampant in our society today. And so much of it can be linked back to the stress we have in our lives. Our inability to find peace is literally taking our lives. The pursuit of peace is an **URGENT** need for us today.

So let's start figuring out how to find it!

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Back to Horatio Spafford...

As Horatio began to come to grips with the knowledge that he and Anna had lost all of their children, he boarded a ship and began the long, lonely journey to Great Britain to go be with his wife. As his own ship neared the area where his wife and daughter's ship had been sunk, you can imagine the emotions that were overcoming his soul at that time. Sadness. Anger. Regret. Confusion. Helplessness.

But, as he passed through the waves that claimed his daughter's lives, a strange thing happened. A song began to form in his heart. And, through the tears of a painful and tragic loss, one of the most treasured hymns of all times was born, and Horatio Spafford taught us all where the one true source of peace can be found...

**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.**

Refrain:

**It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.**

**Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.**

**My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!**

**For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.**

**But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!**

**And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.**

When there was **NOTHING** within his life that would justify peace in his heart, Horatio Spafford found a peace that simply cannot be explained in human terms.

He found his peace in the promises of Jesus Christ.

He discovered that, no matter how difficult the circumstances were that surrounded him, even if the Jordan River should roll above his head, Jesus would still be right there with him to whisper peace to his soul.

It sounds too easy though, doesn't it?

Surely there is more to finding peace than that, right?

So what is your memory verse for this chapter? Now would be a good time to take a look at it again!

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

Let's break those verses down a little...

“DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING...”

Here's an interesting lesson in Greek for you. When you translate the Greek word for “anything” back to the original language and intent of the Apostle Paul, amazingly enough it translates to the word, **ANYTHING**. Crazy, isn't it?

So Paul, the guy who, according to 2 Corinthians 11:24-28, was whipped by the Jews with 39 lashes **FIVE** times, was beaten with a rod **THREE** times, was pelted with rocks, was shipwrecked, was in danger from bandits, from his fellow Jews, from Gentiles, in the city, in the country, at sea – basically wherever he went – who had been cold, naked, starving, and sleepless, **THIS** guy is saying, “Hey, don't worry about it!”

So does that include all those things you wrote down in Evolution 1? It sure does.

Your marriage is a train wreck and you don't see any hope for reconciliation? Paul would say, "Do not be anxious about it."

Your job and the unrealistic demands of your boss are giving you ulcers and overwhelming your life with stress? Paul would say, "Do not be anxious about it."

Your finances are falling apart, and the reality of all those bills coming due in a few days is keeping you up all night in fear and anxiety? Paul would say, well, you get the idea, don't you?

And in case you think he's just being cold and insensitive and that he doesn't understand your situation, take a look at these words from Jesus Himself in Matthew 6:25-27,

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

Remember back in chapter 2 on love? God values you so much that He sent His one and only Son to die. For **YOU**.

If God truly does love you that much, do you really think He will leave you to fend for yourself during whatever trial it is you are facing right now?

Worry and anxiety can't add a single hour to your life, so do not be anxious about **ANYTHING**.

It would be cruel and uncaring if Paul just said, "Do not be anxious about anything," and then just left it at that. Fortunately for us, he told us **HOW** we are to accomplish that.

"...BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD."

Prayer. Petition. Present your requests to God. With **THANKSGIVING**.

When was the last time you went before God Almighty and said, “Lord, thank you for these trials I am facing today...”?

That seems pretty ridiculous, doesn’t it? But that is what Paul is telling us to do. In **EVERY** situation, we are to kneel before the Lord with thanksgiving in our hearts.

James, the brother of Jesus, would say to us,

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tells all Christians,

“... we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Romans 5:3-4

Peter encourages us with these words,

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:12-13

Consider it pure joy to go through hard times.

Glory in your sufferings.

Rejoice in “fiery ordeals.”

With **THANKSGIVING**, present your requests to God.

It just doesn’t make sense, does it? Well, we pray that you would find encouragement in this: it’s not supposed to make sense. That’s the whole point of what Paul is saying in our verses in Philippians.

When you consider it pure joy to go through hard times, and you glory and rejoice in your sufferings, and you lay them all at the feet of Jesus, with thanksgiving in your heart, the Word of God promises us that,

“... THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH TRANSCENDS ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS.”

The peace that comes through the Holy Spirit doesn't just flutter down around us as we are **CHOOSING** to stress out about our marriage.

He doesn't just magically appear and calm our hearts as we are **CHOOSING** to be anxious about our finances.

He doesn't pour out His comfort and rest on our souls as we are **CHOOSING** to freak out about whatever new problem it is that comes our way.

The Holy Ghost gives us His supernatural peace that makes no sense whatsoever, when we **CHOOSE** to lay down our anxiety, get down on our knees in prayer, and wholeheartedly seek after Him, with **THANKSGIVING** in our hearts.

Still sound too simple?

Sound too good to be true?

Well then, let's put our faith to action!

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:26-27

EVOLUTION2: prayer

Spend some time, alone **AND** with your Platoon, praying to the Holy Spirit. Lay down all of those fears and anxieties you wrote down in Evolution1 before Him.

CHOOSE to focus on all of the many blessings He has given to you in your life, and with thanksgiving in your heart, ask Him to pour out His peace over your soul.

Write down your prayer and anything He shows you as you are praying.

“God can work peace through us only if He has worked peace in us... Those who are in the best of circumstances but without God can never find peace, but those in the worst of circumstances but with God need never lack peace.” Henry Blackaby

One final thought as we end this chapter.

The majority of us most likely think of the Holy Ghost as some vague, ethereal being – just floating around like a wisp of smoke. More of a concept really, than an actual being.

But don't forget, way back at the beginning of time as we know it, as recorded in the book of Genesis, God said, "Let us make man in **OUR** image..." Genesis 1:26

Well, who is "our?" It is the Trinity, right? God the Father, God the Son, **AND** God the Holy Spirit.

We are made in the image of the Holy Spirit.

And we need to **SEE** Him as the mighty warrior that He truly is.

Think of the movie "*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*", when the heroes of the Fellowship are frantically running through the mines of Moria. They've got goblin arrows flying around them from all directions, and behind them, the fiery demon from below, the Balrog, is quickly closing in on them.

As the exhausted group of companions nears the exit to the mines, the terrifying Balrog crashes into the caves, and all hope is lost.

If you've seen the movie, you know comes next!

Gandalf – the mighty wizard who has walked the earth for hundreds of years, the wise old sage who has brought the Fellowship together and who has led them with wisdom and direction – stops in the middle of a narrow stone bridge that spans a bottomless chasm, turns around, and makes his defiant stand against the fearsome Balrog.

And with resolve against the overwhelming evil that loomed over him, Gandalf shouts these words,

"You shall not pass!!"

When you think of the Holy Spirit, **THIS** is the image you need to have in your mind.

Our memory verse says that **“... the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

It does not matter what our circumstances are in this life – when we look to the Holy Spirit for peace in the midst of our trials, He rises up like a powerful warrior, plants his feet between our hearts and our enemy that seeks to destroy us, and shouts defiantly, **“YOU SHALL NOT PASS!”**

He **WILL** guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

He **WILL** cover your soul with His peace that passes all understanding.

He **WILL** give you the strength to say, like Horatio Spafford,

**“Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul...”**

He **WILL** give you the courage to say, like Job,

“I know that You can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’

Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’

My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:1-6

Authentic, lasting peace is available to you in this lifetime.

Peace that rises above your pain.

Peace that forces you to your knees in repentance.

But you must pursue it through constant prayer, with thanksgiving in your heart, and through the power of the Holy Ghost.

May He begin to fill you with His peace that surpasses all understanding, as He stands guard over your life, and as you willingly lay down your anxieties at His feet.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 2, go back and do it now.
- Just as we said at the end of the chapter on joy, true peace isn't based on your circumstances – it is found in Christ alone!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7



Ch 5 PATIENCE

MEMORY VERSE:

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Romans 15:5-6

**“Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul, thy best, thy heav’nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.**

- Katharina A. Von Schlegel,
“Be Still, My Soul” (1752)

- attendance
- memory verse

Matt Chandler, pastor at The Village Church in Texas, has a term he uses called “coffee mug” verses. These are verses that Christians love to have plastered all over their coffee mugs, or on their t-shirts, or hanging on cute pieces of artwork on their walls. Verses that sound nice, and are uplifting and encouraging by themselves, **BUT**, when they are put back into the context in which they were meant to be read, they take on an entirely different meaning.

Take, for example, Philippians 4:13,

“... I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

Now that’s an awesome verse, isn’t it?

“We can go out and win this football game today because we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength!! Let’s go!!”

“I can ace this math final today because I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength! Bring it on!!”

“I can close this big sale today and make a big fat commission because I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength! Let’s do this!!”

That gets you all fired up, doesn’t it?

The problem is, that isn’t exactly the message that Paul was trying to get across.

If you go back and read Philippians 4:13 **IN CONTEXT**, you’ll find that really, what Paul was emphasizing through this verse that so many people cherish, is the idea of contentment in Christ. When you read it in context, then the correct application is more like,

“I will play to the best of my abilities today, **BUT**, whether we win or lose, it doesn’t really matter, because my contentment is found in Jesus Christ.”

“I will study as hard as I can, and be diligent and responsible about doing my homework, **BUT**, whether I ace this test or come out with a C-, I will still have contentment through Jesus.”

I will work hard to try to close this deal today, and be honest and fair in all of my proposals, **BUT**, whether I get this job or it goes to someone else, I will be content in Christ, because I know I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.”

Kind of changes your perspective a little, doesn't it?

Another great “coffee mug” verse that many Christians love to quote **COMPLETELY** out of context, is Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

That's a great verse, isn't it? It brings hope and encouragement, knowing that the Lord is on our side, and He deeply cares about our prosperity and well-being.

But, just as Philippians 4:13 was meant to be about contentment in Christ rather than winning the big game, so Jeremiah 29:11 was meant to be about **PATIENCE**, rather than your own personal comfort.

Patience.

Even just reflecting on that one word by itself can bring up emotions of annoyance and irritability. We are a people that are **SO** characterized as impatient, aren't we?

We want everything **NOW**. We want our food fast, our internet speed 'blazing', and our paychecks yesterday, right?

If we shoot out a text or an email to someone, and we don't hear from them within an hour, we immediately assume something's wrong, don't we?

We are anything **BUT** patient when it comes to the things we think we need in this life. And we deal with God with that exact same lack of patience when we pray to Him.

How many times have we prayed to God and pleaded with Him for something in our life, and then got mad at Him when that prayer didn't get answered within a few days?

Or maybe we don't get mad, but after a couple of weeks with no answer we just shrug our shoulders and say, "Oh well, guess it wasn't supposed to happen..."

Sound familiar?

Let's go back and look at Jeremiah 29:11. Only this time, let's look at it **IN CONTEXT**.

"This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem). He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says:

'Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord says:

‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile...’”

Did you catch God’s timeframe there, right before that verse we all love to quote about the promise for our prosperity?

When **SEVENTY** years are completed for Babylon, **THEN** He will rescue them???

These were God’s chosen people. He had declared among the nations that the people of Israel were the ones He would call His own. And yet, they were captives in Babylon. Men, women, and children that had been violently torn from their homes, and marched to a foreign country, where they would be slaves to a foreign empire.

And what was God’s word of comfort to His people through His prophet Jeremiah? Get settled in your slavery. You’re going to be here for seven **DECADES**.

Think about seventy years in your life. Where do you think most of you will be in seventy years? Uh... well, most of you are probably going to be dead, right?

Sure, back in the Old Testament people lived longer than we do today, but seventy years would still take most of them into the final season of their lives, and many of them would not survive that length of time in captivity.

Yet, this was God’s plan for their lives. And, in His perspective, it was a **GOOD** plan.

*(side note: this chapter isn't meant to focus on context or proper ways to study the Bible, but can you see how context matters when we read God's Word? Devotionals are great tools to help you deepen your knowledge of the Scriptures, but, if that is all you are reading, with just a verse or two a day along with someone else's interpretation of those verses, then you are in danger of misinterpreting the Bible. Stop trying to rush through reading plans, or just being content with little snippets of the Word. Slow down. Soak it in. Read it as God meant for you to read it – as one long epic adventure centered around His Son. **BE PATIENT** as you study your Bibles!!)*

So you think seventy years was a long time?

Let's go back a little further in the history of God's people.

God had given his promise to Abram, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore, and that all nations on the earth would be blessed through him. And then God sealed His promise by changing his name to Abraham.

Pretty amazing promise, wasn't it?

But then, just a short time later, God comes to Abraham in a dream and tells him this,

“Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” Genesis 15:12-16

God gave Abraham an unbelievable promise, that every nation on the earth would be blessed through his descendants. And then he dropped a bomb on Abraham's dreams and said, **“BUT**, first they're going to have to endure through four centuries of slavery and oppression in a foreign country.”

If you have been in church for a while, you know the story. Abraham's great-grandsons, along with their father, Jacob, travel to Egypt to escape a

devastating famine that was sweeping the land dry. Through the favor God poured out on one of Abraham's great-grandsons, Joseph, Jacob and his family were treated well in Egypt, and their family grew and prospered under the Pharaoh of that time.

But, not long after the death of Joseph and Pharaoh, a new ruler came along. Very quickly he saw the Israelites (Jacob's family) as a great source of slave labor, so he put task-masters over them and shackles on them, and he enslaved them for a long period of time.

Four hundred years. Just as God had promised. Until Moses came along and led the people to the Promised Land.

And you were thinking 70 years in Babylon was bad!!

So, just based off of these two stories of the Israelites in Egypt and the Israelites in Babylon, you might be thinking to yourself, "I'm not so sure if being 'God's people' is really such a great thing..."

Chances are, as you're reading these stories, you might be thinking about your own life as well.

Maybe you're thinking about your job that you're getting ready to go to this morning, and how much you dread going back to the same boring, depressing, unfulfilling place over and over again. And you're really hoping God isn't planning for you to be stuck there for the next 70 years...

Maybe you're thinking about your marriage, and how it has fallen way short of what you had expected. Instead of years of happiness and respect and lots of great sex, you get to come home to arguments about who has to do the dishes and why you don't provide more for your family. And you're wondering, "Is this what God has in store for me until they put me in the ground?"

Maybe you're thinking about one of your kids that has gone astray, and has decided to live their life in rebellion to all you have tried to teach them...

Maybe you're thinking about a family member who is not saved, and is wasting their life away on fleeting pleasures of this world...

Maybe you're thinking about your financial hardships, and how things would be so much better if you could just make a little more money...

EVOLUTION1: what's YOUR source of impatience?

So what is it for you?

What situation is weighing heavily on your heart and your mind, as you are hoping and praying that God would fix it, and fix it quickly?

BE HONEST, and write it down.

"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?" Psalm 13:1-2

If there is anything we can learn from the stories of the Israelites' captivity, it is that God does not operate on the same time frame as us.

BUT, the key for the follower of Christ is this: there is **ALWAYS** a purpose in His 'delay.'

As the Apostle Peter reminds us,

"... do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:8-9

The Trinity exists outside of time as we know it.

Before the world began, They were there.

We don't know what that looks like. In our heads and our limited understanding, we're thinking, "Were God and Jesus and the Spirit just sitting in the middle of nothingness, looking at each other awkwardly, saying, 'Hey Jesus, what did you do today?' 'Well, Spirit, I didn't do anything. There's nothing here to do...'"

Were the angels there, just wandering around heaven aimlessly, kicking "nothing" rocks as they flew around an expanse of nothingness?

We don't know.

We cannot comprehend what life looks like outside the constraints of our knowledge of minutes and hours and months and years.

But that doesn't make it any less true.

So when we talk about time spans of seventy years or four hundred years, what we must keep in mind is this:

GOD WILL TAKE AS LONG AS HE NEEDS TO.

Period.

Whatever the situation is that you are facing, God may resolve it and answer your prayers within a matter of days. Or it may be years, even decades, before your prayers are answered.

It is also entirely possible that whatever it is you are praying for may not get answered in your lifetime.

And His “slowness” in answering those prayers will be **FOR OUR GOOD**.

As the British evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth, said,

"There is a fruit of the Spirit that must accompany the gift of healing and that is longsuffering, or patience."

Paul says it this way in Romans 8:28-30,

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Now, before you get all worked up about predestination vs. free will, and waste all of your Platoon time trying to argue which viewpoint is right, go back and read that first verse again.

“... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...” That’s free will, correct?

God says, “If you choose to love me with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength, if you seek after Me with everything you’ve got, then you **WILL** find me, and I **WILL** work all things for your good.”

It doesn’t get any more obvious than that, does it? Our free will clearly plays a role in our relationship with our God.

But what about the rest of the verse? ***“... who have been called according to His purpose.”*** And then the next two verses where Paul says

“predestined” twice, along with “**HE** called,” and “**HE** justified,” and “**HE** glorified”?

It’s pretty hard to argue against predestination when you read those verses, isn’t it?

So what’s the answer then? Well the answer is, just like the whole concept of God existing outside of time, it is one of those “mysteries” about God that we simply do not have the right framework to understand in our limited minds.

Have any of the great theologians that have argued passionately throughout history, from one side or the other, actually figured it out? **NO!!**

Does it affect our salvation and how we go out and love others and share the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? **NO!!**

So, at least within the scope of this study, can we agree that it’s not what is really important here? So stay off of that rabbit trail when it gets to the discussion time within your Platoon, and let’s focus on the amazing truth within these verses!

In **ALL** things, God works for the good of those who love Him.

Does **ALL** things mean the job you just lost last week? Yep.

Does **ALL** things mean your marriage that has been a train wreck the past two or seven or twenty-seven years? It sure does.

Does **ALL** things mean your porn habit that you’ve been battling for most of your life, or the alcoholism that you can’t break free from, or the anger or fear or laziness that characterizes who you have become? Absolutely.

God is working behind the scenes in **ALL** of those things. And again, it is **FOR YOUR GOOD**.

Through every circumstance you encounter in this life, God is actively and intentionally shaping and molding your character. Like a master potter, He has us on His potter’s wheel, gently and lovingly applying pressure on us to

shape us into the men He has created us to be. (Romans 9:21, 2 Corinthians 4:27)

Like a master gardener, He is carefully and affectionately pruning off the dead branches in our life, so that we will be able to produce fruit that will feed and comfort and give life to others. (John 15:2)

And like a master blacksmith, He has placed us in His refining fire, burning away all of the sin in our hearts, cleansing us from everything that would weaken our resolve, and giving us strength and purity and beauty – all as He holds us firmly between His hammer and anvil. (Malachi 3:2-4)

God has a tremendous purpose in your pain.

So the question is, will you have the patience to endure it?

As you most likely know from your own experience, the answer to that question is probably “No” or at least “Not for long...”

It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can find the patience we need to endure all of that molding and pruning and refining that God has planned for us.

We do not have the stamina to endure it on our own.

The whole chapter of Romans 8 is a **PHENOMENAL** testimony of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He aggressively moves in and through the life of a believer, giving us life and peace and righteousness and freedom.

And **PATIENCE**.

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." Romans 8:22-27

The Holy Spirit is interceding on our behalf. He is praying for us, even as we sit here and read. He strengthens our hearts, and searches our minds, and goes before the throne of God to lay our longings at His feet.

He gives us patience to endure.

Even greater than that though, He gives us the ability to bring Glory to God through our patient endurance.

Simply enduring quietly through your trials and struggles is admirable, but there is a greater purpose for all of it: **your testimony that you share with others!** 2 Corinthians 1:3-6 spells it out like this,

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."

God has a plan for your pain. He has a purpose for your hardships. Yes, it is for your good, but, even better than that, it will be for the good of others, which ultimately ends with the name of Jesus Christ being praised and exalted!

But that only happens if we are willing to **PATIENTLY** endure whatever it is He has us going through. And the only way we can find the patience that will sustain us for however long we need it, even the rest of our lifetime here on this earth, is if we put our full trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

EVOLUTION2: pray

You know your trials and struggles. You know the areas you are longing for God to move in.

Lay them at His feet, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a deep, long-lasting patience to endure those struggles, for the glory of **HIS** name.

Pray by yourself. Pray with your Platoon. Write it down.

“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:3

Pray for patience.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the strength to endure.

God is shaping you through this trial.

And He has an amazing plan for you on the other side of the pain.

Will you trust in His plan for your life?

It will take patience for you to see it!

“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline 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. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.” Hebrews 12:7-13

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 2, go back and do it now.
- Patience, by its very nature, takes time. You'll need the Holy Spirit to truly be patient. Lean on Him!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5-6



Ch 6

KINDNESS

MEMORY VERSE:

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Titus 3:4-5

**“In loving-kindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace He lifted me.
From sinking sand He lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me,
From shades of night to plains of light,
Oh, praise His name, He lifted me!**

- Charles Hutchinson Gabriel,
“In Loving-Kindness Jesus Came” (1905)

attendance
 memory verse

You are not deserving of God's kindness.

How's that for an opening line???

If we're honest about our feelings (yeah, we know, that's a tough one for men sometimes), then we have to admit that that stings our pride a little bit, doesn't it?

We know that we aren't perfect, and that there are many days when we struggle with measuring up to God's Word, but we like to believe we are **MOSTLY** good, right?

We didn't kill anyone yesterday (hopefully!!), even though there are a few we would've liked to...

We didn't lose control and yell at our boss and storm out of the building, even though he was acting like an arrogant jerk...

We didn't go out and have an affair with that cute little co-worker a few offices over, even though our wife has been treating us like dirt the past year...

We didn't blow up at our kids, even though they've been driving us crazy with their arguing and complaining and disobedience...

At the end of the day, we were **MOSTLY** good, right?

That's what the world (and a growing number of churches) would have you believe about yourself these days. "Stop beating yourself up, brother. You aren't as bad as **THAT** guy. You need to give yourself a pat on the back every once in a while. You made it to church a couple times this month. You helped that little old lady grab something heavy from the shelf at the grocery store. You went out and earned a living for your family this week. You're a **GOOD** person!"

We like to hear messages like that.

We like to feel good about ourselves, especially by comparing ourselves to the loser that lives down the street. At least we're not **THAT** bad of a person.

The problem is, the Bible would tell us something different. Paul, quoting Psalm 14:1-3, says this,

“What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

**‘There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.**

**All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.” Romans 3:9-12**

Paul would say, “Don’t waste your time comparing your righteousness to anyone else. We are **ALL** sinners and have fallen well short of living up to the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23, paraphrased)

Yet, we still insist on sugar-coating our lives, so we can feel better about ‘me’.

But Jesus is not going to allow us to do that.

We look at verses like the Ten Commandments and we think to ourselves, “Well, I didn’t murder anyone today, so that’s a win...”

Jesus would say to you,

**“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”
Matthew 5:21-22**

So did you get angry with someone today? Did you swear at someone under your breath when they cut you off on the highway? Did you walk away from a conversation and say to yourself, “Man, that guy is an idiot...”?

According to Jesus, that is the equivalent to murdering someone.

“Seriously? Come on, that’s a little extreme, isn’t it??”

It sure is. But that doesn’t change the fact that Jesus said it, and it was recorded in the Bible for **YOU** to obey.

“OK, fine. Well at least I haven’t cheated on my wife or had an affair during our marriage...”

Jesus’ response:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Matthew 5:27-30

So, when was the last time you looked at porn? You’re good there? OK, any lingering looks at that girl at the gym this morning with the tight yoga pants? How about that TV series you like to watch on Netflix or HBO? Any sex scenes or nudity there?

According to Jesus, if you even had a lustful thought during any of that, then you are an adulterer.

Not a guy that struggles with porn or ‘wandering eyes.’

An **ADULTERER**.

This isn’t going so well, is it? Let’s try it from another angle then.

“Well, I carry a gun with me so I can protect my family or other innocent people around me. You know, there’s lots of evil in this world today, and we need good men to stand up and fight, with deadly force if necessary...”

Man, that sounds right and manly and Biblical, but Jesus won't have it.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:38-48

OK, seriously Jesus? Be perfect? You can't expect me to be perfect. I think that's asking a little much from us.

And Jesus would say to you, “You are absolutely right. That is why you need Me.”

There is no possible way that we can keep ourselves from having angry feelings towards someone, or lusting over a beautiful woman on the TV, or wanting to injure or harm someone who has hurt us or someone we love. We are humans.

By our very nature, we are bent towards sin.

There is no one good.

Not one.

So why does all of this matter when we are studying a chapter on kindness?

Because the degree of kindness you give to others is directly related to your awareness of your desperate need for kindness from God.

When we realize that, in the midst of our rebellious, wretched, unforgivable condition, Jesus stepped in and rescued us and covered us in His mercy and His compassion and His loving-kindness, then we will **JOYFULLY** long to share that compassion and kindness with others.

When we realize that we were 100%, completely, without a doubt, **POWERLESS** to do anything to bring about our own salvation, and yet Christ extended His grace and kindness to us and gave us life, then we will **WILIINGLY** step into the messiness of this world and be kind and compassionate to everyone else that doesn't deserve it.

Just as Jesus did for us.

Just as Jesus did for **YOU**.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:6-8

What an incredibly reckless and foolish thing to do.

If you stop and **REALLY** think about that – that the God of the Universe, perfect and without blemish, chose to make an ungrateful, unloving, unkind, sinful people the object of His affection – it will blow your mind.

It **SHOULD** blow your mind.

It **SHOULD** wreck your heart and break down walls.

It **SHOULD** drive you towards unrestrained kindness and compassion and grace and mercy towards others.

Here's the key though: **AGAIN**, you need the Holy Spirit to help you truly understand the depth of what Jesus has done for you.

We get too easily distracted, too short-sighted, too focused on the things of this world (comfort, the pursuit of our own happiness, wealth, prosperity, etc, etc...) and our desire to be kind and compassionate is taken over by our desire for more stuff and more "me."

We need the Holy Spirit to remind us of the mercy of God.

"What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." 1 Corinthians 2:12-14

EVOLUTION1: pray

Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you a deep understanding of God's kindness to you. Pray that He would break your heart from your self-centeredness. Pray by yourself, and then with your Platoon. And write it down!

"If you want to be holy, be kind." – Frederick Buechner

Christ-like kindness is weird.

It is foolish and reckless and a bit insane.

And it is one of the most gratifying, **FREEING** things you will ever do – for yourself **AND** for others.

When Jesus sat down at the well in Samaria, and chose to engage in conversation with a woman there, He was breaking all sorts of religious and cultural rules. Men just didn't stop and talk to women like that during Jesus' time. Especially Samaritan women, who were considered to be "mixed-breed" and inferior to the Jews.

But the kindness of Jesus was not constrained by the rules of society.

And she found **LIFE** as a result. (John 4:1-26)

When Jesus reached out to the tax collectors, Matthew and Zacchaeus, He was reaching out to men that were considered traitors to their own people. Sell-outs to the Roman empire that got rich off of the meager earnings of their own brothers and sisters.

But the kindness of Jesus was not constrained by whether these two men deserved it or not.

And Matthew and Zacchaeus both found **LIFE** as a result. (Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 19:1-10)

When Peter went to the home of Cornelius, and took the message of the Gospel of Jesus to a Roman centurion, he wasn't just stepping out of his comfort-zone a little. He was taking his message of hope, one that they had all thought was reserved just for the Jewish people, and not only sharing it with a Gentile (someone who is not Jewish), but with one who served in the military that was actively oppressing Peter and his people.

But the kindness of Peter as He proclaimed the Gospel of Christ was not constrained by government affiliation or political stances.

And not only did Cornelius find **LIFE** as a result of Peter's kindness, but many of his friends and family did as well! (Acts 10:24-48)

One of the great heroes of the Bible, yet someone who doesn't really get a lot of attention from preachers in the pulpit today, was the man Ananias.

We don't know a lot about Ananias, other than that he was a convert to Christianity, he lived in Damascus, the capital of Syria, and he was highly respected by the Jews there (Acts 22:12).

During that same time that Ananias lived in Damascus, there was a man who was quickly becoming notorious for his persecution of Christians. This man was a fanatical Jew, who had studied under the some of the greatest priests and teachers of that time. And he despised the fact that these "follower of Christ" were polluting his religion. So he began to actively travel around the region, and, with the authority of the High Priest, began to arrest and imprison the members of the early Church, persecuting many of them even unto their death. He became greatly feared as one of the deadly terrorists of his day.

This man was Saul of Tarsus.

And in around 33-36AD, Saul set out towards Damascus with the intent of rounding up, and shutting up, all the Christians of that area.

His arrival would mean certain imprisonment for the new Christians there, and possible death for many of them.

But, as he traveled the road to Damascus to hunt down these "traitors of the faith," Jesus showed up.

And in a terrifying display of His power, Jesus knocked Paul to the ground, blinded him, and confronted him in his sin. And for three days, Paul was so distraught that he did not eat or drink a thing.

The Christians in Damascus knew that Paul had arrived. They knew something strange was going on, but they had no idea what. No doubt they were still extremely fearful of what was to come for them and their fellow believers.

And then Jesus spoke to Ananias. Listen to their exchange, and try to put yourself in Ananias' shoes (or sandals) ...

“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’

‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.

The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’

‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’

But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’” Acts 9:10-16

Try to imagine what Ananias was feeling as Jesus was telling him this.

The best equivalent we have in our day is, imagine one of the more vicious leaders of ISIS or Al-Qaeda had arrived in your town. Imagine that your local government was indifferent to his plans to capture and imprison and kill Christians, and they just looked the other way when he arrived.

Then imagine God laying it on your heart to go and share the Gospel with him.

Think you could do it?

Could you lay aside your desire for safety and comfort?

Could you lay aside your dreams of being prosperous and successful in your job, or bouncing your little grandkids on your knee and hearing their giggles, or loving the wife of your youth until you were both old and grey?

Could you step out in obedience as Ananias was being called to do, and walk down the street to what could very possibly be your own death?

Ananias did.

In one of the greatest examples of courage and compassion and kindness we have in the Bible, Ananias made his way to Straight Street, found the house of Judas, laid his hands on the notorious terrorist Saul, and prayed that he would receive the Holy Spirit.

And Saul, whose name would be changed to Paul, and who would later describe himself as the “Chief of all Sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15-17), became a follower of Christ. And Jesus would use him mightily to proclaim the Gospel all throughout Europe and Asia, and even to Rome where he would meet his death at the hands of an insane emperor.

It was the power of Jesus, **WORKING THROUGH THE KINDNESS AND COMPASSION OF ANANIAS**, that transformed the most hated terrorist into the most passionate evangelist.

So, who are **YOU** called to show kindness and mercy and compassion to?

Well, like Jesus, you’re called to show kindness to foreigners like the woman at the well. People that don’t look like you or believe like you.

Like Jesus, you’re called to show kindness to the sell-outs, the traitors, men and women you would normally despise for their actions. Men like Matthew and Zacchaeus.

Like Peter, you’re called to show kindness to people who you don’t agree with politically, people that come from a different religion, or maybe even no religion at all. People like Cornelius and his family.

And, like Ananias, you are called to show kindness to the worst of the worst. The most hated. The most vile. Men like Saul of Tarsus.

Why?

Because that’s what Jesus did for **YOU**.

And He did it for you so that you could turn around and do it for others.

So who are **YOUR** others?

EVOLUTION2: make a plan!

So who are the people God is calling you to be kind to? Don't take the easy way out on this one. Who are the people that annoy you and get on your nerves? Who are the people you despise? Who are the ones you would never even imagine yourself showing kindness and compassion to?

Write out their names, and **MAKE A SPECIFIC PLAN OF ACTION** for how you are going to show the kindness of Jesus to them. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you the same courage and **OBEDIENCE** that He put inside of Ananias.

“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Colossians 3:11-12

It is God's loving-kindness and patience that has led to your repentance.

It was not your own moral goodness, or any good works that you could do in your own strength. Before the Holy Spirit came into your heart, there was **NOTHING** good inside of you. It is only by God's grace that you are saved.

When you choose to hold back kindness from someone, because they don't look like you, talk like you, worship like you, vote like you, or have the same lifestyle as you, you are **CHOOSING** to trample the Son of God under your feet, and you are **CHOOSING** to insult the Spirit of God's grace. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

Yeah, that's a hard truth.

But only for those who have forgotten the depth of their own sinfulness before Jesus came in and rescued them.

The world is in desperate need of men who would step up and be kind and compassionate to the "least of these."

Will you put your trust in the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to shape you into one of those men?

If so, maybe for one of you, your kindness will lead to the next "Paul" of our time rising up and changing the world for the glory of Christ!

"But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." Jude 1:20-24

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- Look for opportunities to show kindness to people that would not expect it!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Titus 3:4-5



Ch 7 GOODNESS

MEMORY VERSE:

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11

**“Ah been 'buked an' ah been scorned.
Ah been 'buked an' ah been scorned, Children.
Ah been 'buked an' ah been scorned.
Ah been talked about sho's you born.
Dere is trouble all over dis worl'.
Dere is trouble all over dis worl', Children.
Dere is trouble all over dis worl',
Dere is trouble all over dis worl'.
Ain' gwine lay mah 'ligion down.
Ain' gwine lay mah 'ligion down, Children.
Ain' gwine lay mah 'ligion down.
Ain' gwine lay mah 'ligion down.”**

- Author unknown
Old Slave Spiritual

attendance
 memory verse

Agathosyne.

Probably not a word you use too often in your daily language.

Actually, it is a word that has hardly been used by anyone, in all of history.

Just a little background on the Bible. The original New Testament was written in the Greek language. This was widely considered the more 'educated' language of the time.

Over the centuries, as people translated the Bible into other languages, they would often go to other Greek documents from the time the Bible was written in, to try to accurately translate what the writers' intent was.

For example, let's say someone a thousand years from now was trying to translate one of our books, and they came across the word "lightbulb." In a thousand years, there will probably be some new invention that provides a source of light for people, so the word 'lightbulb' won't really mean much to them. So the translator, in an effort to get the greatest understanding of the word, will try to find multiple sources and descriptions of the word 'lightbulb' so he can paint as accurate a picture as possible for the people in his day.

Make sense?

That is how the Bible has been translated into what we have today.

The problem is, every once in a while, a word comes up that they cannot easily translate. Agathosyne is one of those words.

According to R.C. Trench's "Synonyms of the New Testament", the word agathosyne is not found in any other pieces of classical Greek literature, and it is only found in the New Testament four times – all in letters written by the Apostle Paul.

This makes it difficult to land on an accurate translation that would best convey Paul's heart when he used the word.

Ultimately, it was decided that **GOODNESS** best described what Paul was saying when he said agathosyne.

Great. Problem solved, right?

Well, it would be, but there is another word in the Greek language that also can be translated as 'goodness', the word 'chrestotes'.

And, what makes things difficult is that Paul used both agathosyne **AND** chrestotes in his list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. So, a more clearly defined distinction on what Paul was trying to say has to be made.

Hang in there. We promise this isn't a chapter on learning the Greek language...

Fortunately, there are lots of really smart people out there that have spent long hours studying and pouring over these things, so we don't have to look too far for an answer. According to Jerome, the ancient historian who was considered one of the greatest Bible scholars of his time during the fourth century,

"... among the Greeks chrestotes signifies a gentle, charming, and calm virtue, suited to the company of all good people, attracting their friendship, delightful in encouragement and moderate in manners. Also the Stoics define it thus: chrestotes is a virtue willingly ready to do good. Agathosyne is not much different, for it also seems ready to do good. But it differs in that it can be more harsh and with a countenance wrinkled by strict standards for one to do well and to excel in what is demanded, without being pleasant to associates and attracting crowds by its sweetness..."

Basil of Caesarea, a bishop also from the time of Jerome, narrowed it down even further,

"I think chrestotes is more extensive in doing good to those who in any way at any time have need of it; agathosyne is more narrow and uses words of justice in its well-doing."

So, if we take the explanations of Jerome and Basil, we can land on a usable definition of the word agathosyne that will give us our focus for this chapter:

Agathosyne: goodness, driven by action, with a passionate sense of justice.

And if we can simplify it even further, putting it in today's terms, it is:

MAKING A STAND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT

We can probably all agree that this world we live in is not exactly improving morally as the years press on. If you turn on the news for just a few minutes, your heart **SHOULD** be broken by all of the terrible things that are happening, not just in far-off countries that we struggle to relate with, but right here in our own backyards.

Murder happens every day right in our own cities.

Corruption plagues our businesses and even our political leaders of our nations.

Extreme poverty takes the lives of tens of thousands of men, women, and children every single day.

Innocent babies are being aborted.

Young boys and girls are being sold into sex-trafficking.

Racism, sexism, and bigotry still permeate so much of our culture.

Genocide still exists in horrifying numbers around the world.

Crime runs rampant.

It's not too difficult to see that we are living in the end times that Jesus prophesied about in Mark 13:5-8,

“Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains...”

And as Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:1-5,

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power...”

There is no doubt about it – we are truly in the ‘last days’.

And for too many Christians, we have become so overwhelmed – or worse, desensitized – to all of the evil around us, that we have chosen apathy over agathosyne.

It is **SO** much easier just to shut off the news, turn on a good movie or TV show, and check out of reality.

It is **SO** much easier to drown out the voices of those in distress and agony by drugging ourselves with alcohol, food, porn, or some other fleeting pleasure.

It is **SO** much easier to spend our weekends out on the lake, or on our motorcycles, or whatever other hobby we might have. Or consuming our time with ‘good’ things like our kids’ activities, or even Church activities.

It is **SO** much easier to **NOT** get involved in the hard things, the messy things, the things that break your heart so much you simply fall to your knees and weep for those involved.

But, for the follower of Christ, for the man who truly desires to be a disciple of our Master, apathy **CANNOT** be an option.

We are called to pursue goodness.

We are called to pursue agathosyne.

We are called to pursue justice.

If you were a part of the Phase 1 study of Band of Brothers, then there should have been a four-week period that you fasted along with your brothers. How did that go for you? Many of our guys have seen a significant deepening in their walk with the Lord during that time, that was strengthened even more by fasting alongside their brothers. If you missed out on that, don't worry, we're going to give you another chance to do it starting this week!

But fasting from food isn't the only kind of fasting that the Bible talks about.

In fact, according to God Himself, it's not even the best kind of fasting.

Read these words from Isaiah 58:6-14. Let them sink in, and force them to go deep into the areas of your heart that you have allowed to grow cold...

“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?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle

words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

What a powerful portion of Scripture. And a what a convicting portion as well. You cannot read verses like those, and then go about your daily routine, with no heart-change at all, unless you are actively and intentionally **CHOOSING** to ignore it.

God **COMMANDS** action.

There’s a story of a man who was distraught, and even angry, about all of the tragedy and heartache that he saw in the world around him. “God, how can you allow such terrible things to happen to so many people? Why don’t you step in and do something?”

And God’s response? “I did do something. I sent **YOU.**”

There are a **TON** of tragic and horrific and evil things happening every single day, all around us.

Some would say that, if God is truly real, He must be a heartless God to not step in and fix things.

It is time for the men of the Church to awaken from their slumber and say, with a deep passion and resolve, “That is why I am here. So **OTHERS** may live.”

We must become men of agathosyne. Men so zealous to see the goodness of God and the justice of God proclaimed across the earth, that we will let **NOTHING** stand in our way or distract us from our cause.

Men who are willing to lay down their golf clubs or their video game controllers or their addictions to pornography or even their feeling of importance they get from serving at church, and stand up and say, “Here I am Lord, **SEND ME.**” Men who are strong enough to get on their knees and pray that the Holy Spirit would break their hearts...

EVOLUTION1: pray

It may feel like we are stuck on repeat here, but the one central theme of this study is: **YOU CANNOT DO THIS ON YOUR OWN**. Unless you are looking to the Holy Spirit for your strength and guidance and endurance, you will get really excited about fighting for something important, and then 3 weeks from now you'll be back to your old routine.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill your heart with an overwhelming, **SUSTAINABLE** desire for God's goodness and justice.

Pray that He would break your heart in a painful and beautiful way. Pray alone, and then pray with your Platoon. Then write it down.

"This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place." Jeremiah 22:3

So, once the Spirit begins to stir in our hearts, the overwhelming question is, "Where do I start???"

There is so much pain, so much poverty, so much injustice. It is like a raging river that will sweep us away if we attempt to get involved. If you're like most men, you're already having thoughts of, "I cannot make a difference. Let me just skim through the rest of this chapter, and I'll come up with some excuse for why I can't make it to group this week..."

Take comfort from these words of Mother Theresa, the sweet little old lady who has impacted this world so greatly, by simply touching one life at a time,

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

What will be your stone?

What will be the cause you will **CHOOSE** to get involved in **THIS WEEK**?

There's a story in the Bible of one small stone that changed the course of a nation.

It was a little rock picked up by a young shepherd, and flung at the head of a fearsome giant.

David picked up five stones from the river bed. But it only took one to slay the mighty enemy of the Israelites.

What will be **YOUR** stone that you throw into the waters?

In the 1700's the British Empire became heavily involved in the Slave Trade. Ships loaded down with British-made goods would sail to Africa. These goods would be used to purchase slaves. Men, women, children. At the peak of the trade, over forty thousand were enslaved in one year. These slaves would be crammed onto slave ships heading to the West Indies, with the conditions so grotesque and inhumane that many would die along the way. Those who survived would spend the rest of their lives in hard labor on the sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations. The goods they farmed were then taken back to Britain to be sold for profit. It was a horrendous triangle, centered around man's greed and corruption.

But, as is the case in so many acts of oppression and injustice throughout history, the bad things were overlooked. The government profited. The

people enjoyed their sugar in their tea and their tobacco in their pipes. And most everyone, including Christians, chose to ignore the 11 **MILLION** slaves that were taken captive during this time.

Until God got a hold of the heart of one man who would **CHOOSE** to step into the mess.

William Wilberforce was a member of the British Parliament from 1780-1825. During his early years at Parliament, he was known as a powerful speaker, a tremendous singer, and a passionate gambler. He stood up for many different causes, and was well-liked and respected.

But then, in 1784, he submitted his life to Christ. And the Lord began to open his eyes to the injustice that surrounded him.

And for the remaining 5 decades of his life, at great expense to his own reputation, and even his own health, Wilberforce fought passionately for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

And in 1834, one month after his death, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, and over 800,000 slaves were freed.

Because one man decided to cast a stone into the waters.

Let the weight of his words below resonate in your heart...

“To live our lives and miss that great purpose we were designed to accomplish is truly a sin. It is inconceivable that we could be bored in a world with so much wrong to tackle, so much ignorance to reach and so much misery we could alleviate...”

To miss the purpose we were designed to accomplish is sin.

The Bible would agree with Wilberforce.

“Speak and ACT as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith

save them? 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? In the same way, faith by itself, IF IT IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ACTION, is dead." James 2:12-17 (emphasis added)

Faith without action is dead.

It does not get any more clear than that.

You can spend hours studying your Bible, or complete a hundred different reading plans or Bible studies, but if the words inside it do not compel you to action, your faith is dead.

You can serve at your church every hour the doors are opened – Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesdays – but if the preaching and teaching you sit under does not drive you to step **OUTSIDE** the doors of the church and **ACT**, your faith is dead.

Go back to Wilberforce's quote.

"It is INCONCEIVABLE that we could be bored in a world with so much wrong to tackle, so much ignorance to reach and so much misery we could alleviate..."

Yet how many of us, if we are truly honest with ourselves, are just plain bored with our lives?

We get up at the same time each morning. We have the same routine as we get ready for our day. We kiss our spouse and kids goodbye, and then we head off to the same job we went to yesterday. At the end of the day, we're tired from a hard day's work, so we sit in front of the same movies or TV shows. We have the same routine of getting the kids to bed and getting things ready for the next day. And we spend our lives in pursuit of more stuff, more comfort, and more "me" time.

And at the end of the day, we are bored.

Could it be that we are missing the one great purpose that we have been placed on this earth to do? Ephesians 2:10 says,

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Surely God didn’t create us to simply live a mundane, 9-5 existence, where our greatest sense of fulfillment comes when we get our paycheck?

Surely there is more to this life than just working towards a good retirement?

There is a story in the Gospels that Jesus shares with His followers that **SHOULD** make us all very uneasy...

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:31-46

Whatever you did not do for the 'least of these,' you did not do for me...

"But Lord, I was mostly a good person. I went to church, and even served there when I could. I didn't cheat on my wife or my taxes. I worked hard to support my family and tried to meet all of their needs. I tried to make an effort to be nice to all my neighbors and coworkers, and even invited them to Church when I could... doesn't that amount to something?"

As hard as it is to hear, the answer is no.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Matthew 7:21-23

So do our good works help get us into heaven then?

Nope. As we discussed earlier in this study, the Bible is perfectly clear that it is only by the grace of God that you are saved, not by your good works. So **NO ONE** can boast about how good of a person they are. (Ephesians 2:8)

But the Bible is also crystal clear that the fruit of our good works is the **EVIDENCE** that we have truly been saved.

Jesus immediately follows up those verses in Matthew 7:21-23 with the story of the wise man who built his house upon the rock, and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. When the rains and floods and storms came, only the wise man's house was still standing.

And what did Jesus say about the wise man?

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...” Matthew 7:24

If you are not putting the words of the Lord, the Bible, into practice, then you are fooling yourself and your house will not stand through the storm.

Even worse, it is very possible that you may not have ever truly submitted your life to Christ.

That’s not a very popular message these days – to tell “Christians” that they might not actually be saved. But isn’t that exactly what Jesus was trying to tell us in the story of the sheep and the goats? In fact, He says in Matthew 7 that **MANY** will walk this life completely deceiving themselves, believing that they are one of His followers, when in all actuality, they are not.

That is a sobering thought.

But what is so encouraging is that there **IS** a way we can know without a doubt that we are truly saved: look at your fruit.

Go back through the sections of Scripture highlighted in this chapter from Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25. Do you see yourself in those verses? Does the fruit of your life line up with the teaching of God’s Word? As you are asking the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with that “agathosyne” kind of goodness, is your heart beginning to soften and break towards the injustice of this world?

Go back and look at the hymn at the first page of this chapter, that old spiritual that the slaves in America sang in the midst of their oppression and suffering... (we’ll translate it a little to bring it up to today’s language)

**“I’ve been rebuked and I’ve been scorned.
I’ve been rebuked and I’ve been scorned, Children.
I’ve been rebuked and I’ve been scorned.
I’ve been talked about sure as you are born.**

**There is trouble all over this world.
There is trouble all over this world, Children.
There is trouble all over this world,
There is trouble all over this world.**

**Ain't gonna lay my religion down.
Ain't gonna lay my religion down, Children.
Ain't gonna lay my religion down.
Ain't gonna lay my religion down.”**

The slaves in America, just like the slaves in the British Slave Trade, experienced hardship the likes of which most of us will never even come close to knowing.

Yet, out of that time of strife, came so many deep hymns of conviction.

Hymns that cried out, “No matter how much I am rebuked and scorned, no matter how much trouble there is in this world, we will **NOT** lay down our faith. We will **NOT** be silent about our God.”

The men and women and children of the British Slave Trade had a desperate need for men to stand strong in their faith and demand justice.

The slaves of the American cotton plantations in the 1800’s had a desperate need for men to stand strong in their faith and demand justice.

The millions of young boys and girls **TODAY** that are being bought and sold in the sex slave trade all over the world are **PLEADING** for men to stand strong in their faith and demand justice.

As are the countless number of unborn babies.

And entire people groups around the world that are being persecuted for their faith or social status.

And the men and women right in our own neighborhoods that are being cast aside because of their race, or their sexual preference, or what religion or domination they belong to, or simply for the bad choices they have made in life.

Which one of **YOU** will rise up and say, “There is trouble all over this world, but I will **NOT** lay my religion down. I **WILL** go into the dark places. I **WILL** choose to get messy and uncomfortable and pour myself out for them. I **WILL** pursue agathosyne...”

If those things are beginning to take root in your heart, then take courage Christian! God is working in you!!

So, let's capitalize on what the Spirit is beginning to stir in your heart, and let it drive us into **ACTION!**

**“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send?
And who will go for us?’
And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”** Isaiah 6:8

EVOLUTION2: fast

Well, we warned you this was coming!! Here's the challenge for this chapter.

Fast for four weeks. As we did in Phase 1 of BOB, get together with the guys in your Platoon. Pick a day of the week, and fast for that day. For four weeks.

Your focus for this fast? Pray **SPECIFICALLY** that God will break your heart towards a certain injustice in this world. Maybe it is the poverty in the low-income areas of your city. Maybe it is the global epidemic of sex trafficking and sex slavery. Maybe it is the greed and indifference and racism that oppresses so many in our world.

It's so easy to get overwhelmed and just check out because it's too big of a problem.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will narrow your heart down to a single cause.

With your Platoon, find your one stone, and get into the fight against one of the giants. Fast from food, one day, for four weeks.

But also fast from injustice. Fast from apathy. Fast from not caring.

As God begins to reveal your Platoon's "cause", write it down on the next pages.

We're also giving you an extra page for notes on this evolution. As you begin to actively get involved in the fight, journal what your Platoon is doing. Journal what God is doing in your heart, and what it looks like as you become a "Repairer of Broken Walls."

Our prayer is that, five or ten or twenty years from now, you will be able to dig this study back out of a dusty old box, and as you turn to this chapter, you will find the written record of when your heart began to shift towards a greater cause than your own. That you will look back and praise God that He put into your heart and the hearts of your brothers, a deep desire for justice to be done in this world. And that you will see that **THIS** was the time you decided, "Here I am Lord, send me!!"

1. COMMIT TO FAST FOR 4 WEEKS. WHAT WILL YOU FAST FROM? WHEN? HOW LONG?

2. IDENTIFY YOUR PLATOONS CAUSE. WHAT IS YOUR PLAN OF ACTION?

3. JOURNAL WHAT GOD DOES IN YOUR HEART ALONG THE WAY.

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” – Bishop Desmond Tutu

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- Remember – AGATHOSYNE, not APATHY!!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11



Ch 8

FAITHFULNESS

MEMORY VERSE:

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” Hebrews 11:1-2

**“Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love’s strong cord,
Overcoming daily with the Spirit’s sword,
Standing on the promises of God.**

**Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I’m standing on the promises of God.”**

- Russell K. Carter

“Standing on the Promises” (1886)

- attendance
- memory verse

The year is 2043.

Much of the earth has been devastated by nuclear war.

The earth's atmosphere has been damaged by the fallout, so the sun has scorched most of the land into desert.

Lawlessness rules everywhere.

Pretty much your typical post-apocalyptic movie plot. This one belongs to the movie, "The Book of Eli", starring Denzel Washington.

In the movie, Washington plays the character Eli, a lone nomad who has been wandering the earth for over thirty years, and who seems to have a strange attachment to a certain book. He's also one heck of a fighter, as we find out throughout the movie.

The other thing we discover as the movie goes on, is that that book he so lovingly protects is a Bible. Not just any Bible, but the only Bible that is left on the earth. And Eli believes it is his mission to "take it West," where it will be put into the hands of men who can do good with it.

Along the way, Eli encounters some nasty resistance (which is where we get to see his crazy fighting skills), but he also gains the friendship of a young woman, Solara. And Eli begins to teach her the great truths from this Book that he cherishes and reads every day.

He teaches her how to pray.

He teaches her that life is about loving others, and treating them better than yourself.

And he teaches her about faith.

Solara: You know, you say you've been walking for thirty years, right?

Eli: Right?

Solara: Have you ever thought that maybe you were lost?

Eli: Nope.

Solara: Well, how do you know that you're walking in the right direction?

Eli: I walk by faith, not by sight.

Solara: [sighs] What does that mean?

Eli: It means that you know something even if you don't know something.

Solara: That doesn't make any sense.

Eli: It doesn't have to make sense. It's faith, it's faith. It's the flower of light in the field of darkness that's giving me the strength to carry on. You understand?

Solara: Is that from your book?

Eli: No, it's, uh, Johnny Cash, Live at Folsom Prison.

(The Book of Eli (2010), the Hughes Brothers)

“How do you know you’re walking in the right direction?”

That is a question we **ALL** wrestle with, isn't it?

If we are honest with ourselves, there are many times when we feel like we are the restless wanderer on this earth. We keep walking forwards, putting one foot in front of the other, but we're not real sure where we're going or why we're on this path. Many of us have gotten lost in the mundane, haven't we?

And for a lot of us, we have begun to lose our faith a little along the way, too.

Oh, we still make it to church every week with a smile on our face. And when people ask how we're doing we say, “I'm doing great!” or “I'm just fine, how are you?”

But inside, we're not so great. Inside, we are not fine.

Our faith is struggling as we face the looming credit card bills, our spouse that we aren't really connecting with, our job (or lack of one) that is draining all of our energy and emotion.

We know a lot about God, and there's definitely a part of us that longs to follow him. But it's so difficult to stay focused on Him, isn't it? The questions constantly come up, “Are you **SURE** this is where God really wants you?” “Is this **REALLY** the plan God has for your life?”

Or, as Solara asks Eli, “How do you know you are walking in the right direction?”

His answer is simple. Almost too easy. Too “churchy.”

“I walk by faith, not by sight.”

And Solara’s response is what we so often feel in our own hearts. “What does that mean? That doesn’t make any sense...”

By its very nature, faith is hard.

We want explanations for everything. We want to know “why” we need to do this, or “how” we will do that, or “when” something is going to happen.

We want to **SEE** the path laid out in front of us before we take that first step.

But if we could see everything in front of us, then we wouldn’t be walking by faith, would we?

When Eli says, “I walk by faith, not by sight,” he’s actually quoting the Apostle Paul from his letter to the believers in Corinth.

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in [our bodies] is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. *For we live by faith, not by sight.*

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we

must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

These words from Paul should give us **GREAT** comfort. This is **THE** Paul. The man who traveled throughout much of the Roman empire, facing hardships, trials, and persecution as he shared the Gospel. The man whose efforts and evangelism shaped so much of what became the Church we know today.

And he says this: “While we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened...”

Paul knew more than anyone that life was hard.

He was constantly on the run, not just from the oppressive government of the Roman Empire, but also from the followers of his former religion, Judaism, who saw him as one of the biggest traitors out there against everything they stood for.

He understood groaning. He knew what it meant to be burdened by the weight of this world.

Yet he pressed on.

He made the decision – probably every single morning as he got out of bed and prepared to pour his heart out to a people who may or may not stone him, beat him senseless, or even kill him – to live that day by faith, and not by sight.

If he walked by sight, he would see the Jewish leaders in Iconium stirring up dissension against him and planning to kill him with rocks (Acts 14:1-7), and he probably would’ve kept quiet.

If he walked by sight, he would see the rocks that actually flew at him in Lystra, bashing him until the people dragged him out of the city because they thought he was dead (Acts 14:8-20), and he probably would’ve given up and went back to making tents.

If he walked by sight, he would’ve seen the mob coming for him in Philippi, ‘severely beating him’ with a rod, and then throwing him in prison (Acts

16:16-24), and he probably would've turned and ran back the other direction.

But Paul didn't walk by sight.

He **CHOSE** to walk by faith.

Faith that Jesus was who he said He was.

Faith that the Holy Spirit had been given to him as a deposit to guarantee the promises that awaited him.

Faith that, even if his enemies took his life, it would simply mean that he would get to go home to be with his Jesus.

Paul **CHOSE** to walk by faith, not by sight. And because of his choice, God used him to literally change the world.

But he was not the only one...

Our memory verse for this chapter, Hebrews 11:1-2, kicks off what is often called the "Wall of Faith" – a list of Old Testament heroes who were just normal men and women, yet they **CHOSE** to walk by faith in God, believing that He was the One true God, the Creator of Everything. One worthy of their obedience.

Take the time to slowly read through this list. Try to envision yourself in their place. Try to put yourself in their circumstances, in their situations, and imagine the faith it would require to make the decisions they made...

"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith." Hebrews 11:7

Noah spent **DECADES** building a boat that was one-and-a-half times longer than a football field, in preparation for a flood the likes of which no one in all of history had ever seen before. Imagine the long, hot days swinging a hammer, lifting the heavy timbers – dedicating years of your life to one single

focus – all while your friends, family, and neighbors no doubt think you’ve lost your mind. That is unbelievable faith!!

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham left everything he knew behind him – his home, his comforts, his occupation – he walked away from it all and traveled to a foreign land. To live in a tent. Imagine the fear and apprehension. Imagine the daily internal struggle he faced, wondering if he made the right call. There was no Google Maps to guide him and his family to a certain destination, no Siri to help translate the strange dialects he encountered along the way. But, in faith, Abraham walked forwards.

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” Hebrews 11:17-19

So this one is just ridiculous. God called Abraham to sacrifice his son. His **ONLY** son. The one that was supposed to lead to the formation of an entire nation of Abraham’s descendants. Imagine the turmoil in Abraham’s heart as he and Isaac walked up the mountain, Isaac carrying the wood for his own fire, his dad carrying the knife to kill him with. Imagine the wrestling that was happening within his soul as he tied his son down to the altar. But, in faith, Abraham obeyed. (spoiler alert: if you’ve never read the story of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham didn’t have to kill him. Go back to Genesis 22 to see God’s dramatic rescue)

And Hebrews 11 goes on to tell of the faith of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, and the faith of Moses and his parents, the faith of the Israelites as they walked through the Red Sea, and so many more.

Get your Bible out. Read Hebrews 11 for yourself.

The examples of **NORMAL** men and women who chose faith are numerous.

Remember, as we read in chapter 1, we have the benefit of looking back in hindsight at these stories, and seeing the big picture of what really happened.

For these men and women, they had **NO IDEA** how, or even if, God was going to come through.

Noah didn't know if there was going to be an unprecedented amount of rain pour out all over the earth and flood the whole thing. He didn't have the radars and forecasting tools and almanacs that we have today. All he had was faith.

Abraham didn't know if he was uprooting his family and walking directly into danger or harm or even death. He didn't have the example of anyone else to look at and say, "Oh, well God told Joe to go do this a few years back, and it worked out fine for him..." All he had was faith.

Moses didn't know what was going to happen as he and millions of his Hebrew brothers and sisters stood by the Red Sea, helplessly pinned between the waters of the Sea and the insane rage of the Egyptian army behind them, who had just lost all of their firstborn sons in one night. All he had was faith.

These were **NORMAL** men. Just like **YOU**.

Many of them were rewarded greatly by their faith in action.

The sobering reality, however, is that many were rewarded with suffering, imprisonment, and even death for their faith...

"... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced

jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground...” Hebrews 11:35-38

The world was not worthy of them.

So God brought them home.

How powerful is that?

That kind of faith is hard to come by these days. In this age of the “self-made man”, climbing to the top of the ladder through hard work, dedication, and ambition – why do we really need God?

We have become experts at walking by sight.

We see that goal we want, and we work our tails off to get it.

Maybe it’s that big house with the white picket fence and the 3-car garage. We see it with our eyes. We see how much it’s going to cost us. We see how we can work more hours, and make more money. We see how we can manipulate our finances so that the bank will approve us for a bigger mortgage. Boom. The big house is yours, with the 3-car garage, the white picket fence, the nice yard with perfect grass, and a big fat 30-year mortgage.

We saw it. We wanted it. We went out and got it.

And then we talk about how ‘blessed’ we must be...

The same could be said for that big shiny truck you just went out and financed.

Or the promotion you put in sixty-plus hours a week to get.

We see what we want. We do whatever it takes to get it. And we call it the ‘favor of God.’

So is hard work and achievement a bad thing, then?

Absolutely not. The Bible says to do everything with excellence, as if you were working for the Lord Himself.

BUT, at what expense are you achieving your success? What is it costing you, as you go deeper into debt, and devote more time to your job or your hobbies than your family?

Or, the better question as it pertains to this chapter, how much faith did it **REALLY** take for you to accomplish all those achievements and get all that stuff?

If we actually take the time to think about that, and we are truly honest with our answers, we'll acknowledge that there probably wasn't much faith involved in that, right?

WE made it happen.

WE accomplished our goals.

WE saw what we wanted and **WE** worked hard to get it.

And our faith very slowly and quietly shifts from God to ourselves.

And at the end of the day, when we step back and look at all we've attained, and then compare it with the achievements of the men and women in Hebrews 11, we might start to realize that maybe we weren't chasing after the right things.

Maybe life really isn't about the titles, and the promotions, and the shiny stuff.

Those men and women in Hebrews 11 didn't have any of that. Yet they are considered the heroes of the Christian faith. Maybe what we've thought was the 'blessed life', was really just a shallow life of walking by sight...

EVOLUTION1: pray

The right focus of our faith is incredibly essential for the sincere follower of Christ. If we allow ourselves to get sidetracked, and place our faith in our abilities, rather than in who Jesus is, then we could very possibly miss the point of our entire existence upon this earth.

It is worth devoting some prayer to.

Spend some time talking with the Holy Ghost, both by yourself and with your Platoon.

Ask Him to begin to reveal to your heart what true, Biblical faith really looks like. Ask Him to show you where you have been trusting in your own skills and talents, rather than Christ. Write down what He shows you.

“Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.” – Francis Chan, ‘Crazy Love’

True faith in God will mess with your head.

When you begin to truly listen to the Holy Spirit, and take the time to ask Him, “What path would bring God the most glory in my life?”, then ideas will begin to pop into your head that make little or no sense at all.

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In the 1850s, Dwight Moody gave up his successful sales career in the shoe business, and went and started a Sunday School class in the slums of Chicago. The Sunday School turned into a church. His service there led him to become an evangelist. His preaching took him all the way to Europe. And he spent the remaining years of his life building the Moody Bible Institute, one of the greatest Bible colleges in the US today.

But it took radical faith for him to take those first steps into the poverty-stricken heart of Chicago.

One of his more famous quotes is this:

"If this world is going to be reached," he said, "I am convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all, there are comparatively few people in this world who have great talents."

God isn't looking for men that have great talents and skills and abilities.

He is looking for average, ordinary men that have **EXTRAORDINARY** faith.

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In the 1820s, Charles Finney had a profitable law practice in New York. One day, he ‘randomly’ decided to go walk into the woods to try to find God, and vowed that he would not come back until he found Him. And God got a hold of Finney’s heart that day. He chose to walk away from money and prestige, and devoted his life to preaching the Gospel. His first job as a new Christian? A missionary employed by the Female Missionary Society of the Western District of New York. Let that sink in for a minute! Charles Finney went on to become one of the great evangelists of the 1800’s, the “Father of Modern Revivalism”.

And it started with a walk in the woods, looking for God like a crazy person, and then leaving a successful law practice to go work for a Women's Missionary Society. Talk about faith!!

Finney was known for 'in-your-face' messages such as this:

"Revival comes from heaven when heroic souls enter the conflict determined to win or die – or if need be, to win AND die! 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force!'"

God is looking for men that have a **HEROIC** faith, willing to enter **HIS** conflict.

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In the mid-1800s, Hudson Taylor devoted his life to Christ as a teenage boy, and went on to pursue medical studies – not to make a fortune like other doctors of his time, but because he knew it would open a door to missions opportunities in unreached places. And in the 1860's, Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, the first missionary organization ever formed to go deep into the heart of China. Through his bold leap of faith, thousands of missionaries began to bring light to a place of almost total darkness.

Taylor's rallying call?

"China is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women... The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put Jesus, China, and souls first and foremost in everything and at every time – even life itself must be secondary."

God is looking for men with a **BOLD** and **COURAGEOUS** faith, men who see obstacles as invitations, and difficulties as challenges.

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Moody. Finney. Taylor.

Like so many other men of their time, they could have chosen to pursue riches, comfort, titles, prestige. They could have stayed nice and safe, built

respectable practices, raised nice, well-behaved families. They could have walked by sight.

But they chose instead to throw it all to the wind and say, “I choose faith in Jesus Christ above all else.”

Like the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Philippians,

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:7-14

Whatever I once valued so highly – it is now **RUBBISH** compared to knowing Christ, and straining forward towards what **HE** has laid in front of me...

What would it look like if you could truly say, “All that stuff I have been chasing for so many years of my life – it’s all just a pile of junk. I want to start chasing the things that **MATTER**. I want to pursue the heart of Jesus, and the things that would bring **HIM** glory. I want to make an impact for **HIS** Kingdom, not mine!”

Isn’t there something inside of you, even just a small spark, that longs to step out in faith and do something amazing like the D.L. Moody’s and the Hudson Taylor’s of this world?

Isn't there a part of your heart that is yearning for so much more than what this world has to offer, with its ever-increasing focus on "I" and "ME" and "MINE"?

If you are a follower of Christ – if you truly have the Holy Spirit inside of you – at some point He will begin to make you uncomfortable with "normal." At some point, He will begin to open up the truths of the Scriptures, and open your eyes to see that you do not belong to this world. At some point, He will begin to fan into flame a deep desire and passion to drop all that you thought was important, in exchange for the glory of the Kingdom of God.

Our prayer for you is that that time is **NOW**.

Our prayer is that this study, and this chapter, fueled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, will awaken in you dreams and visions for your life that, when you really begin to sit down and 'count the cost' of what it would look like to follow them, it will make you increasingly uncomfortable.

Why would we pray something like that???

Because our world needs men that are willing to walk in a faith that does not make sense.

Because **MILLIONS** of people, all around the world, are stuck in the rut of "normal", and they are being deceived by the Prince of this earth and all the shiny trinkets he is waving in front of their faces.

Because **MILLIONS** of people are wasting their lives trying to look like everyone else, trying to fit in, trying to be cool and relevant and popular – and they're turning their backs on Jesus because He cramps their lifestyle too much.

Because millions of people **HAVE NEVER EVEN HEARD** the Good News that they can have eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

And they are facing **ETERNITY** in hell.

Because **WE** would rather chase after a bunch of rubbish that "moths and vermin can destroy, and thieves can break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19)

How desperately this world is in need of men who have the same heart as C.H. Spurgeon, who said,

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”

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So, if you're like most men, your mind is probably racing right now with one of two thoughts:

Either you're thinking,

“I don't have what it takes to make that kind of a difference in this world...”

Or, you're thinking,

“I don't even know where to start...”

Let's focus on that first thought.

“I don't have what it takes to make that kind of a difference in this world...”

Well, that's an easy one to answer. **YOU DON'T.**

To truly make an impact, either in the community you live in, or on the other side of the planet – one that could serve to change the course of eternity for **GENERATIONS** of people – you **MUST** rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

To step out in faith and say, “Whatever it costs me Lord, I will follow you into the fight!” you will need the resolve and conviction and the fire of the Holy Spirit. Period.

That kind of sustained faith is completely foreign to our nature. It simply doesn't exist within us. Which should give you a **TON** of comfort.

God **IS** calling you to step out in faith. God **IS** calling you to give up your life and pick up your cross for the sake of His Kingdom.

God **IS** calling you to walk away from everything that the world calls 'normal' and follow Him instead.

But He also says, "I will put My Spirit inside of you to lead you and to encourage you and to give you strength. I will give you everything you need to accomplish My calling for your life."

So will you accept it? Will you get on your knees and say, "Spirit, **YOU** guide me, **YOU** lead me – even if it costs me my life – give me the strength and courage to live recklessly for the cause of Christ..."?

If you will do that, then you **WILL** have **EXACTLY** what it takes to make an incredible impact in your lifetime, for the glory of the Kingdom of God!

So what about the second thought then?
"I don't even know where to start..."

Well first of all, just breathe.

Relax.

God (most likely!!) is not going to say, "Go home, sell everything you've got, and move you and your family to some remote tribal village in the jungle somewhere."

What He **WILL** say to you is **OBEY** in the small things.

Start to take steps towards radical faith.

Sit down and **HONESTLY** examine your life. If you're married, sit down with your wife and talk through it together. Where have you gotten comfortable? Where are you **NOT** trusting God? Where are you walking in your own strength?

Have you become closed-fisted with your money, holding back from giving freely and generously to the Church and to those in need?

Have you grown complacent in building relationships with your neighbors, your co-workers, people at your church? Or maybe within your own family?

Have you become distracted with the pursuit of your own happiness and comfort and temporary pleasures, forgetting that you are not a citizen of this earth, but an ambassador for the Kingdom?

Have you forgotten that you were put here for one reason only, to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ, and spread the hope of eternity to others around you?

Where do you need to stop walking by sight, just like everyone else around you, and start walking **BY FAITH** in Jesus Christ and all of His promises found in Scripture?

Throughout history, God has used normal men to do extraordinary things for His Kingdom.

The only thing He needs for **YOU** to become one of those men is your faith!

“I have given Him my faith, and sworn my allegiance to Him. How, then, can I go back from this, and not be hanged as a traitor?” – John Bunyan

EVOLUTION2: act

What steps can you take, **THIS WEEK**, to begin stretching your faith? They don't have to be huge steps that completely shift your entire lifestyle overnight, but, **THEY MUST BE STEPS THAT REQUIRE FAITH!!**

Again, spend some time praying that the Holy Spirit would fill you with His supernatural faith. Pray that He will give you "eyes to see and ears to hear" all of the **MANY** needs around you. And then go **DO SOMETHING**.

"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- **FAITH = ACTION.** Make sure you do **SOMETHING** that stretches you this week!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” Hebrews 11:1-2



Ch 9

GENTLENESS

MEMORY VERSE:

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:1-2

**“O heaven’s grace - humility!
Thy cherished charm I’ll wear;
I must be humble, Lord, like Thee,
Thy holy image bear.
Come softly from thy throne above,
O grace so sweet and fair;
Come, touch my heart in gentle love,
And scatter meekness there.**

- Charles E. Orr
“Sweet Humility” (1907)

- attendance
- memory verse

Imagine yourself getting ready to go to war against your enemies. You're in a foreign country, far from your home, your wives, your children.

You know a fierce, bloody battle awaits you. You know some men will die. Maybe even you.

But then the General of the army stands before you and your fellow soldiers, your brothers-in-arms, and reminds you all of your great cause. He reminds you that you are entering into the fight because evil must not triumph. He reminds you to dig deep, and find the faith and the courage to engage the enemy, and stay in the fight until they are destroyed.

THAT is how you fire **REAL** men up. **THAT** is how you motivate and challenge your men to 'leave it all on the field.'

Like the memorable speech of William Wallace in the movie 'Braveheart', as he's rallying his fellow Scotsmen to stand up and fight the tyranny of England,

"Aye, fight and you may die. Run, and you'll live... at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willin' to trade ALL the days, from this day to that, for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take... OUR FREEDOM!"

Or the mighty words of King Theoden, as he leads the charge of his cavalry against the orcs of Saruman in 'The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers',

"Let this be the hour when we draw swords together. Fell deeds awake. Now for wrath, now for ruin, and the red dawn! Forth, Eorlingas!"

Or even in the triumphant victory song of Moses, after God covered the entire Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea,

"I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The
best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like
a stone.
Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand,
Lord, shattered the enemy.
In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who
opposed you.
You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like
stubble.
By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging
waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the
heart of the sea.
The enemy boasted, 'I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will
divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my
sword and my hand will destroy them.'
But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They
sank like lead in the mighty waters.
Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you – majestic
in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" Exodus 15:1-
11

Can't you just feel the emotion in those words? Can you feel the pride, the excitement, the thrill of victory over the enemy? Those are words that inspire and motivate and challenge people to do **GREAT** things for worthy causes.

Words of faithful **ACTION**.

If we were sitting down, with pen in hand, getting ready to challenge our brothers and sisters in Christ to pursue the fruits of the Holy Ghost with everything they had, **THAT** would be how we would end it, right?

With a dramatic call to live a life of faith, walking out the doors of our churches or homes or wherever we are meeting, with a loud shout of victory, ready to draw our swords together.

If we were the ones writing Galatians 5:22-23, that's how we would do it. If Paul **REALLY** wanted the readers of this letter to be inspired, he should've stopped with **FAITHFULNESS**, right?

But he didn't.

In fact, it's almost as if he turned a complete one-eighty, and went back the opposite direction from where he was building up to.

Imagine William Wallace again, all covered in his war paint, with his great sword lifted high in the air, shouting,

“Our enemies may take our lives, but they'll never take... OUR FREEDOM! Now, let us go take the field of battle, and let us be gloriously and courageously... gentle.”

Kind of loses the dramatic inspiration, doesn't it?

That's just not how you motivate people to go out a live a life sold out for Christ – get 'em all fired up to follow in the footsteps of D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, and all the heroes of Hebrews 11, and then say, “Oh wait a minute guys... before you head out, let's talk about gentleness.”

But that is how Paul **CHOSE** to order his list of the Fruits of the Spirit. And we believe that order was **DIVINELY** inspired.

So the question then becomes, “OK, that's kind of weird, so **WHY** did God want it that way?”

If we pause and think about it, and think about our own natural tendencies, **ESPECIALLY** as a bunch of grown men, it starts to become very clear why gentleness falls near the end of Paul's list – because we are a **PRIDEFUL** people.

And **PRIDE** is one of the greatest hindrances out there when it comes to following Christ.

The Greek word that has been translated as 'gentleness' is the word 'prautes'. One definition of prautes is:

“Meekness, coming from a divine origin, which expresses power with reserve and gentleness.”

Jesus used a similar word in one of His most famous sermons, in Matthew 5:5,

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth...”

In today’s culture, ‘meekness’ isn’t exactly a virtue that many of us chase after, is it? Most likely, your first thought when you hear the word ‘meekness’ is ‘weakness’.

When we hear Jesus say, “Blessed are the meek...” it’s hard to not think of some weak, pushover Christian – some guy that isn’t real passionate, isn’t very courageous, and who lets everyone just walk all over him.

That’s what **WE** think when we hear the word ‘meek’ or ‘gentle’.

But that’s not who Jesus was **AT ALL**.

Sure, Jesus was compassionate and gentle to those who desperately needed love. He was kind and patient with lost sinners who He saw as “sheep without a shepherd.” (Mark 6:34) He was full of grace and forgiveness to those who had been cast aside by society.

But He also charged through the temple with a homemade whip, wrecking all the merchandise displays of the salesmen who forgot that the temple was supposed to be about worship and prayer, not making money. (John 2:13-17)

He got in the face of the old-fashioned religious bigots – men who were supposed to be leading the Church in humility and grace, but had instead gotten caught up in power and reputation – and He called them ‘blind fools’, hypocrites, and a ‘brood of vipers’. (Matthew 23:13-39)

And when He comes back to establish His complete and unchallenged rule and reign over this world, He will come back with terror and devastation for all who have chosen to rebel against him,

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.’

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.” Revelation 19:11-21

No, Jesus is **FAR** from being a pushover.

So what is He trying to say when He tells us that the “meek shall inherit the earth?”

What is Paul trying to communicate when he places ‘gentleness’ near the end of his list of the Fruits of the Spirit?

Again, is this not a statement against the sinful pride within our hearts?

Both Jesus and Paul fully understood the condition of the human heart.

Especially for men.

They knew that, even if a group of brothers, like **YOU** for example, were to see the Holy Spirit work in miraculous and supernatural ways in their lives, teaching them about love and joy and peace and patience, filling their hearts with a newfound kindness and goodness and faithfulness – even if they spent an entire study seeking the will of the Holy Spirit – for many of them, the thought of “Look what *I* am doing” would begin to make its way into their hearts.

You know that is true.

It is the same self-righteousness that the Church has struggled with from day one.

It’s the same self-righteousness that Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees for in Matthew 23.

It’s the same self-righteousness that Paul called out Peter for in Galatians 2:11-21.

And it’s the same self-righteousness we battle with today.

Things are starting to go really well in our lives as we’ve started to tap into the power of the Spirit. Our relationships are going deeper. Our resistance to sin is stronger. Our walk with the Lord just feels better overall.

So we start to develop a bit of a swagger.

We start to say ridiculous things like “I’m gonna kick Satan in the face today,” or “Satan is runnin’ scared this morning after **THAT** quiet time you just had,” or “Brother, you’ve got Satan trembling in his boots today (or whatever it is that the devil wears on his feet...)”

And, slowly (and unintentionally), a shift begins to take place in our hearts, and we begin to take a little more credit for the good things that are happening in and around us. We look forward to the pats on the back a little

more than we used to. And our humility and meekness and gentleness begins to wane as I take center stage.

This is a great time for a reality check.

If you remember, back in the **“Phase 1: Combat Training”** study, in the chapter on Spiritual Warfare, you read the story of Daniel praying and fasting and mourning for three weeks because of a terrible vision he had received from the Lord. Read these verses again from Daniel 10:1-14, and imagine yourself in Daniel’s place,

“In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

‘At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief

princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”

So let’s look at Daniel’s role in this portion of Scripture. He was flat on his face – praying, fasting, and mourning. He was trembling on his knees. He was humbled before God.

A mighty battle was raging in the heavens for sure, and Daniel’s humility and meekness before the Lord was at the heart of that battle. But who was “kicking the enemy in his face?” Was it not the angel that came to his aid? And even he was struggling in the fight until Michael, the great archangel, came and took over.

Pride and self-righteousness were nowhere to be seen in Daniel’s life at that moment.

Isaiah experienced this same sense of complete helplessness and humility when he came into the presence of the Lord and His angels. There was absolutely zero pride to be found in Isaiah’s heart as he cried out,

“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Isaiah 6:5

When the prophet Ezekiel saw the heavenly creatures coming out of a windstorm, with their wings spread wide, having faces like lions, oxen, and eagles, and then saw the likeness of the Lord, glowing like metal in an insanely hot fire, he could not stand to be before Him.

“Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the

Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking..." Ezekiel 1:25-28 (read all of chapter 1 to get the full picture of what Ezekiel saw)

The Apostle John had a similar experience when He saw his vision of the Lord from his exile on the island of Patmos.

"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead..." Revelation 1:12-17

What's interesting about John's reaction was that he was possibly Jesus' best friend while Jesus was alive on the earth. He referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" in John 21:20 (yeah, that's kind of odd to say about yourself, but it is in the Bible!)

Most scholars believe that Jesus and John developed a deeper bond than most of the other disciples. So, if there was anyone who could stand before the risen and resurrected Christ, in all of His glory in the heavens, you would think it would've been His good friend John.

But, when He came into the presence of the Lord, his own sinfulness and unworthiness struck him so deeply that he fell down as if he was dead.

What we see in Daniel's story, and Ezekiel and Isaiah and even John's encounter, is that, when a human comes into the presence of the Lord, or even just one of His angels, he is completely wrecked by the realization of his own helplessness.

Do we remember who Satan was before he fell?

He was one of God's angels. Possibly even one of high rank within the army. At any rate, he had enough influence to sway a third of Heaven's angels to turn their backs on the glory and holiness of their Creator.

“Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.’ And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”
Revelation 12:3-9

The “great dragon”, the “ancient serpent”, was hurled down to the earth. And if you read on in Revelation, you'll see that he came down to wage war against **YOU** and anyone else who calls Jesus their Lord.

So, with all of that in mind, do you **REALLY** think that he trembles because you read your Bible for fifteen minutes this morning?

Do you **REALLY** believe he is shaking in fear because you went to Church or came to your men's group this week?

Do you **REALLY** believe that **YOU** can make a fallen angel, one described as a “great dragon”, cower before your righteous deeds?

Seems pretty ridiculous, doesn't it. Yet that is what happens when men see success – whether it's in the business world, within ministry, or in our own homes – we **LOVE** to stand proud and have others admire all that we have done.

In fact, **PRIDE** is what caused Satan's fall from Heaven. He believed that he could be equal with God, and it destroyed his relationship with the Creator **FOR ETERNITY**.

No, the only way we will defeat our great enemy is to realize that there is **NOTHING** in us that has the power to stand against him.

It is **ONLY** through the power of Jesus Christ that we may stand firm on His Word.

It is **ONLY** through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to do **ANYTHING** good for the Kingdom.

It is **ONLY** when we get on our knees and submit to our God in Heaven that we will see victory over Satan.

That is what meekness looks like.

Those are the encounters that will put in any man a gentleness and a humbleness that will reach deep into his soul.

When we begin to grasp our own sinfulness, our own inability to muster up anything of lasting value in our own strength, and we begin to have a deep reverence of God's holiness, **THEN** Satan will cower in fear.

Not because he looks up and sees our resolve.

But because he sees the power of the Risen Christ flowing through our hearts.

We need an encounter with the Lord.

We desperately need humility and meekness and gentleness.

And it is only found when we come face to face with our own sinfulness, and the awesome and terrifying holiness of our God!

EVOLUTION1: pray

This is a tough one. We hesitate to come before the Lord and ask his Holy Spirit to give us this same kind of encounter as Daniel and Isaiah and so many others. We know that it will completely wreck us if we get even a glimpse of His glory.

But if we truly desire to live our lives in such a way that only He would get the praise and honor and glory from our lives, then we **MUST** pray for this!

Ask the Holy Spirit to begin to give you a revelation of your own sinfulness. And at the same time, pray that He would give you a glimpse of the splendor and holiness of our God. Ask Him to overflow your heart with humility and meekness. Pray by yourself, and pray with your Platoon. And write down your prayer.

“Here is the path to the higher life: down, lower down! Just as water always seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds men abased and empty, His glory and power flow in to exalt and to bless.” – Andrew Murray

It's time to get practical.

What does the spirit of gentleness and meekness and humility look like in our own lives? As we've seen already through the example of Christ, it most certainly doesn't mean we become an apathetic pansy that is swayed by every strong breeze.

A Christian man, fully submitted to the will and the power of the Holy Spirit, is a mighty force to be reckoned with.

BUT, he is also gentle and meek, and full of the overwhelming love and graciousness of our Lord.

So what will it look like for us to pursue the fruit of gentleness?

It will look like you **RECKLESSLY** loving your enemies.

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
Matthew 5:43-48**

It will look like you showing **INEXPLICABLE** mercy to those who seek to harm you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” Matthew 5:38-42

It will look like you forgiving **IRRATIONALLY** and **REPEATEDLY**.

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” Matthew 18:21-22

“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.” Acts 7:59-60

“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’” Luke 23:32-34

And it will look like you going out into the world, living your life with a **RADICAL** faith, believing in the promises of the Lord, and **ACTING** on them, being willing to **JOYFULLY** suffer at the hands of others.

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:7-11

And it will look like you doing **ALL** of these things, literally and figuratively, flat on your face – confessing to Jesus and to the world, “I can do **NOTHING** without you working in and through me. It is all **BY** You, and **FOR** You.”

Or, as John the Baptist said to his disciples regarding the Christ,

“He must become greater; I must become less.” John 3:30

Gentleness isn't looking so easy anymore, is it?

Thank the Lord that, if you are truly one of His chosen saints, then you have all the power you need through His Holy Spirit!!

Hopefully you've been praying that He would fill you with the fruit of gentleness.

Now it is time to put it into action!

“I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that He is indeed our Master.” – John Newton

EVOLUTION2: act

Again, you can't do any of these things on your own. It simply is not in our nature to be able to accomplish any of this. Pray for the Holy Ghost to give you the strength to be full of gentleness, meekness, and humility. It is the **ONLY** way that this will work!

Love your enemies RECKLESSLY

Show them INEXPLICABLE mercy

Forgive them IRRATIONALLY and REPEATEDLY

Be willing to JOYFULLY suffer for the sake of Christ

And when the temptation comes to puff out your chest, and start walking with a little more swagger in your step, then CHOOSE to get on your knees and say, "HE must become greater..."

Who is an "enemy" in your life right now? Maybe it's your boss. Maybe your neighbor. Maybe it's even your wife. You know who's annoying you, or ridiculing you, or slandering you. Write it down.

Now **HOW** will you love them recklessly? **HOW** will you show them the same kind of mercy that Christ has shown to you? **HOW** will you practically and tangibly show them forgiveness? **HOW** will you show others your joy as you **CHOOSE** to embrace suffering for the glory of the name of Jesus? Try to get as specific as possible on this one!

(our prayer for you is that by now the Spirit is moving freely through your heart, and that you would be overwhelmed with ideas of how you can show the "Fruit of Gentleness" to your enemies!)

“I choose gentleness... Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.” – Max Lucado

Gentleness. Meekness. Humility.

Those are incredibly rare qualities within the Church today. Especially among the men.

We've got too many celebrity pastors, too many rock star worship leaders, too many men of God standing proud and saying "Look at all that we have accomplished."

We've got too many man-made systems and programs that we create and market to bring in more numbers (yes, maybe even like the one you're going through right now!), and we take great pride in all that we have done.

And, over time, it all becomes about us.

May we, as the men of the Church – God's appointed leaders of **HIS** bride – get back on our knees, repent of our pride, and begin to strive after the fruit of gentleness and meekness within our own hearts.

May we lean on the Holy Spirit for the courage to fade into the background, so that Jesus will be the only One people see!

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- Gentleness and meekness flies in the face of everything culture encourages – THAT is why it will make such an impact when people see it in YOU!!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:1-2



Ch 10

SELF-CONTROL

MEMORY VERSE:

“Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.’” John 14:23-24

**“When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”**

- John H. Sammis

“Trust and Obey” (1887)

- attendance
- memory verse

There could be no better “bookends” to Paul’s list of the Fruits of the Spirit than love and self-control.

We must start with love.

When one of the Pharisees, an ‘expert in the law’, came to Jesus and asked Him what the greatest of all of God’s commandments was, Jesus replied,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40

That is a **CRAZY** statement! When Jesus said that **ALL** of the Law and the Prophets hang on those two commandments, He was basically saying to His followers, “Pretty much all of the Old Testament doesn’t mean a thing if it is not grounded in love.”

Love God with everything you’ve got.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

If you are not doing either of those things, then it doesn’t matter how many laws and commandments you are obeying from God’s Word – all you’re doing is just washing the outside of the cup, but leaving the inside filthy (Matthew 23:26)

The Apostle Paul echoed the words of Jesus in his letter to the church in Corinth,

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

In other words, you can speak all the right Christian lingo, you can know the Bible backwards and forwards, you can even go to the ‘ends of the earth’ and sacrifice all you have to try to win converts – but if you don’t have love, then **NONE OF IT** means a thing.

Those are powerful words.

So, you can chase after joy, and pray that the Spirit would fill you up with His full measure of it and remind you of all that you have been saved from, **BUT**, if it is not based on an overwhelming love for the Lord and a sacrificial love for others, it is just a fabricated happiness that will fade the next time someone or some circumstance annoys you.

You can pursue the peace of Christ in the midst of all of your trials and struggles, that supernatural peace that surpasses all understanding, **BUT**, if it’s not rooted in a deep love for Him and an enduring love for others, it will only be a temporary, fleeting peace, and it will **NOT** weather the storms of this life.

You can desire to be filled with a patience that trusts in God and believes that no matter how long He has you in the valley, it is for your good, **BUT**, if your patience is not partnered up with a strong love for Jesus and a persevering love for others, then it will quickly turn to impatience at the next bump in the road.

You can long for a kindness that is rich in grace and mercy, reaching out to those who are hurting and in need, **BUT**, if it is not grounded in a love for Jesus and an overwhelming sense of gratitude and thankfulness for all that He has done for you, and a love that longs to pour itself out to others, then your kindness will disappear the first time you are rejected or offended by someone.

You can yearn for goodness and justice to prevail in this dark world, and throw yourself whole-heartedly into some worthy cause, **BUT**, if love for God and the glory of His name is not at the forefront of your cause, and an aching love for those being mistreated is not in your heart, then your passion will not last, and your cause will not endure.

You can strive after a radical faith that casts aside all comfort as you say “Yes!” to whatever God asks from you, **BUT**, if that faith is not driven by a

‘recklessly abandoned’ love for Jesus and the people He has created, then your ‘radical’ faith is really just a desire for adventure and excitement and attention, and it will only last until you get bored.

You can pray that the Holy Ghost would give you a gentleness and meekness that is willing to love your enemies, and turn the other cheek when persecution comes, **BUT**, if you don’t truly love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and if you don’t love others as you love yourself, then you will revert back to irritation, bitterness, and anger within no time.

Love is essential.

Love for Jesus.

Love for others.

If you do not first have love, then **NONE** of the rest of the fruits of the Spirit matter.

The same can be said for self-control.

In this life, we all have choices to make. Every single day, we are faced with decisions. Some are small decisions, like “What color socks am I going to put on this morning?”

But many of them are much bigger, much more **ETERNAL** decisions.

Unfortunately, not many of us think in the scope of eternity these days. We’re more concerned with our happiness today than we are with other people’s eternity tomorrow.

Too harsh?

OK, when was the last time you sat down and shared the Gospel with someone?

When was the last time you said to someone else, “Can I walk alongside of you, and teach you to better understand God’s Word, and model what it looks like to be a follower of Christ – so that you might turn from your

sinfulness and follow Him as well? And then, once you've submitted to Jesus and His Lordship in your life, can I teach you how to go out and teach others to do the same?"

That is called making disciples.

That is called walking in **OBEDIENCE** to some of the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples while He was still here on this earth...

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" Matthew 28:18-20

THAT is why we are here.

And it requires brutal self-control.

"I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." 1 Corinthians 9:26-27

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philipians 3:13-14

Paul understood the sacrifice required to truly follow Jesus Christ.

He understood that it was far more than raising a hand at church and repeating someone else's prayer.

He understood that there is a significant cost to following Jesus, and that cost is that you must **CHOOSE** to die to yourself. **EVERY** day.

He understood that there is a constant battle raging in our souls between the “old” man inside of us and the “new” man that Christ has redeemed.

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:15-25

Can you feel the holy frustration within Paul’s heart in that passage? He is **LONGING** to do the right thing, to follow after Christ with his **WHOLE** heart – but he must war with his flesh, every single day, to make it happen.

And so must we.

Lives are at stake.

Not just figuratively speaking this time. Literally, there are people around us that are **DYING**, every single day. As we talked about in the chapter on love, we live in the midst of a brutal war, where people are aimlessly wandering through the battlefield of this life, getting picked off left and right, and they have no clue what is going on all around them.

And most of the Christian men in their community would rather shut the front door and go look at porn.

Or maybe your sin is one of the more socially acceptable sins like eating too much. Or drinking too much alcohol. Or watching too much Netflix or ESPN.

Or spending too much time at work, or at the gym, or at the golf course or the gun range.

Or maybe, if we're gonna finish this study out with gut-level honesty, you really just don't care.

There is a tragic apathy running through the Church today. Maybe it's been there for decades. The need in our world is growing deeper and more urgent every day. And the lack of action by the men of the Church is staggering.

Why?

Because we do not pursue the fruit of self-control.

We don't have anything in our life that even comes close to the passion and resolve that Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 or Philippians 3:13-14.

When was the last time you **CHOSE** to "strike blows to your own body," making it your slave to righteousness, so you could have the strength and courage to go out and preach the Gospel to your neighbor down the street?

When was the last time you **CHOSE** to set down your oversized plate of nachos, or the remote control to your TV, or that big driver you just dropped a few hundred bucks on, and instead decided to "strain towards the prize that you have been called to" and go out and intentionally make disciples in your community?

When was the last time you **CHOSE** to step out of your comfort zone and go on a global mission trip to experience the pain and suffering and heartache that exists outside of the walls of your own comfort?

When was the last time you **CHOSE** to bring someone into your home that was broken down and hurting, so they could experience the real and tangible love of Jesus Christ?

When was the last time you **CHOSE** to suffer for the sake of the Kingdom, and walk in **OBEDIENCE**, rather than pursue your own pleasure?

When we do not pursue self-control, we become worthless servants in God's Kingdom. In Luke 14:34-35, Jesus tells His disciples,

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.”

Salt affects change. When salt is salty, you can tell without a doubt when it is present in your meal.

But what if it loses its saltiness?

What if it no longer fulfills the purposes it was intended for?

Jesus would say it is useless. He would say, not only would it mess up your dirt if you threw it out on the ground – it would also mess up your pile of manure.

Think about that! Manure, as gross and smelly and disgusting as it is, serves as an extremely effective fertilizer that helps things grow. But, throw some “unsalty” salt in there, and even your pile of crap is now worthless!

Salt that has lost its saltiness is useless.

So, how's **YOUR** saltiness?

Have you gotten distracted by the sin in your life?

Have you been taken out by pornography, or gluttony, or apathy?

Have you decided the most important thing in this life is to pursue a fat paycheck, or a bigger house, or nicer vacations, or more comfort?

Are you hiding behind your family, claiming that they are your top priority, and that you must do all that you can to keep them safe and happy and provided for?

We cannot become salty again until we put **ALL** of that behind us and press on towards the goal that **JESUS** has called us to...

EVOLUTION1: pray

As we begin to wrap up this study, it is more important than ever that we get on our knees and ask the Spirit to fill us with His fruit of self-control.

We cannot do this without Him.

You do not have the ability to make your life salty again. Only the supernatural power of the Holy Ghost can make it happen.

So, you know the drill. Pray that the Spirit would fill you with His passion and resolve. Write down your prayer. Lock arms with your brothers in your Platoon. And **PRAY TOGETHER**.

“Spirituality is much needed here; there is a great lack of it, too much laughing and scoffing, not a real deep spiritual power. And why? Because they are afraid of it. Fancy! They are afraid of getting strained, and so instead of giving them fewer meetings, they dilute with the ditchwater of nonsense too often.” – C.T. Studd

Self-control is crucial to the life of a man who desires to become a Ghost Warrior.

You can either be controlled by fear like the eleven disciples who cowered down in the safety of the boat, **OR** you can have self-control, focus your faith and your trust on Jesus, and walk on the water with Peter. (Matthew 14:22-29)

You can either be controlled by the lust for more stuff that can rust and fade and be eaten by moths, and walk away from Jesus with your head down in disappointment like the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-25), **OR** you can have self-control, joyfully renounce the riches of this world, and experience the fullness of Jesus Christ with Zacchaeus. (Luke 19:1-10)

You can either be controlled by the illusion of safety and comfort that this world holds out in front of you, and sell out your Savior for thirty pieces of silver because He doesn't meet your expectations, just like Judas, **OR** you can have self-control, **BELIEVE** that Jesus is exactly who He says He is, and walk directly into suffering, pain, rejection, persecution, and maybe even death, all for the sake of His name.

Like the Apostle Paul, who was beat up by his fellow Jews, whipped and beaten by Roman soldiers, thrown in prison, and eventually had his head cut off by Emperor Nero.

Like Peter, who considered himself unworthy to even suffer the same death as His Savior, and requested instead to be crucified upside down in humility and disgrace.

Like John, who was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil for his faith, and somehow survived that, just to be exiled for the rest of his days on the island of Patmos, most likely blind and heavily scarred.

Like James, John's brother, who was decapitated by Herod Agrippa for refusing to back down and recant his belief that Jesus was the Son of God.

Like Matthew, the tax-collector, who was run through with a sword for standing firm in his proclamation that Jesus is Lord.

Like Phillip, one of the first to be called by Jesus to be a disciple, who was scourged with whips, and then crucified, following the example of Christ all the way up to his final breath.

Like James, the brother of Jesus, who, at the age of 94, was stoned by the Jewish people, and then had his brains beaten out with a club for his beliefs.

Like Andrew, and Jude, and Bartholomew, and Simon the Zealot, who were all crucified for being Christians.

And yet, according to Fox's Book of Martyrs,

"...notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plenteously with the blood of saints."

This is what discipleship means.

This is what it looks like to **CHOOSE** to live a life of self-control, making war against every desire of your flesh, and joyfully pursuing discomfort **THROUGH OBEDIENCE**, for the sake of Christ.

You can **NOT** call yourself a follower of Jesus if you are spending the majority of your days pursuing the same things everyone else around you are wasting their lives on.

You are deceiving yourself. Even worse, you are deceiving others.

We are called by Jesus to go out and make disciples. It is **THE** great commission of our lives.

The question is, what kind of disciples are you making?

Are you simply raising up a bunch of fellow lukewarm brothers, men who want to claim Christ as their own, but who also want to continue to dabble in pornography, materialism, and worldly ambition? Men who, when pressed to the fire, decide they'd rather have comfort and safety, than share in the sufferings of their Lord? Men who think being a disciple means reading

their Bibles every once in a while, making it to Church every other weekend, and having the right answers in Sunday School class or small group?

OR, are you raising up men who are sold out for Jesus?

Men who will rush into persecution and discomfort, because that is where the real battle is raging.

Men who will lead their families towards faith, action, risk, and yes, even danger, showing them that the riches of Heaven far outweigh any of the ridiculous rewards this world claims to offer us.

Men who will get on their faces in humility and desperation, crying out for the power of the Holy Spirit to lead them into the fight.

Men who will devote their lives to becoming Ghost Warriors.

What kind of disciples are **YOU** making?

They will model what they see from you... are you showing them the power and impact that a sold out, Spirit filled, self-controlled believer can have?

“Millions call themselves by His name, it is true, and pay some token homage to Him, but a simple test will show how little He is really honored among them. Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who or what is ABOVE, and his true position will be exposed. Let him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and men, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest, the proof is in the choice he makes day after day throughout his life.” – A.W. Tozer

EVOLUTION2: act

Your final evolution is this: Identify the areas you are still holding back in. You will never “arrive” at who Christ has called you to be in this life, **BUT**, you must **ALWAYS** be pressing forwards to that goal.

You know where you’re still hanging onto this world. Call it out for what it is. Confess your areas of sin and lack of self-control.

Get accountability from your brothers.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you courage to walk in **OBEDIENCE**.

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10

We will never change our neighborhoods, our communities, our workplaces, if we don't look any different than everyone around us.

The world will know us by our fruit.

What kind of fruit does your life show?

Our final prayer for you is that your love for God and your love for others will compel you into action. That you will have a deep and lasting joy and peace and patience that others are drawn to. That you will have a kindness and compassion that willingly goes into the dark places to rescue the broken and cast aside. That you will have a righteous anger towards the injustices of this world, and a faithfulness that gives you the courage to fight them. And that you will humbly point to Jesus Christ as you begin to impact this world, with gentleness and self-control as you choose to lay down your life, so others may live.

Our prayer for you is that you become a Ghost Warrior.

“What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men, men of prayer.” – E.M. Bounds

NOTES:

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

- Don't forget your memory verse!
- If you didn't pray or write down your prayer in Evolution 1, go back and do it now.
- A self-controlled life is a life lived in submission to the Holy Ghost. Fight for it!!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please write down the requests for all of the members of your Platoon for this week, and be diligent about lifting them up throughout the week)

“Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.’” John 14:23-24



GHOST WARRIORS