

COMBAT STRESS BIBLE STUDY

A 13-WEEK BIBLE STUDY  
THAT ADDRESSES THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES VETERANS FACE  
WHEN READJUSTING TO LIFE AFTER COMBAT

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## Introduction

Every veteran experiences some degree of combat stress and as a result, post-combat stress is a major problem in the military today. Many veterans have difficulties adjusting to life after combat and as combat deployments continue, this problem will continue to grow in the days to come. Combat stress is not simply a physical or psychological problem; it is a spiritual problem as well. Because this problem has a spiritual aspect to it, pastors and chaplains must address the spiritual elements of this issue. This Bible study was designed to address the spiritual aspects of combat stress because God's Word is capable of helping veterans overcome the problems they face as they readjust to life after combat.

During this time of war, the number of veterans that need help will continue to increase. These veterans need ministers to share with them the life-changing truth of God's Word to help them. Read the letter below from one of the Marines that I served with in Iraq.

*I remember coming home from the combat zone. I remember being in the hospital in Landshtul Germany and being able to tell who all the combat veterans were. Not just because of their sand colored uniforms, and the smell of no showers for days, or weeks, but because when a door slam echoed down the hallway we all ducked or hit the floors instinctively and the ones in wheel chairs and stretchers would sometimes cry because they could not.*

*I remember sitting in the wounded warrior barracks and hearing a song on the radio about losing brothers in the field, and bawling my eyes out with my room mate because that was the one place we could cry and not be ashamed.*

*I remember coming home and not being able to walk outside my own house in my own yard without first checking out all the windows, and looking behind every crevice, and fork in every tree, behind every fence, and potential hide-away in sight before I could walk out the door.*

*I remember sitting with my wife in the dark of night and trying to explain to her how everyday I look at my hands and remember the things that I have done with them, and then wonder how I can ever hold my children with those same hands. I remember. War hurts, and memories hurt, and trying to adjust back to what normal used to be hurts. I remember.*

I have given much thought to this. I have struggled with it. I have given my life to Christ, and His Word and His Spirit guide my thoughts and my actions. It isn't a hocus pocus kind of thing where I said a prayer and everything got better. It's a day by day thing, where when my mind wanders to something it shouldn't and I start to get angry or depressed about how I did a certain thing, He reminds me that I gave that to Him, and so I give it up daily.

Everyday, I know I get closer to Him and the day will come when He wipes all tears from my eyes, and there will be no more darkness, sickness, or pain. I know because He says so, and while I do not know everything about Him, what I do know leads me to believe that His Word is trustworthy. And there is no where else I can go that gives me the peace that believing in Him gives me.

God Bless,  
Pete Walker  
USMC veteran of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*

This Bible study was developed for the hundreds of thousands of veterans who need God's Word to help them readjust to life after combat. This Bible study was originally developed as a Doctor of Ministry project for the combat veterans assigned to Weapons and Field Training Battalion Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina. The Marines who participated in this Bible study struggled with many aspects of post-combat stress, but by the end of the thirteen-lesson Bible study, the participants found that they were overcoming the effects of post-combat stress because of the life-changing power of God's Word.

My prayer is that this Bible study will continue to help veterans face and overcome the effects of post-combat stress by the power of God's Word. May God bless you and empower you in your efforts to minister to the veterans in your ministry setting.

Because He lives,

Brian Kimball

## Combat Stress

Combat stress is the natural physiological response to the circumstances of life in a combat zone. The United States Army defines combat stress as “the complex and constantly changing result of the stressors and stress processes inside the soldier as he performs the combat-related mission.”<sup>1</sup> Combat stress is the result of a complex interaction of physical, mental, and spiritual stressors. These stressors affect warriors not only during combat, but after combat as well, resulting in post-combat stress.

### Combat Stressors

There are three major stressors a marine faces in combat: physical, mental, and spiritual stressors. The physical and mental stressors are the obvious stressors that are researched and investigated by medical science; however, spiritual stressors are often forgotten and frequently ignored. These three stressors often overlap, but are distinct and affect everyone who serves in combat.

Table 1. Physical Stressors in Combat

Physical Stressors	
Environmental	Physiological
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heat, cold, or wetness</li> <li>2. Vibration, noise, or blast</li> <li>3. Hypoxia (insufficient oxygen), fumes, or poisons</li> <li>4. Chemicals</li> <li>5. Directed-energy weapons/devices</li> <li>6. Ionizing radiation</li> <li>7. Infectious agents/diseases, skin irritants or corrosives, or physical work</li> <li>8. Bright light, darkness, haze, and obscuration</li> <li>9. Difficult or arduous terrain</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sleep deprivation</li> <li>2. Dehydration</li> <li>3. Malnutrition and poor hygiene</li> <li>4. Muscular and aerobic fatigue</li> <li>5. Impaired immune system</li> <li>6. Overuse or under-use of muscles or organ systems</li> <li>7. Illness or injury</li> </ol>

*Source:* United States Army, *FM 22-51: Leader’s Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994) 29, table 2-1.

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<sup>1</sup>United States Army, *FM 22-51: Leader’s Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994), 28.

### *Physical Stressors*

A physical stressor is one that directly affects the body. Environmental and physiological conditions determine the nature and intensity of physical stressors in combat. Physical fitness is essential in order to minimize this stressor. A warrior is far more capable of executing his mission if he begins the combat deployment in peak physical condition.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 illustrates the various physical stressors found in combat.

### *Mental Stressors*

Mental stressors are a natural consequence of the war environment. The chaos of battle is the most obvious mental stressor, but boredom also plays a role in the mental stress of warriors. There are long periods when combat engagements are not waged, but when the battle begins, there is confusion. Good communication can minimize this problem. Whenever possible, good leaders inform those under their command of all the relevant information available. If a leader fails to do so, this creates unnecessary mental stress when a battle begins, thus compromising the effectiveness of the unit during the fight. Poor communication creates unnecessary mental stress.<sup>3</sup> Table 2 illustrates the various mental stressors found in combat.

Table 2. Mental Stressors in Combat

Mental Stressors	
Cognitive	Emotional
1. Communication: too much or too little information, ambiguity, uncertainty, isolation time, pressure versus waiting	1. Fear and anxiety producing threats (injury, disease, pain, failure, loss, personal or mission failure)
2. Unpredictability	2. Grief-producing losses
3. Rules of engagement or difficult judgments	3. Resentment, anger, and rage
4. Organizational dynamics	4. Frustration, threat, loss, and guilt
5. Hard choices versus no choices	5. Boredom-producing inactivity
6. Recognition of impaired functioning	6. Conflicting motives (worries about home, divided loyalties)
	7. Interpersonal feelings

*Source:* United States Army, *FM 22-51: Leader's Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994) 29, table 2-1.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 28-30.

## *Spiritual Stressors*

Spiritual stressors are subtle and generate far less attention than physical and mental stressors; however, spiritual stressors are significant and life changing for those who serve in combat. The saying, “there are no atheists in foxholes” implies combatants experience a revival of personal faith. For many warriors this is true, but war can also create a crisis of faith causing individuals to question their faith and reject their belief in God.<sup>4</sup>

War is an intimate exposure to all kinds of evil. This exposure creates spiritual tension within the soul of a warrior. The question is raised, “If God is all powerful, then why does He allow such profound evil to prosper?” In the midst of war, soldiers and marines see their close companions injured and killed. Overcoming the loss of a friend can be overwhelming, but often times the loss is compounded by feelings of abandonment by God because it feels as though God failed to protect the one who was injured or killed. Events in war can seemingly indicate that God is not able or interested in protecting those who trust in Him. Feelings of betrayal by God in war can lead to a crisis of faith.<sup>5</sup> Table 3 illustrates the various spiritual stressors found in combat.

Table 3. Spiritual Stressors in Combat

Spiritual Stressors
1. Concerns about family
2. Questioning the purpose and meaning of life
3. Fear and anxiety (injury, disease, pain, loss, failure)
4. Feelings of betrayal by allies, leaders, society, and the media
5. Feelings of hopelessness
6. Grief
7. Resentment, anger, and rage
8. Forgiveness (self and others)
9. Survivor’s guilt
10. Shame for immoral and unethical actions
11. Loss of faith and trust in God
12. Unanswered prayer
13. Existence of evil

War causes tension within the soul that ultimately affects the warrior’s entire outlook on life. Many who volunteer to serve in the military do so with noble intentions,

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<sup>4</sup>Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash, eds., *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 28-29.

<sup>5</sup>Jonathon Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Maxwell MacMillan, 1994), 74-75.



but the reality of war causes the soldier to question the meaning of almost everything, including life itself.<sup>6</sup>

### Stages of Combat Adaptation

Combat is intrinsically challenging because there are so many stressors involved. Warriors quickly adapt to the physical and mental stressors of the combat environment, but adjusting to the stress of engaging the enemy in battle takes more time. There are three stages of combat adaptation, which are illustrated in figure 2.

#### *Novice Soldier*

The first time a soldier engages the enemy in combat is the first stage of adaptation. The novice soldier experiences some anxiety and worries about the unknown. During battle, the novice soldier struggles to perform tasks and when the engagement ends, he quickly feels relieved that he survived.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Experienced Soldier*

The experienced soldier is the second stage of adaptation. The experienced soldier has some anxiety about the next engagement, but is confident since he knows the risks and has survived other engagements. The experienced soldier calmly responds under fire and simply concentrates on job performance during the battle. Following combat, the experienced soldier experiences high levels of stress when recounting the risks endured during the battle.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Overstressed Soldier*

The final stage of adaptation is the overstressed soldier. Prior to combat, this soldier experiences high anxiety and dreads the risk involved. During an engagement, the overstressed soldier has extreme difficulty in task performance. Following the battle, the overstressed soldier experiences sustained anxiety and cannot stop thinking about the battle.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>7</sup>United States Army, 36.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 38.

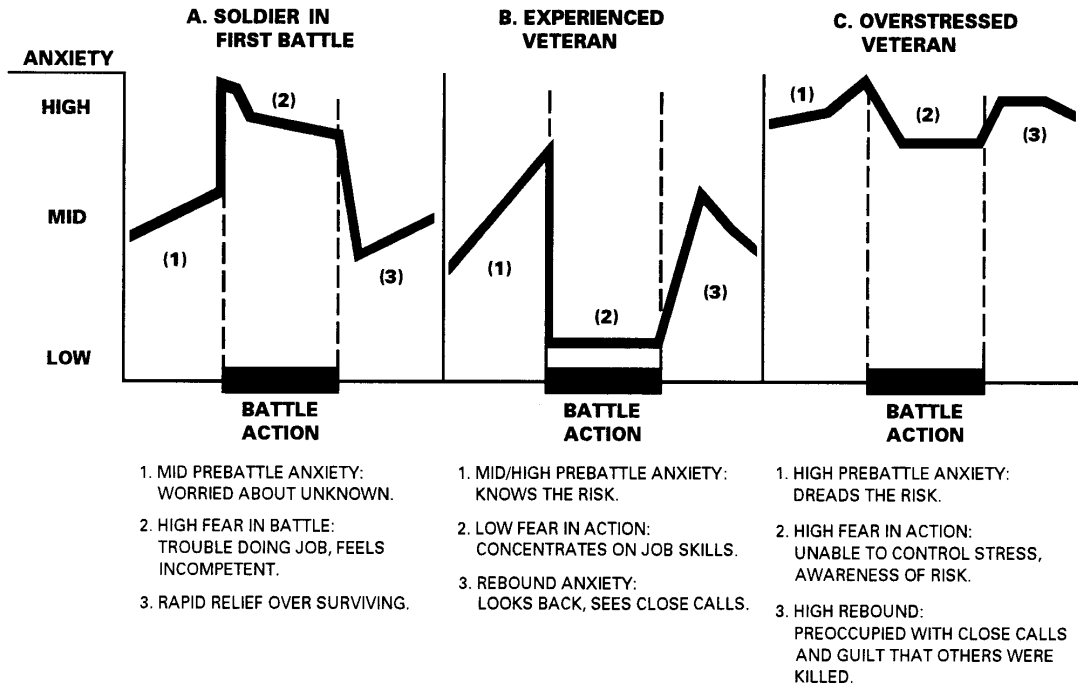


Fig. 2. Stages of Combat Adaptation. United States Army, *FM 22-51: Leader's Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994) 38, figure 2-2.

### Killing Response Stages

War is stressful and the warriors who bear the burden of combat endure countless moments of fear, anger, and anxiety that few civilians will ever understand. Those who have never served in combat may speculate that the greatest issue a soldier or marine faces in combat must be the fear of death or physical injury. But of all the physical or mental stressors of combat, the single most traumatic event that takes place in war is the act of killing. At first, this may seem difficult to believe because those who join the military, particularly the Army and the Marine Corps, know that they may be required to kill the enemy in defense of the nation. This statement is logical, but does not take into account the tremendous emotional toll that a warrior pays upon fulfilling his duty. In his authoritative work *On Killing*, Lt.Col. Dave Grossman explains the significance of the killing event in this way:

Looking another human being in the eye, making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form the single most basic, important, primal, and potentially traumatic occurrence of war. If we understand this, then we understand the magnitude of the horror of killing in combat.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Grossman, 31.

The traumatic significance of killing in war cannot be understated. To understand the trauma of killing, it is necessary to understand Grossman's five stages of a soldier's response to killing the enemy in combat.<sup>11</sup> These five stages are illustrated in figure 3.

### ***Stage 1: Concern about Killing***

Killing is an issue addressed from the very beginning of basic training because humanity has a natural instinct to resist killing another human being. To counter this instinct, soldiers receive countless hours of training preparing them for the necessary evil of killing the enemy in combat. This training conditions the soldier so that his natural response under pressure will be to kill the enemy; however, this training does not eliminate each person's need to address this difficult issue. The novice soldier is concerned about whether or not he will be able to perform during the heat of battle. The question remains in the soldier's mind; "Will I be able to kill in combat?" Soldiers cannot help but think about this, and until the day of combat comes, this question will remain unanswered.

### ***Stage 2: Killing Circumstance***

Soldiers instinctively react according to their training once a combat engagement ensues. Following the battle, the soldier who kills the enemy finds that his actions were instinctive reflexes, requiring almost no conscious thought. Those who kill in combat immediately enter the third stage of response. If a soldier finds he is unable to kill the enemy, his failure to do so is a traumatic experience that can actually lead to PTSD.

### ***Stage 3: Exhilaration from Killing***

A soldier will experience an increase in adrenaline immediately after the kill. The successful kill of the enemy produces an intense feeling of euphoria and excitement. The magnitude of this exhilaration is powerful and can even be addictive. Once the adrenaline is gone, satisfaction and the thrill of victory quickly evaporate and the soldier enters the fourth stage of response.

### ***Stage 4: Remorse and Nausea from Killing***

A soldier will experience profound remorse after killing someone. Nausea and vomiting are common physical reactions following the event. Intense remorse is a powerful feeling that can overwhelm a soldier when he realizes the magnitude of his actions. In his remorse, the soldier contemplates whom he may have killed. He ponders the thoughts of who this person was and what his future could have been. Thoughts of this kind may seem insignificant or irrelevant to those who never kill, but for the soldier

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 231-40.

who just killed someone, these thoughts cannot leave his mind. As a soldier beholds the result of his actions, the horror of killing another human being overwhelms him because he must live with the memory of this event for the rest of his life.

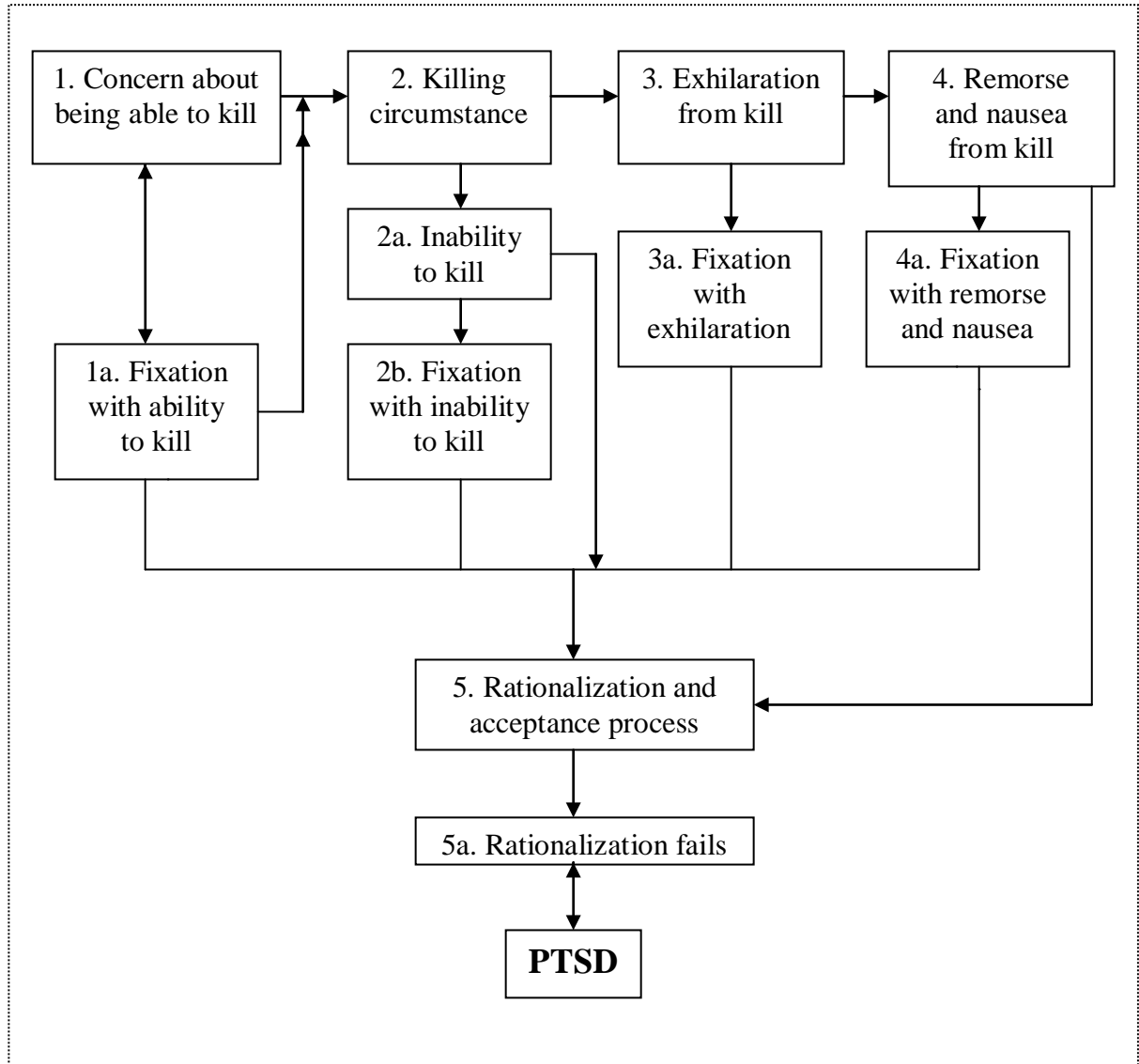


Fig. 3. The Killing Response Stages. *Source: Dave Grossman, On Killing* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995), 232.

### ***Stage 5: Rationalization and Acceptance Process***

The final stage of the killing response is the process of rationalization and acceptance. This stage can vary in duration, depending on the event. Some soldiers never really accept what they had to do while others find it easier to accept. If the soldier can

accept that he had no other choice but to kill, he may be able to accept the consequences of his actions. Unfortunately, some soldiers fail to rationalize and accept what they did in combat and become victims of PTSD.

## Post-Combat Stress Reactions

War is intrinsically dangerous. The soldier who wages war for his country must endure the physical and mental stressors of combat. The body physiologically adapts to these stressors, thus ensuring the survival of the individual. After thirty or more days in a hazardous environment, this physiological change becomes relatively permanent; therefore, these physiological changes affect the soldier even after his return home. In time, these changes may subside, but many warriors struggle with post-combat stress.

Combat stress is the natural reaction to the stressful environment of combat. Post-combat stress is the lingering effect war has upon warriors after their return home from war. Unfortunately, the safety and comfort of home do not immediately reverse the changes that a soldier experiences while serving in combat. There are four types of reactions commonly found among returning veterans, which are illustrated in table 4.<sup>12</sup>

### *Emotional Reactions*

The first emotional reaction an individual experiences upon his or her return to the United States after serving in combat is profound relief. This feeling of euphoria does not last long because the combat veteran remembers the war is still waging on. The feeling of relief often transforms into guilt. The service member may feel guilty for not suffering as much as others and for “not doing enough.” Many veterans struggle with disturbing dreams or intense moments of reliving the horrors of war. The returning veteran is often provoked to anger and is highly irritable. There is an underlying feeling of vulnerability that provokes the veteran to frustration, anger, and feelings of inadequacy. Returning warriors often feel alone and overwhelmed by all these emotions. The natural response is to deny these feelings because the veteran feels as though he is the only one going through these struggles. These emotional reactions are typical symptoms of post-combat stress among returning veterans.

### *Physical Reactions*

War is physically exhausting. Returning warriors are tired and need plenty of sleep. Unfortunately, those struggling with disturbing dreams and recurring nightmares have profound difficulty getting any rest. This significantly complicates the individual’s ability to recover from post-combat stress. An exhausted veteran does not easily overcome the challenges of readjusting to life after combat.

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<sup>12</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Common Reactions Following Combat* (Camp Pendleton, CA: Marine Corps Community Services, 2005), 2-4.

The body experiences significant physiological change in a combat zone. The warrior's senses are heightened, which increases his chances of survival. This heightened sensibility leads to exaggerated startle responses and even an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Some veterans struggle with headaches, nausea, upset stomach, and diarrhea. The human body eventually adjusts to the non-combat environment. Many of these symptoms will subside within the first couple of weeks. If these symptoms persist for longer than three months, the veteran needs to see a physician because post-combat stress may not be the only cause for these physical reactions.

Table 4. Common Reactions Following Combat

Emotional Reactions	Physical Reactions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initial euphoria, relief</li> <li>2. Guilt about surviving or not having suffered as much as others</li> <li>3. Anxiety, fear, guilt, worry</li> <li>4. Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, being overwhelmed</li> <li>5. Pervasive concern about loved ones</li> <li>6. Vulnerability</li> <li>7. Loss of sense of power, control, well being, self-confidence, trust</li> <li>8. Shame or anger over vulnerability</li> <li>9. Irritability, restlessness, super alertness, impatience, agitation</li> <li>10. Anger, blaming (anger at source, anger at those exempted, anger at those trying to help) or anger "for no reason at all"</li> <li>11. Frustration</li> <li>12. Cynicism, negativity</li> <li>13. Mood swings, emotional attacks</li> <li>14. Despair, grief, sadness</li> <li>15. Feelings of emptiness, loss, no hope, decreased trust of others</li> <li>16. Reawakening of past trauma or painful experiences</li> <li>17. Apathy, diminished interest in usual activities</li> <li>18. Feelings of isolation, estrangement, "no one else can understand"</li> <li>19. Denial or feelings of numbness</li> <li>20. "Flashbacks," intrusive memories of the event, illusions</li> <li>21. Recurrent dreams of the situation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vague body complaints</li> <li>2. Fatigue</li> <li>3. Sleep disturbances</li> <li>4. Pounding heart, fast or irregular heartbeat, increased blood pressure, sweating</li> <li>5. Trouble getting breath, irregular breathing</li> <li>6. Feeling of tightness in throat, stomach, chest</li> <li>7. Feeling a "lump in the throat"</li> <li>8. Chest pain</li> <li>9. Heavy feeling in arms or legs</li> <li>10. Numbness or tingling in parts of the body</li> <li>11. Lower back pain</li> <li>12. Soreness in muscles</li> <li>13. Feeling of weakness in parts of the body</li> <li>14. Hot or cold spells</li> <li>15. Faintness, dizziness</li> <li>16. Exaggerated startle response</li> <li>17. Trembling</li> <li>18. Headaches</li> <li>19. Nausea, upset stomach, diarrhea, constipation</li> <li>20. Changes in appetite or weight</li> <li>21. Increase in allergies, colds, or flu</li> <li>22. Menstrual changes</li> </ol>

Table 4 – *Continued*

Mental Reactions	Behavioral Reactions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poor concentration</li> <li>2. Mental confusion, slowness of thinking</li> <li>3. Forgetfulness</li> <li>4. Memory loss (complete or partial)</li> <li>5. Inability to make judgments and decisions</li> <li>6. Inability to appreciate importance or meaning of current events or information</li> <li>7. Poor judgment</li> <li>8. Loss of appropriate sense of reality (denial of reality, fantasies to counteract reality)</li> <li>9. Intrusive thoughts, memories, mental pictures of the event; “flashbacks”</li> <li>10. Preoccupation with the event</li> <li>11. Repetitive, obsessive thoughts</li> <li>12. Over-generalization, over-association with the event</li> <li>13. Loss of objectivity</li> <li>14. Rigidity</li> <li>15. Confusion regarding religious beliefs/value systems; breakdown of meaning and faith</li> <li>16. Self criticism over things done or not done during combat</li> <li>17. Awareness of own and loved ones’ mortality</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jumpiness</li> <li>2. Hyperactivity</li> <li>3. Workaholic</li> <li>4. Reckless behavior, accident proneness, apparent carelessness in tasks</li> <li>5. Outbursts of anger, arguments, or aggressiveness</li> <li>6. Difficulty returning to normal activity level</li> <li>7. Worried look, rigid posture, nervous actions</li> <li>8. Repetitive behaviors, compulsions</li> <li>9. Staring into space</li> <li>10. Withdrawal, social isolation, “distancing”</li> <li>11. Inability to express self verbally or in writing</li> <li>12. Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or food</li> <li>13. Avoidance of activities or places that arouse recollection of stressful event</li> <li>14. Family and relationship problems</li> <li>15. Disruption of work, school, social relationships and roles</li> <li>16. Excessive use of sick leave</li> <li>17. Sexual problems</li> </ol>

*Source:* United States Marine Corps, *Common Reactions Following Combat* (Camp Pendleton, CA: Marine Corps Community Services, 2005), 2-4.

***Mental Reactions***

Post-combat stress profoundly affects the way a veteran thinks. The events of the deployment preoccupy his mind, making it difficult to concentrate on anything else. The result is that the soldier is prone to forgetfulness, confusion, and poor judgment. The soldier is preoccupied with his experiences in combat, which leads to a loss of objectivity regarding his own actions, resulting in unfounded self-criticism. In an attempt to cope

with these troubling thoughts, some veterans will daydream, creating fantasies to help them avoid the painful truth of reality.

Many veterans experience a breakdown in their value system. Returning warriors are physically and emotionally exhausted from combat, which changes their perspective on life. The significant events of war are life changing and veterans find themselves questioning their values, particularly the meaning of life. After living day after day in combat, veterans are profoundly aware of how fragile life is, and they often worry about the safety of those they love.

Returning warriors will reassess their faith in God. Some veterans find their faith strengthened through the miraculous intervention of God during combat. In contrast, some veterans question whether there even is a God after experiencing the horror and injustice of war. Each veteran responds differently, but every returning warrior will reevaluate his faith.

### ***Behavioral Reactions***

The complex interaction of the emotional, physical, and mental reactions to post-combat stress will produce negative behavioral reactions among veterans. Upon their return from war, veterans are looking for relief from the stressful experiences of their combat deployment. Some veterans seek relief through aggressive and reckless behavior, while others will choose a less noticeable response and become workaholics, hoping that their busy work schedule will allow them to forget the painful memories of the past. Another common reaction among veterans is to socially withdraw from others, including family and close friends.

### Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-combat stress is an issue nearly every returning warrior must address. There are some veterans who have a far more profound problem than post-combat stress: combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is a difference between combat-related PTSD and combat stress.<sup>13</sup> PTSD is a medical disorder and only a trained psychologist or psychiatrist has the authority and expertise to determine if an individual is experiencing this disorder. In contrast, combat stress is not a medical disorder. It is the natural, physiological response to the circumstances of life in combat. Post-combat stress may appear similar to PTSD, but the symptoms may not be severe enough to meet the criteria of PTSD. To understand the distinction between PTSD and combat stress, it is necessary to examine the criteria psychologists use when making a determination if someone is experiencing PTSD.

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<sup>13</sup>Douglas Bey, author of *Wizard 6*, contends that the development of PTSD as a mental health disorder emerged as a means to undermine the Vietnam War. In the end, veterans of Vietnam who struggled with readjusting to life after combat bore the stigma of being diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Eric T. Dean, Jr., author of *Shook Over Hell*, agrees with Bey that the development of PTSD was influenced primarily by the politics of anti-war psychologists. Though these authors are in the minority, it is important to understand that not all psychologists believe PTSD is a legitimate mental health disorder.



The authoritative source psychologists consult when identifying a mental health disorder is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)*. Here is the description of PTSD found in *DSM-IV*:

The essential feature of posttraumatic stress disorder is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.<sup>14</sup>

This description covers a broad spectrum of potentially traumatic experiences, including events commonly experienced by those serving in combat. Not everyone exposed to an extremely stressful circumstance will experience PTSD, and certainly not every combat veteran should be diagnosed with PTSD. For an individual to be diagnosed with PTSD, he or she must meet six specific criteria.

### ***Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD***

Those diagnosed with PTSD must meet the six criteria listed in *DSM-IV*. The first diagnostic criterion is that the person must have been exposed to an intense situation that provoked profound feelings of horror, fear, and helplessness. The individual may personally experience or simply witness this traumatic event and it must involve a serious threat of death or physical injury.<sup>15</sup>

The second criterion is that the traumatic event must be reexperienced in at least one of the five following ways. First, intrusive distressing memories of the event recur in the person's mind. This includes not only thoughts of the event, but also perceptions and feelings that transpired during the event. Second, the person may experience recurring distressing dreams of the event. Third, the individual may act or feel as though the traumatic event were recurring. This reliving of the event includes flashback episodes, illusions, and hallucinations. Recurrences provoked by alcohol or drugs are considered legitimate recurrences. Fourth, exposure to anything symbolizing or resembling any aspect of the traumatic event may provoke intense psychological distress. Fifth, this distress provoked by these symbols may trigger the same physiological response that took place during the traumatic event itself.<sup>16</sup>

The third diagnostic criterion of PTSD is persistent avoidance of any stimuli associated with the traumatic event. This avoidance is characterized by a general numbing effect that must be demonstrated in at least three of the following seven ways. First, the individual makes a conscious effort to avoid anything related to the trauma including thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the event. Second, the person avoids

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<sup>14</sup>American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 424.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 428

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 428-29.

anything that reminds him of the trauma, particularly activities, places, or people associated with the traumatic event. Third, he is unable to recall significant aspects of the traumatic event. Fourth, the individual loses interest in activities that were considered important prior to the traumatic event. Fifth, the person begins feeling distant and detached from friends and family. Sixth, the individual is unable to experience the full range of emotion, particularly feelings of love. Seventh, the person loses all hope of the future and truly believes he will not live a normal life span.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth criterion of a PTSD diagnosis is persistent symptoms of increased arousal. This increased arousal must be demonstrated in at least two of the following five ways: difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, increased irritability including outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response.<sup>18</sup> The fifth criterion is that the disturbing symptoms described in the second, third, and fourth criteria must persist for at least one month. The sixth criterion is that the disturbing symptoms must cause significant interference in important areas of life, such as work or close relationships with friends and family.<sup>19</sup>

Psychologists diagnose a patient with PTSD if he or she meets all six criteria. Once a diagnosis is made, the psychologist will determine the extent and onset of the disorder. If the symptoms last less than three months, the diagnosis is acute PTSD. If the symptoms last more than three months, the diagnosis is chronic PTSD. If the symptoms do not begin until at least six months after the traumatic experience, the diagnosis is classified as delayed onset (acute or chronic) PTSD. These three terms clarify the nature of the patient's diagnosis.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Diagnostic Tools for PTSD***

There are three diagnostic tools used by psychologists to determine if an individual meets the criteria of PTSD. The first tool is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory – 2 (MMPI-2). MMPI-2 contains 567 true-false questions that are used to diagnose a variety of pathologies, including PTSD. The second tool is the Mississippi Scale for combat-related PTSD. This thirty-five item test uses a five-point Likert scale to determine if an individual is exhibiting the symptoms of PTSD. The third tool is the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS). CAPS is a structured clinical interview based upon the criteria for PTSD found in *DSM-IV*. Psychologists use these tests to aid them in the process of diagnosing individuals who appear to meet the diagnostic criteria of PTSD.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>21</sup>Christopher Frueh, "Documented Combat Exposure of U.S. Veterans Seeking Treatment for Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 186 (2005): 467-472.

## History of Combat Stress

Combat stress is a problem that is as old as war itself. Jonathon Shay introduced new research on the history of combat stress by studying the ancient works of Homer. In his two works, *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America* Shay demonstrates that combat stress was a major problem for warriors in the days of Homer. The reason why combat stress appears to be a new problem in modern warfare is explained by Lt.Col. Dave Grossman: “There is, indeed, a cover-up and a ‘conspiracy of silence,’ but it is a cultural conspiracy of forgetfulness, distortion, and lies that has been going on for thousands of years.”<sup>22</sup> In the past, society did not want to know the horror of war, and, in contrast to the present, those who fought in war were not willing to share their experiences. The twentieth century brought about a change in this way of thinking. Understanding the history of combat stress demonstrates that this is indeed a problem the United States has faced since the Civil War and must continue to address in the years to come.

### Civil War

The U.S. Civil War is considered the first modern war by many historians. Technological advances of the time allowed Civil War veterans to witness precision killing like no other war before it. Rifled muskets and improved artillery led to unprecedented casualties. The natural consequence of these developments took an emotional toll on the soldiers who served during the war. Combat stress reactions during the Civil War were common, but the cultural assumption was that these soldiers were cowards.<sup>23</sup>

Civil War doctors were surprised by the number of soldiers affected by combat stress. Doctors began diagnosing these soldiers with “nostalgia,” a seventeenth century “disease” found among battle weary Swiss soldiers who were homesick and unable to fight. As the war progressed, doctors identified a variety of symptoms that today would fit the description of combat stress: the blues, lonesome, disheartened, downhearted, discouraged, demoralized, nervous, played out, used up, anxious, worn down, worn out, depressed, rattled, dispirited, sad, melancholy, and badly blown.<sup>24</sup>

In the beginning of the war, doctors diagnosed combat stress as “nostalgia,” but soldiers were also diagnosed with “insanity” or “sunstroke.” By the end of the war, the most prominent diagnosis for combat stress was “irritable heart,” also known as “soldier’s heart.” J.M. DaCasta, a Civil War Army psychiatrist who created this diagnosis, observed that after soldiers served in combat, they suffered from shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, and rapid heartbeat. The medical assumption at the time was that combat somehow affected the soldier’s heart.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Grossman, 36.

<sup>23</sup>David H. Marlowe, *Psychological and Psychosocial Consequences of Combat and Deployment with Special Emphasis on the Gulf War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 17-22.

<sup>24</sup>Eric T. Dean, Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Posttraumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 115-16.

<sup>25</sup>Figley and Nash, 163-64.

## World War I

World War I escalated the horror of war with the widespread use of machine guns, precision artillery, and poison gas. Soldiers were exposed to unimaginable devastation, which resulted in an increase in combat stress reactions among frontline soldiers. Soldiers suffered from the following symptoms: vague anxiety, depression, startle reactions, an inability to concentrate, loss of memory, insomnia, nightmares, intense fear, increased heartbeat, panic attacks, uncontrollable shaking, inability to speak, hysterical blindness, amnesia, partial or total paralysis, and fits of hysteria.<sup>26</sup> Soldiers with these symptoms were diagnosed with “shell shock.” Early in the war, doctors adopted the medical theory that exploding artillery shells sent off invisible shock waves that caused these symptoms among soldiers. When soldiers not exposed to artillery fire experienced the same symptoms, doctors realized shell shock was a psychological problem caused by the stress of war.

Shell shock casualties impacted the British Army throughout the war. After the first year of combat, shell shock cases rapidly increased, so much so that by 1916, shell shock was the cause of nearly 40 percent of British casualties. By the end of the war, twenty army hospitals in Great Britain were dedicated to the treatment and recovery of over 80,000 soldiers diagnosed with shell shock.<sup>27</sup>

## World War II

“Battle fatigue” was the term employed by medical practitioners in World War II for combat stress. The symptoms of battle fatigue were similar to those diagnosed with soldier’s heart and shell shock in previous wars. Battle fatigue is an important term because it recognizes four contributing factors that lead to combat stress: sudden exposure, physical exposure, physical stressors, and home front issues.<sup>28</sup> Since shell shock was such a major problem in World War I, the U.S. military sought a solution to minimize this problem in World War II.

Prior to World War II, medical science believed that some individuals were more vulnerable to mental disorders than others. In response to this theory, the U.S. military required a psychological screening for everyone entering military service. This screening process rejected 1,600,000 potential recruits who were deemed psychologically unfit for duty.<sup>29</sup> Due to this screening process, military leaders were confident that psychological problems would no longer be a major problem.<sup>30</sup>

The opening campaigns of the war quickly proved that battle fatigue was going to be a major problem for the United States. In the battle of Guadalcanal, 40 percent of the evacuated casualties were diagnosed with battle fatigue.<sup>31</sup> The Northern Africa campaign

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<sup>26</sup>Dean, 30.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>28</sup>Figley and Nash, 164.

<sup>29</sup>Todd C. Helmus and Russell W. Glenn, *Steeling the Mind: Combat Stress Reactions and Their Implications for Urban Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), 13.

<sup>30</sup>Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 103-109.

<sup>31</sup>Marlowe, 49.

alone produced more than three times as many cases of battle fatigue than all of the shell shock cases for the U.S. in World War I.<sup>32</sup> In the later years of the war, marines and soldiers diagnosed with battle fatigue were leaving the Pacific theater faster than the military could provide replacements. During the Pacific campaign, the military evacuated the same number of casualties due to physical injuries as psychological injuries (a 1:1 ratio).<sup>33</sup> After the war, 60 percent of all inpatient hospitalizations at V.A. hospitals were due to psychological injury.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, combat stress had a significant impact on those who served in World War II.

### Korean War

There were far fewer cases of battle fatigue in the Korean War than in World War II. The psychiatric prescreening process that failed in World War II was abandoned; instead, new recruits were evaluated on a case-by-case basis. This new evaluation process proved to be more effective. In order to prevent battle fatigue, the Army implemented a troop rotation policy after the first year of the war. This policy ensured soldiers spent no more than nine months serving in combat. This rotation policy dramatically reduced the rate of battle fatigue cases to less than half of the rate experienced in World War II.<sup>35</sup>

### Vietnam War

Combat stress was a profound problem during the Vietnam War. Attempts were made to minimize the impact of battle fatigue, but these efforts actually made the problem worse. The rotation policy in the Korean War seemed to reduce battle fatigue casualties, so military planners believed that rotating soldiers individually would improve the morale of soldiers while maximizing the fighting ability of the unit. This plan seemed like a good idea, but actually made combat stress a greater problem because of the overwhelming absence of unit cohesion. This lack of cohesion created a hostile environment, and leadership was not trusted by the average soldier.<sup>36</sup>

The number of battle fatigue cases in Vietnam was about the same as those in the Korean War, but post-combat stress reactions began manifesting among veterans shortly after their return to the United States. Psychologists recognized this delayed reaction was unique, and the term “battle fatigue” was rejected. Without a universally accepted term in place, psychologists created various terms to describe this post-combat stress reaction: Vietnam Syndrome, Post-Vietnam Syndrome, Vietnam Veteran Syndrome, Re-Entry Syndrome, and Post-Viet Nam Psychiatric Syndrome. By 1980, all of these terms were

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<sup>32</sup>Peter G. Bourne, ed., *The Psychology and Physiology of Stress: With Reference to Special Studies of the Viet Nam War* (New York: Academic Press, 1969), xvi.

<sup>33</sup>United States Army, 13.

<sup>34</sup>Penny Coleman, *Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, and the Lessons of War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>35</sup>Bourne, xxii-xxiii.

<sup>36</sup>Dean, 37-41.

abandoned when the American Psychiatric Association officially recognized PTSD as a mental health disorder.<sup>37</sup>

The Vietnam War produced PTSD cases at an alarming rate for several reasons. First, soldiers experienced a loss of community because of the individual rotation policy. A soldier would leave his unit in the field and within two days, the soldier was back in the United States. In all previous wars, soldiers returned with their comrades and together they could cope with their war experiences. In contrast, Vietnam veterans returned alone. Second, Vietnam veterans were rejected by society. Having already lost the community of their fellow soldiers, returning veterans needed to be accepted and honored by society, but instead Vietnam veterans were systematically harassed and ridiculed by anti-war protesters. Already alone, Vietnam veterans quietly suffered as Americans rejected and dishonored them. Vietnam veterans experienced unimaginable rejection, which in the end produced an unprecedented number of psychological casualties. Thirty percent of Vietnam veterans were diagnosed with PTSD, and the National Vietnam Veteran's Readjustment Study indicated that ten years after the war, 15 percent of Vietnam veterans were still receiving treatment for PTSD.<sup>38</sup>

## Gulf War

*Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm* was a short war, lasting only seven months with major ground combat operations lasting less than a week. Since the war was short, many problems that arose during previous wars did not impact those who served in the Gulf War. Following Vietnam, military psychology developed a comprehensive approach to handle combat stress and minimize the number of PTSD casualties. Because of these changes, many units conducted small-group debriefings before leaving the Persian Gulf region. These debriefings identified those who were struggling with combat stress and appropriate care was provided for them before leaving the region.<sup>39</sup> The military learned many lessons from Vietnam and as a result, only 5-15 percent of Gulf War veterans were diagnosed with PTSD.<sup>40</sup>

## Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom

The military today has built upon the lessons learned from previous wars. The military emphasizes the importance of mental health before, during, and after combat deployments. Prior to deployment, service members receive instruction on the risks and stressors that trigger combat stress. During a combat deployment, leaders watch for warning signs that indicate someone may be experiencing combat stress. Prior to redeploying back to the United States, chaplains conduct "Warrior Transition" classes to

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>38</sup>Jones and Wessely, 133-34.

<sup>39</sup>Marlowe, 149-50.

<sup>40</sup>Kenneth C. Hyams, Stephen Wignall, and Robert Rosewell, "War Syndromes and Their Evaluation: From the U.S. Civil War to the Persian Gulf War," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 125, no. 5 (1 September 1996): 401-402.

prepare combat veterans for adjustment difficulties that commonly occur following combat. The medical officer oversees a medical assessment that everyone receives prior to leaving the combat zone. If someone exhibits signs of combat stress, the individual is immediately seen by a psychologist. Three months after returning from combat, everyone is required to take a post-deployment screening test, which is designed to identify those who may have symptoms of delayed onset PTSD. The military has developed an impressive structure that provides immediate care for those experiencing combat stress. Recent studies indicate that 10-20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are diagnosed with PTSD, which is a vast improvement from the Vietnam War.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Figley and Nash, 165-66.



## Chaplain Responsibilities in Combat Stress Control

Post-combat stress is a growing problem in the military. As combat deployments continue in Iraq and Afghanistan, the number of military service members who struggle with combat stress and combat-related PTSD will increase. The medical community must identify and aid those who are suffering from combat-related PTSD because this is a medical issue; but for those struggling with combat stress, every leader in the military is tasked with mitigating this problem, including chaplains.

Chaplains are key leaders in the effort to help those struggling with combat stress. By the very nature of their position, chaplains have equal access to everyone in their assigned unit from the lowest ranking private to the commanding officer. This allows chaplains to support anyone in need. In combat, the chaplain's role is to encourage everyone in his unit and be able to identify and aid those who are struggling with personal issues. If the chaplain discovers someone is struggling with combat stress, his duty is to determine if the service member requires further examination by a psychologist. If the individual in question does not, then the chaplain is to support, encourage, and counsel the individual so that the unit can maintain combat readiness. Following combat, the chaplain continues to help those who struggle with problems, including post-combat stress. Table 5 illustrates the responsibilities the military places upon chaplains in addressing combat stress.

Table 5. Chaplain Responsibilities for Combat Stress

Chaplain Responsibilities
1. Provide religious support and the ministry of presence (being with the soldiers) to all soldiers in the unit.
2. Advise the command on spiritual, moral, and morale issues.
3. Help soldiers to be spiritually strong to face the moral and ethical dilemmas and paradoxes of human combat.
4. Encourage soldiers to share their feelings after combat.
5. Encourage continued performance of duty.
6. Recognize stress symptoms, provide immediate solace, and recommend further evaluation and treatment when appropriate.
7. Know and provide information to unit leaders on combat stress control team locations and capabilities.
8. Provide assistance by integrating recovered stress casualties back into their units.
9. Minister to the sick and dying.
10. Assist survivors with grief and bereavement.

Source: United States Army, *FM 22-51: Leader's Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1994) 24, table 1-5.



## Testimonies

The Word of God is powerful and changes the lives of those who live by faith. The following testimonies are from four combat veterans. All four of them are sergeants in the Marine Corps who were born again believers before they entered military service. Following their combat tours, each of them faced different struggles with post-combat stress, but found answers for their struggles through this Bible study.

The first testimony is from a Marine who served two tours in Iraq. Prior to the Bible study, he had struggled with anxiety attacks that were caused by some of his experiences in combat. At the beginning of the Bible study, he was taking medication to help him sleep at night because of his anxiety. He not only struggled with anxiety, but he also had trouble controlling his anger. He said that he struggled with feelings of shame for what he had seen and experienced in Iraq. After his two tours in Iraq, he searched the Bible for answers on how to handle his struggle with post-combat stress, but he only found verses to help him with his anger problem. The Marine stated that this Bible study helped him understand why he struggled so much with anxiety and shame, but that the Bible study also helped him overcome these issues. He believes this Bible study is the primary reason why he had only one anxiety attack during the three months of the Bible study, when prior to the Bible study, he had three or four anxiety attacks a month.

The second testimony is from a Marine who served three tours in Iraq. Prior to the Bible study, he struggled with feeling vulnerable without a weapon and found it profoundly difficult to go anywhere in town without feeling as though someone was going to attack him. He also struggled with feelings of shame because of his experiences in Iraq. During one of his tours in Iraq, one of his friends was killed as a direct result of a poor leadership decision. Because of this experience, he has found it very difficult to trust anyone in a position of authority. He struggled with feelings of betrayal after his third tour in Iraq because his wife cheated on him while he was deployed. When he returned from Iraq, she was not there for the welcome home celebration and the next day he was served divorce papers. He said that if it were not for his faith in God, he would not be able to handle any of these experiences. Though he still struggles sometimes with feelings of anxiety, this Bible study has helped him feel less anxious than he felt in the past. He also believes the Bible study helped him understand how to cope with the feelings of betrayal that he has toward his ex-wife and the Marine Corps.

The third testimony is from a Marine who served two tours in Iraq. Prior to the Bible study, he struggled with feelings of loneliness and depression. At one point, he had actually contemplated suicide because he was so discouraged. The cause of his depression was his fear that he had witnessed the wrongful death of Iraqi civilians. During his second tour in Iraq, his battalion was given an operational order to attack a village that was known for harboring insurgents. The villagers were given advanced notice to evacuate the village, but when the battalion made its attack on the village, the Marines found it very difficult to distinguish the insurgents from the civilians. The operation was morally confusing and caused him to question whether or not this combat engagement was conducted in an ethical manner. To this day, he feels haunted by the dead bodies of unarmed Iraqi men that he saw during this combat operation. He felt that God could not forgive him for his role in what appeared to be the killing of unarmed civilians. No one else in his company expressed any concern regarding the morality of

this operation, which caused him to feel isolated from his peers. He found the group discussions in this Bible study helpful because it helped him see that he was not the only Christian that has struggled with post-combat stress. The Bible study helped him confront the feelings of shame and guilt that have plagued him over the past two years. Though he knows this will continue to be a struggle in the days ahead, he believes this Bible study has given him biblical answers that he never had before. As a result, he has a renewed confidence that his faith in God will help him overcome his struggle with post-combat stress.

The fourth testimony is from a Marine who served one tour in Iraq. Prior to the Bible study, he struggled with post-combat stress because his battalion fought in *Operation Phantom Fury*, the November 2004 battle of Fallujah. During this operation, he was a squad leader in charge of twelve Marines and their assignment was to clear buildings of insurgents. He fought day after day for over a month in the close confines of the city. The five weeks of fighting in this battle changed his life forever. He saw thirteen Marines killed in his company, including two of his closest friends. One of his greatest challenges during this battle was watching one of his closest friends get killed as his squad entered an insurgent stronghold. Since he was the squad leader, he had to continue directing fire until the building was secure. Once the building was under their control, he carried the dead body of his friend to the casualty evacuation point. Many of his experiences in Fallujah were traumatic, but there was never an opportunity to grieve or even think about these events because of the fast-paced tempo of combat operations. He said that when the city of Fallujah was finally taken from the insurgents, he realized it was a miracle that he was even alive. As the pace of operations slowed down during the rest of the deployment, he thought often about how God answered his prayers by protecting him from the enemy. At the same time, he could not understand why God allowed such evil people to exist. The more he thought about the existence of evil in the world, the more he began questioning his faith. He tried to attend chapel, but he felt that the sermons were not addressing the questions he was struggling to answer. When he returned from Iraq, he quit going to church and this is when he felt that he had abandoned his faith. Six months later, his wife convinced him to attend church again. His pastor helped him restore his faith in God, but he still struggled with anger, bitterness, and the existence of evil. This Bible study helped him understand why God allows evil to exist and why he was so angry and bitter. During the battle of Fallujah, he felt betrayed by two of the officers in his battalion and as a result of their decisions, his friends died in combat. He was angry and would not forgive these officers for the decisions they had made. Because of this Bible study, he was finally able to forgive these men and come to terms with what he had experienced in Iraq. As a result of this Bible study, he was finally able to let go of his bitterness and experience peace with God.

## **Summary**

Post-combat stress is a major problem in the military today. Every veteran experiences some degree of combat stress during combat and following combat as well. History substantiates this problem and during this time of war, combat veterans need ministers of the Gospel to address the spiritual elements of this issue. As ministers biblically address the challenges of post-combat stress, faith in God will enable veterans to experience the healing and renewal that can only come through the Holy Spirit working through the power of God's Word.

## Lesson 1: Introduction to Combat Stress

Psalm 55 is an important passage of Scripture that helps warriors understand their struggle with combat stress. This passage describes emotions that every warrior experiences during and after war. Many veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan struggle with these same experiences. God can help Christian veterans handle this issue just as He did with David. In this psalm, David describes six combat stressors and six combat stress reactions, which are illustrated in the table below.

Combat Stress in Psalm 55	
Combat Stressors	Combat Stress Reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Stressors (Physiological)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless – v. 2</li> </ul> </li> <li>Mental Stressors (Cognitive)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure – v. 3</li> </ul> </li> <li>Mental Stressors (Emotional)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terror – v. 4</li> <li>• Fear – v. 5</li> </ul> </li> <li>Spiritual Stressors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betrayal – v. 13</li> <li>• Anger toward injustice – v. 15</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Reactions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless – v. 2</li> <li>• Trembling – v. 5</li> </ul> </li> <li>Mental Reactions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distracted – v. 2</li> </ul> </li> <li>Emotional Reactions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety – v. 4</li> <li>• Overwhelmed – v.5</li> <li>• Desire to Escape – vv. 6-8</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### *Context*

The most likely timeframe in which David wrote Psalm 55 was during the days of Absalom’s rebellion. Though most commentators agree with this assessment, one notable exception is John Calvin. He was persuaded to believe this psalm fit best within the context of King Saul’s persecution of David because of his vivid descriptions of the enemy. Though there were many times in David’s life that he experienced the dangers of war, the context of this psalm fits best within the context of 2 Samuel 15-17, when David’s kingdom was overthrown by his son Absalom. During this uprising, David was betrayed by his most trusted advisor Ahithophel.

Psalm 55 is the climax in a short series of betrayal psalms. The progression of betrayal in David’s life moves from a foreign enemy, to his own countrymen, and finally to a personal friend. In Psalm 52, David is betrayed by Doeg the Edomite during the reign of King Saul. Psalm 54 describes the betrayal of David by his own people in Ziph. The climax of the betrayal psalms is Psalm 55 where David is betrayed by his trusted advisor and friend, Ahithophel.

## *Commentary*

Psalm 55 is an individual lament written by David during the uprising of Absalom. David was betrayed not only by his son, but also by his trusted advisor Ahithophel. A commentary on this passage to explain the historical-grammatical meaning of this passage will provide support for the position that this psalm can be properly applied to the contemporary issue of combat stress.

### Invocation of God (vv. 1-2a)

- 1 Give ear to my prayer, O God;  
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.
- 2 Give heed to me and answer me;

Psalm 55 begins with a general introductory petition to God. The request for God to give ear to his prayer comes from *azan*, which carries the idea of listening with great intensity. This intensity is compared to the sharpness of a pointed weapon. The intensity of this request is enhanced by the imperative mood. David is begging God to carefully listen to every word of his request and to give careful attention to every detail. The word David used for prayer is *tephillah*, which means ‘intercession’ or ‘deprecation’. David’s prayer is an act of humility. He realizes that he has no ability to alter his circumstances; therefore, David humbly requests the intervention of God on his behalf. The phrase, “do not hide Yourself,” is an allusion to the law that prohibits willfully withholding aid to those in need (Deut. 22:1-4). David is pleading for God to not withhold from him. God appointed David as king, yet the kingdom was divided after the uprising of his son Absalom. God’s sovereignty was at stake if His will truly was for David to remain the king of Israel. David desperately needed the intervention of God. ‘Give heed’ is the translation of *qashab*. This imperative means ‘to attend to one who is speaking’. Once again, David emphasizes his desire for God to listen to his request. The consistent use of the imperative in the beginning of this psalm demonstrates David’s desperation for God’s intervention. Essentially, David is intensely begging for God to hear his request which is emphasized in the opening verses of this psalm with his fourfold appeal to God: “give ear . . . do not hide yourself . . . give heed . . . answer me.”

### The Psalmist’s Distress (vv. 2b-8)

- 2b I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted,
- 3 Because of the voice of the enemy,  
Because of the pressure of the wicked;  
For they bring down trouble upon me  
And in anger they bear a grudge against me.
- 4 My heart is in anguish within me,  
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
- 5 Fear and trembling come upon me,  
And horror has overwhelmed me.

- 6 I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest.”
- 7 “Behold, I would wander far away,  
I would lodge in the wilderness.”
- 8 “I would hasten to my place of refuge  
From the stormy wind and tempest.”

David describes the emotional turmoil his enemy has brought upon him in vv. 2b-8. The language of this passage is dramatic and vividly describes the unbearable anguish he is enduring. In v. 2 David is distraught. To express this feeling, he uses the word *ruwd*, which scholars have difficulty translating. The NASB translates this as “restless,” because scholars attribute the meaning of this word to an Arabic root, which can also mean ‘rove to and fro’. David is restless and battle weary. His thoughts wander to and fro because of the anxiety of being dethroned and thrust into a civil war with his own son.

In v. 3 David explains to God that he is distracted in his prayer because he is oppressed by the enemy. The word *aqah* is difficult to translate because this is the only time it appears in the Massoretic Text. The Arabic root of this word conveys the meaning of ‘pressing or oppressing’, so David finds himself pressured and oppressed by the wicked. Not only do the wicked oppress David, but they also sin against him in anger, bringing great trouble upon him. The NASB translates *satam* as “bear a grudge.” This can also be translated as ‘hate’, with the nuance of one who lays a trap or snare. David is in emotional turmoil, so he cries out to God for deliverance from a vindictive enemy that plans his demise.

In v. 4 David says that his “heart is in anguish.” The word for anguish is *chuwl*, which is an imperfect Qal, and in this tense conveys the idea of ‘one who is twisting, writhing, or whirling about in agony’. The use of this word profoundly illustrates the overwhelming effect David’s enemy has had on him. The literal translation, “terrors of death have fallen upon me,” dramatically describes the impact of David’s turmoil. The physical and emotional condition that David describes in v. 4 is a typical combat stress reaction.

David admits in v. 5 that he is overwhelmed by fear. The word for fear, *yirah*, conveys the idea of ‘fearing one who is awesome or terrifying’. David is an experienced warrior; nonetheless, Absalom’s civil uprising strikes great fear in David’s heart. His physical response to this overwhelming emotion is trembling. This response is reiterated by the phrase, “horror has overwhelmed me.” The word for horror, *pallatsuwth*, can also be translated as ‘shuddering’. In other words, David is overwhelmed by shuddering, which is a typical physical response to combat stress.

David expresses his desire to escape his circumstances in vv. 6-8. The desire to escape is also a typical reaction to combat stress. In his prayer to God, David uses three metaphors to explain his desire to escape his situation of hardship. The first metaphor is in v. 6 where he wishes he could have “wings like a dove.” It is interesting that of all the animals in God’s kingdom, he wishes to be a dove, which in Hebrew is *yownah*, a peaceful creature that was often used as a term of endearment. By using this symbol, David clearly implies that he no longer wants to fight. He longs for peace and for the war to end. He wishes to fly away to a place of rest as indicated by the word *shakan*.

The second metaphor is in v. 7 where David expresses his desire to wander in the wilderness. The first phrase of this verse literally means, ‘I will make remote to wander’. David would rather live the rest of his days in the harsh environment of the wilderness, than to continue waging war. David would rather forfeit the wealth and comfort he enjoys as a king than to continue enduring this emotional agony. He would much rather be far away, as it says in v. 7. “Far away” is translated from *rachaq*, meaning ‘to exhibit distance, to be gone far away, or to remove’. David eloquently expresses his deep desire to be removed from this situation. The second phrase of v. 7 literally means ‘bivouac in the wilderness’. David longs to be in a solitary place that is secure. He is battle weary and would rather live in peace in the wilderness than continue waging war.

David’s third metaphor expresses his intense desire to escape. In v. 8 he compares the wrath of his enemy to a raging storm. The image of a storm illustrates David’s need for deliverance and that he is completely overwhelmed, needing a place of refuge. David goes to the Lord for shelter, but he cannot wait long for fear of his enemy’s wrath. He chooses the word *chuwsh* to express the immediacy of his need, an onomatopoeic word that adds poetic emphasis to his urgent desire for God to hasten his escape from this perilous circumstance.

#### Plea for Judgment on the Enemy (vv. 9-11)

- 9 Confuse, O Lord, divide their tongues,  
For I have seen violence and strife in the city.  
10 Day and night they go around her upon her walls,  
And iniquity and mischief are in her midst.  
11 Destruction is in her midst;  
Oppression and deceit do not depart from her streets.

In the previous passage, David expressed his yearning for God to hear his prayer and he poured out his emotional turmoil to the Lord. In this passage, he is calling upon God’s justice. Knowing that God is just, David asks God to intervene in his life. In v. 9 David asks God to confuse his enemies by dividing their tongues, which is an allusion to the tower of Babel. David calls for God’s intervention because there is an uprising in the city to overthrow him as king. David describes this uprising as an act of *chamac*, meaning ‘violence, wrong, cruelty, or injustice’. This uprising was a cruel act of injustice, for God was the one who ordained David as king. David calls upon God’s justice to *bala*, which is an imperative verb meaning ‘to destroy, swallow up, or engulf’. This verb conjures up images of the earth consuming Korah when he rose up against Moses, God’s chosen leader.

David describes the nature of this uprising in vv. 10-11. The city is no longer guarded by watchmen, but instead the city is patrolled day and night by iniquity and mischief. The word translated, “go around” comes from *cabab*, which means ‘to encompass, to surround, to envelop, to march around, or to go about’. David uses powerful language to express his anxiety that Jerusalem is enveloped by evil, and consumed by sin as he says, “iniquity and mischief are in her midst.” David is truly sorrowful that the city of God that was once a place of worship is consumed by evil. In v.



11 he declares that Jerusalem is consumed by wickedness. The city is no longer ruled by justice. Instead, the city is ruled by *tok*, which means ‘oppression or violence’. These wicked men also rule the city by *mirmah*, which means ‘deceit or fraud’. David cries out in despair to the Lord because Jerusalem has been overrun by oppressive and violent men who strive to deceive the people of God.

#### The Faithless Friend (vv. 12-14)

- 12 For it is not an enemy who reproaches me,  
Then I could bear it;  
Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me,  
Then I could hide myself from him.
- 13 But it is you, a man my equal,  
My companion and my familiar friend;
- 14 We who had sweet fellowship together  
Walked in the house of God in the throng.

David begins revealing whom his adversary is in v. 12. The one who reproaches him is not his enemy. The word for reproach in this verse is *charaph*, which means ‘to reproach, defy, or taunt’. David is taunted by an adversary that is not even his enemy. He could bear this reproach if it was brought on by one who hated him, but instead his adversary is his friend. This former friend betrays their friendship as well as David’s authority as the king of Israel. David describes this betrayal with the word *gadal*, which means ‘to magnify, to do great things, or to make great’. His adversary magnifies himself at the expense of Israel’s king and David is not able to hide himself, because his adversary was once his most trusted advisory.

David explains in v. 13 that his new adversary is his “equal.” This is translated from *erek*, which means ‘set in a row or pile’. This is an interesting choice of words because *erek* invokes images of the showbread in Exodus 40. David’s relationship with his adversary was no different from the relationship found among the showbread. Each loaf of the showbread was always treated equally. This is an interesting choice of words because there are few people that could be considered equal to a king. This equal is his *alluwph*, meaning that he is David’s familiar, intimate friend. This friend is one he shared sweet *cowd* with, which means ‘secret or intimate counsel’. The NASB translates this as “fellowship,” because of the spiritual nature of this friendship. Prior to this betrayal, they once walked together in the house of God. This fellowship was publicly known, for their worship was done in the midst of the throng. The intimacy of their friendship makes this betrayal all the more hurtful.

#### Renewed Call for Judgment (v. 15)

- 15 Let death come deceitfully upon them;  
Let them go down alive to Sheol,  
For evil is in their dwelling, in their midst.



David calls upon God to deliver divine retribution upon his adversary in v. 15. David was betrayed by deceit and prayed that death would come upon his adversary in the same manner. Here deceit conveys the idea of death coming by surprise. Using the word *chay*, David expresses his desire for a quick and immediate end for his adversaries. This request is for God to consume them alive, just as he did with Korah's rebellion. David appeals to God for swift justice because his adversary is consumed by evil.

#### Statement of Confidence (vv. 16-19)

- 16 As for me, I shall call upon God,  
And the LORD will save me.  
17 Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur,  
And He will hear my voice.  
18 He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me,  
For they are many who strive with me.  
19 God will hear and answer them –  
Even the one who sits enthroned from of old – Selah.  
With whom there is no change,  
And who do not fear God.

In this passage, David shifts away from his prayer of complaint to a prayer of trust and hope. In v. 16 David emphatically states his trust in God: "I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me." 'Call' is translated from *qara*, which is an onomatopoeic word that poetically emphasizes his proclamation. An interesting note on David's request is his shift from *elohiym* to *Yehovah*. David's willingness to invoke the name of God in this prayer demonstrates the personal nature of his relationship with God.

David trusts God without any reservations. His trust in God is not a solitary moment; but rather, he communes with God all day long. In v. 17 David states that he prays in the evening, in the morning, and at noon. This phrase is not intended to imply that David only prays three times a day; instead, this phrase conjures up images of the Hebrew day. The force of this phrase poetically expresses the continuous nature of David's prayers. The content of this prayer is a reflection of David's heart. The NASB literally translates *siyach* and *hamah*, meaning that 'he will complain and murmur' to God. Since David has an intimate relationship with God, he feels safe revealing to Him his innermost feelings of anger, resentment, and frustration.

David clings to the promise of redemption as he says in v. 18, "He will redeem my soul in peace." Redeem is the translation of *padah*, which means 'to ransom, redeem, rescue, or deliver'. David recognizes his plight and his profound need for the deliverance of God from the battle that is waged against him. Though he is in the midst of war, David requests for *shalowm*, which means 'peace, safety, completeness, or wholeness'. This is not simply a ceasefire that David desires; he longs for true peace from the physical war as well as the emotional war waging in his soul. David longs for peace because he knows the war will not end any time soon. The final phrase "they are many who strive with me" can be misunderstood in English. This phrase reinforces the desperate odds that David faces, not that David has many allies.

The language in v. 19 is awkward, and commentators find it challenging to interpret. The first phrase, “God will hear and answer them,” is translated properly by the NASB. In English translations, the word *anah* is translated in two different ways. Some versions exchange ‘afflict’ for ‘answer’, but ‘answer’ is the best translation of the word *anah*. The phrase *yashab qedem* that is translated as “the one who sits enthroned from of old” expresses David’s understanding of God’s eternal, sovereign authority. The rest of the verse conveys David’s frustration that the enemy does not intend to change and does not fear or respect God. This frustration continues in vv. 20-21.

#### Reprise: The Faithless Friend (20-21)

- 20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him;  
He has violated his covenant.
- 21 His speech was smoother than butter,  
But his heart was war;  
His words were softer than oil,  
Yet they were drawn swords.

David did not provoke this war against his friend. They were at peace when his friend betrayed him, but he *shalach*, which means that he ‘stretched forth his hands against him’. The trusted friendship they once had was broken. The word *chalal* is translated in the NASB as “violated,” but can also be translated as ‘profaned or dishonored’. This is powerful language to describe this intimate betrayal.

This passage closes with David’s description of his adversary’s deceptive speech. The NASB literally translates the phrase, “his speech was smoother than butter,” which is figurative language for flattery. While David was flattered by his friend, his friend schemed in his *leb*, which is translated as “heart,” but can also mean ‘inner man, mind, or conscience’. David’s adversary quietly schemed all along to betray him; his words were “softer than oil,” yet they were *pethikhah*, meaning ‘drawn swords’. David’s faithful advisor betrayed him and became his adversary.

#### Confidant Trust in God (vv. 22-23)

- 22 Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;  
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.
- 23 But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction;  
Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half of their days.  
But I will trust in You.

In the midst of unbelievable hardship, David realizes there is only one who understands his turmoil. God is his only source of hope or strength. Though his burden was great, David knew he must “cast his burden upon the LORD.” The word for cast is *shalak*, which is an imperative meaning ‘to throw, cast, throw away, cast off, shed, or cast down’. “Burden” is from *yehab*, which means ‘burden’ or ‘the lot one is given’. The

message David is expressing is that regardless of his lot in life and the burden he bears, it is imperative that he cast off this burden and throw it away because God will bear it for him. Though his circumstances were difficult, he knew that God was his source of strength and that God was able to sustain him through any hardship. David clung to the promise that the righteous are never 'shaken', nor will they 'totter or slip', as this is the meaning of *mowt*.

David takes comfort knowing that God will bring justice upon the unrighteous. The pit of destruction that David refers to in the phrase *ber shachath* is an allusion to the pits used to snare wild animals. This allusion exemplifies the perspective David holds of both his adversary as well as his God who will deliver him. The statement, "men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days," reinforces David's firm hope that God will indeed execute judgment on his adversary. David concludes this psalm with a statement of his faith using the word *batach*. This word literally means that David is confident, secure, and bold in trusting God. There is no greater confidence than that which David places in God.

### Combat Stressors

David describes in Psalm 55 his experience with four different combat stressors. The first combat stressor is found in v. 2. He is restless and unable to sleep because of his experience. This physiological stressor affects nearly everyone who participates in war. David then described a second stressor in v. 3, which was his experience with cognitive mental stress. David felt immense pressure from his enemy, so much so that even the voice of the enemy caused him duress. Third, David also experienced emotional mental stress. In v. 4 he is overwhelmed by anguish within his heart. David is stressed by the certainty of death. He goes on to explain in v. 5 that he is fearful. This is a profound admission, particularly for one who is both a warrior and a king; nonetheless, combat stress affects everyone, regardless of rank or position. Fourth, David experienced the spiritual stressors of combat. He describes his feelings of betrayal in v. 13. Betrayal is an intimate wound that has a profound effect upon its victim, and David was no different. As a result, David experienced intense anger toward this injustice (v. 15).

### Combat Stress Reactions

There are three different types of combat stress reactions found in Psalm 55. First, David suffered the physical reactions of combat stress. In v. 2 he describes his restless state of being. Those who engage in combat experience an increase in the sensitivity of their five senses. God created humanity in this manner in order to ensure survival, but an unfortunate side effect is the inability to rest. David also experienced intense fear that actually led to trembling (v. 5). Second, David experienced the mental reactions of combat stress. He found himself distracted in v. 2. Combat is physically demanding and depletes the body of so much energy that it can be difficult to remain focused, and this was exactly what David was experiencing at this time in his life. Third, David suffered from the emotional reactions of combat stress. He struggled with anxiety in v. 4. Then in

v. 5 David admits that he is overwhelmed. Finally, in vv. 6-8 he reveals his intense desire to escape this hardship.

### Conclusion

David experienced the stressors of combat and endured the physical, mental, and emotional reactions of combat stress. Though he was overwhelmed by his circumstances, he knew the solution for his dilemma: faith in God. David said in v. 16, “As for me, I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me.” David realized God could help him through every situation, including combat. His faith gave him confidence that God was able to save him and sustain him, as David declared in v. 22, “Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Does it surprise you that David experienced combat stress?
2. What are some of the obstacles a veteran must overcome in order to depend upon God as David did?
3. In light of today’s war, how does Psalm 55 apply to those returning from combat?
4. How did God sustain you during your combat tour?

### Memory Verse

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

## Lesson 2: Faith and Trust in God

Scripture: Hebrews 10:35-11:2

35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. (Habakkuk 2:3)

38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. (Habakkuk 2:4)

39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

Our lives are governed by the core values and belief systems that we hold. This mental framework serves as a grid in which we filter every experience of life. The importance of faith cannot be understated because faith changes the way we see the world. For the believer, every experience of life is viewed with new and different meaning because of our faith in God.

### Faith Defined

Only once in the Hebrew Old Testament does the word “faith” appear as a noun. In Habakkuk 2:4, *emunah* is translated as “faith,” although this word is translated elsewhere in the Old Testament as “faithfulness.”

The Hebrews viewed faith as an activity as can be seen in the words used for faith in the Old Testament. The most common word used for “faith” in the Old Testament is *am’an*. In the Qal tense, it means “to nourish.” In the Niphal tense, it means “to be firm, established, regard as true, or believe.” When used with different prepositions, *am’an* means “confident resting upon someone or something” or “giving assent to a testimony.”

The second Hebrew verb for “faith” is *batach*. This word carries the meaning “to lean upon or to confide in.” This verb emphasizes trust and commitment above intellectual belief.

New Testament Greek uses the noun *pistis* and the verb *pisteuo* for the word “faith.” These words define faith as “to believe what someone says, to accept a statement.” Examples of this definition include Matthew 8:13 and 9:28. *Pistis* and *pisteuo* also emphasize that personal trust is distinct from mere credence or belief. Examples of this definition can be seen in Mark 1:15 and Acts 10:43.

Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

## The Importance of Faith

- Saved by faith  
Romans 5:1 – Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Ephesians 2:8-10 – For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- Sanctified by faith  
Acts 15:9 – And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.
- Kept by faith  
1 Peter 1:5 – Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- Established by faith  
Isaiah 7:9b – If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.
- Healed by faith  
James 5:15 – And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.
- Walk by faith  
2 Corinthians 5:7 – For we walk by faith, not by sight.
- Overcome by faith  
Mark 9:23 – And Jesus said to him, “If You can?” All things are possible to him who believes.
- Necessity of faith  
Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

## The Meaning of Faith

Faith is more than intellectual assent, but rather it is a turning of the soul to God. According to the Scriptures, faith leads to a change of heart. There are three elements of faith: intellect, emotions, and volition (or decision).

1. There is an intellectual element of faith. Faith requires believing that there is a God and that He accurately reveals Himself to man through the Word of God. Faith requires an intellectual assent to the contents of Scripture including its historical facts and doctrinal teachings. Faith is not simply a blind acceptance of these matters, but rather an evaluation based on the evidence that the Word of God is in fact true.

Romans 10:14 – How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Romans 10:17 – So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

2. There is an emotional element of faith. When the Gospel is presented, this causes an awakening within one's soul. This awakening can cause a variety of emotions including guilt and shame regarding sin, but also happiness and excitement over the prospect of God's mercy and grace. True faith will not simply end with an emotional response.

Matthew 13:20 – The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

3. There is a volitional element of faith. If an individual accepts the truth of God's Word and is convicted of sin, he or she must make a decision to accept or reject the truth. Those who believe are born again and become children of God.

Romans 10:9-10, 13 – That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Joel 2:32)

#### The Source of Faith

1. The Divine Side of Faith

Romans 12:3 – For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

1 Corinthians 12:9 – To another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

Hebrews 12:2 – Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2 Peter 1:1b – To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

2. The Human Side of Faith

Matthew 25:29 – For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

Luke 17:5 – The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Romans 10:17 – So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

Acts 4:4a – But many of those who had heard the message believed.

## The Results of Faith

### 1. Salvation – Romans 5:1 and 1 Peter 1:5

Titus 3:5-7 – He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

### 2. Assurance

Romans 8:38-39 – For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Peter 1:8 – And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

### 3. Good works

Matthew 5:16 – Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Titus 3:8 – This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the obstacles that cause veterans to not trust God?
2. What are some of the reasons why veterans do have faith in God?

## Memory Verse

Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.



### Lesson 3: The Meaning of Life

It is inevitable that someone will ask the question, “What is the meaning of life?” After serving in combat, veterans ask this very same question. There are a wide variety of experiences a veteran may have, but unfortunately, many of these experiences leave the veteran with unanswered questions about life. This is a frustrating experience.

God knew that humanity would experience frustration in life and have important questions go unanswered. This is why He gave us the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. This book is perhaps the most puzzling book in the Bible, but within its pages are the answers to life’s most important question, “What is the meaning of life?”

A survey of Ecclesiastes will reveal that from a human perspective, life is meaningless. Materialism, work, knowledge, and pleasure will never satisfy. Life is designed to have meaning only when people live in a right relationship with God. Without God, life cannot truly satisfy.

1. From a human perspective, life is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 1:2-4

2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,  
“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

3 What advantage does man have in all his work  
Which he does under the sun?

4 A generation goes and a generation comes,  
But the earth remains forever.

2. Materialism and work cannot satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 1:13-14

13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

3. Knowledge and wisdom cannot satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 1:18 – Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

4. Pleasure cannot satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2

1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” and behold, it too was futility.

2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all labor.

11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

5. Those who try to find meaning in life simply from materialism, accomplishments, knowledge, or pleasure will be disappointed.

Ecclesiastes 2:17 – So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

6. God’s plan is for His children to simply enjoy each day of life.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 – There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen and that it is from the hand of God.

7. There is a time and place for everything in life.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven –

2 A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

3 A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

4 A time to weep and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

8 A time to love and a time to hate;

A time for war and a time for peace.

8. There is nothing better in life than being content in a relationship with God Himself.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-14

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;

13 Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor – it is the gift of God.

14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

9. God intends for us to enjoy life.

Ecclesiastes 3:22 – I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

10. The ability to enjoy life is hindered by the presence of sin in this world.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 – Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.

11. God intended us to enjoy the journey of life with others.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.

10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

12. We are to honor God with our lives.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, 7b

1 Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.

2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

7b Rather, fear God.

13. Once again, money cannot satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 – He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.

14. Nothing in this fallen world is certain; therefore, we must trust in God rather than riches.

Ecclesiastes 5:13-14

13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.

14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.

15. God intended for work to be rewarding.

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20

19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.

20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

16. Life is uncertain, but God expects for us to live with character and integrity.

Ecclesiastes 6:12 – For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 7:1a – A good name is better than a good ointment,

17. Though this world is filled with injustice, we must control our anger.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 – Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

18. A wicked spouse can make life miserable.

Ecclesiastes 7:26 – And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

19. God created the world perfect, but humanity sinned against God. The result of this choice is an imperfect world.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 – “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

20. Sometimes it appears that sin leads to prosperity, but it is always right to honor God.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

21. Once again, God intends for humanity to enjoy each and every day of life.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 – For there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

22. Our lives are in God’s hands.

Ecclesiastes 9:1 – For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

23. God wants us to work hard and enjoy life.

Ecclesiastes 9:7, 9, 10a

7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

10a Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

24. Life is short, so honor God and enjoy it.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

25. There is life after death.

Ecclesiastes 12:5c, 7

5c For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.

7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

26. Ultimately, God's purpose for us is to enjoy each day that He gives us. The meaning of life is simply found in fearing God and keeping His commandments. Perhaps this seems too simple, but according to the Scripture, this is the meaning of life.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Is it harder to enjoy life after serving in combat? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe the meaning of life for you has changed since the war?

#### Memory Verse

Ecclesiastes 3:22a – I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot.

## Lesson 4: Hope

The previous lesson addressed the important issue of life's meaning. Ultimately, life has meaning when we have a relationship with our Creator. God created our lives to have meaning through Him. The important topic this lesson will address is how to move from a position of feeling hopeless to a feeling of hope.

1. God is the only way of salvation.

Psalm 27:1 – The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?

Psalm 37:39 – But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble.

Isaiah 12:2 – “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.”

Isaiah 25:9 – And it will be said in that day, “Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

2. Christ is the source of salvation.

John 10:9 – I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

John 14:6 – Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Acts 4:12 – “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 15:11 – “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

Romans 5:9 – Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Hebrews 5:9 – And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

Hebrews 9:28 – So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

3. It is possible for anyone to be saved.

Acts 2:21 – “AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” (Joel 2:32)

Romans 5:18 – So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

Romans 10:9-13

9 That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

10 For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” (Isaiah 28:16)

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;

13 For “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” (Joel 2:32)

1 Timothy 2:4-6

4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

6 Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

12 Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

13 Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

14 Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.



4. Salvation is a free gift that cannot be earned.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 4:10 – Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:32 – He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

2 Corinthians 9:15 – Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 Not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Titus 3:3-7

3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,

5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

6 Whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

7 So that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

5. We can receive forgiveness for our sins.

Isaiah 43:25 – “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.”

Isaiah 44:22 – “I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”

Isaiah 55:7 – Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Micah 7:18 – Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.

Matthew 26:28 – For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

Luke 24:47 – And that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Acts 2:38 – Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Hebrews 9:22 – And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

6. God does not condemn those who believe.

Isaiah 50:9 – Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who is he who condemns me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them.

John 3:18 – He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 5:24 – Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Romans 8:1 – Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:34 – Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

7. Salvation can never be taken away from God's children.

John 1:12 – But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

John 10:27-30

27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

28 And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

30 I and the Father are one.

Romans 8:28-30, 35-39

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

30 And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." (Psalm 44:22)

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 11:29 – For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Timothy 1:12 – For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

1 Peter 1:5 – Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 24 – Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

## God's Simple Plan of Salvation

1. We are all sinners.

Romans 3:10 – As it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one.”

Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

2. Christ has already paid the price of our sin on the cross.

Romans 5:8 – But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. Faith in Christ will save you from your sins.

Romans 10:9-10, 13

9 That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

10 For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

13 For whoever will call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the reasons why veterans lose hope?
2. Did you ever question your faith or feel like you were losing hope in God?
3. What helped you overcome those feelings?

### Memory Verse

Romans 5:1 – Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

## Lesson 5: The Existence of Evil

The word “evil” appears over 500 times in the Bible. You cannot read the Bible and avoid this topic. In many ways, we do not fully understand why there is evil in this world, but God gives us answers in His Word to help us comprehend the existence of evil. Because we are the victims and perpetrators of evil, it is very difficult for us as human beings to fully understand why evil exists.

### Evil Defined

There are several words used throughout the Bible that are translated as “evil.” These words are defined below.

Old Testament words for evil:

- *ra`* – adj. (1) evil, bad (2) evil in appearance or deformed (3) unhappy or sad (4) ethically wicked
- *roa`* – noun (1) badness, evilness (2) deformity
- *ra`a`* – verb (1) to be bad or evil (2) ethically wicked (3) to break or shatter
- *`aven* – noun (1) emptiness or vanity (2) falsehood or fraud (3) wickedness (4) misfortune, calamity, or adverse circumstances

New Testament words for evil:

- *phaulos* – adj. (1) easy, slight, ordinary, mean, worthless, or of no account (2) ethically bad, base, or wicked
- *poneros* – adj. (1) full of labors, annoyances, or hardships (2) physically or ethically bad or evil

### Evil Explained

There are two types of evil found in the Bible: moral evil and physical evil. Moral evil is the wrong that people inflict upon each other while physical evil is the presence of sickness, calamity, and other acts of unintentional harm. Physical evil is the result of natural events; but moral evil requires more explanation.

Moral Evil

1. Immorality may be present even when the evil action has not been performed.

Proverbs 23:7 – For as a man thinks within himself, so he is.

Matthew 5:28 – But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

James 1:14-15 – But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

2. The 10 Commandments address the issue of moral evil.

Exodus 20:12-17

12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

3. Evil begins gradually.

Romans 1:20-32

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,  
31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;  
32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Notice how in the beginning of this passage, those who sin observe the handiwork of God's creation and then eventually reject God. Man chases after his own reasoning and rejects the truth of God for a lie. As a result, God allows man to freely choose what he wants, which is ultimately why evil is so prominent in this world. Man freely chooses to do that which is evil.

4. Man freely chooses all kinds of evil.

Galatians 5:19-21

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

#### Why Is There Evil and Suffering in the World?

This is an important question that is not easily answered. The question is raised, "If God is all-powerful and all loving, then why does He permit evil and suffering in the world?" There has yet to be an answer to this question that permanently settles this issue, but the following reasons are possible solutions to this age-old question.

1. The reason for God allowing evil to exist probably exceeds our capacity to understand. The words found in Isaiah 55:8-9 remind us of this fact.

Isaiah 55:8-9 – "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

2. By allowing evil to run its course, humanity will not be able to argue against the need for God to judge sin.

In the beginning, God's creation was perfect (Genesis 1). Part of God's perfect world was man's free will. God created man with the capacity to choose God or reject Him. Unfortunately, Adam sinned and rebelled against God, and as

a result, God's creation was no longer perfect. Earth was no longer a paradise and from that day forward, humanity was born with a sin nature.

God will judge sin at the end of time. The problem for us today is that we do not understand why God allows evil to persist. The fact is that God created human beings with the capacity to choose good or evil. If God were to intervene in the affairs of humanity and prevent evil, human beings would not have the freedom of choice. We do not have a problem if God were to remove choice from those who would exercise the gravest of evils such as murder or rape, but we would have a problem with this intervention if we realized God would have to stop every evil, including our very thoughts, which are all too often sinful. The fact is that if God prevented evil, we would not even have the ability to act freely, nor could we think freely. For reasons we may not fully understand, the plan of God is that human beings must have the freedom of choice, which ultimately results in the presence of evil in our world.

3. God allows good to come from suffering.

Romans 5:3-5 – And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

An example of this truth is found in the life of Joseph.

Genesis 50:20 – As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

The greatest example of good coming from suffering is the salvation that God freely offers humanity through the death of Christ. Clearly, Jesus did not deserve to die or suffer as He did; yet the greatest good (our salvation) came from the greatest evil (Christ's suffering and crucifixion).

## **Conclusion**

The problem for us is not in understanding what is presented here in this lesson. The problem for us is our inability to see any good coming from the death of a child or the senseless suffering caused in this world by evil dictators. There are times that it seems evil prospers without any fear of consequence. After serving in combat, the reality of evil in this world is hard to fully accept and understand.

It is difficult to emotionally resolve this issue. Ultimately, sin is the result of God giving us what we want: the ability to sin. Unfortunately, those who seem innocent to us



seem to bear the brunt of the evil in this world. In many ways, this is not just. We want to see immediate retribution for these offenses, but the fact is that the full judgment of sin awaits us all after death. No sin has escaped God's account. Every evil deed and every evil action will be paid for in eternity. For those who did not repent and believe on Christ, they will receive punishment for all eternity in Hell. For those who believe on Christ, Jesus has already paid the price of sin when He suffered and died on the cross. Because He was our substitute, we will be pardoned on the final Day of Judgment. We will then spend all eternity in the very presence of God in Heaven.

Revelation 21:4 – And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

#### Discussion Questions

1. After serving in combat, did you face the question, "Why does God allow evil?"
2. After serving in war, is it harder to understand the existence of evil?
3. In your own mind, how do you resolve this question?

#### Memory Verse

Isaiah 55:8-9 – "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

## Lesson 6: Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a difficult, but necessary topic that must be explored. When we are the victims of those perpetrating evil, we find ourselves deeply hurt by these actions. As victims of sin, we face a terrible dilemma: how do I respond to this situation? The natural reaction is to embrace the anger and hate we experience, but what about the consequences of bitterness? Perhaps we should consider the other option: forgiveness. But the question must be asked, “How do you forgive someone who has inflicted these horrific actions upon me?” These issues will be addressed and resolved in this lesson.

### Forgiveness Defined

What is forgiveness? There are misunderstandings related to this action, so it is necessary for us to understand exactly what the Bible says about forgiveness. In order to do this, we must first define the words found in Scripture that are translated as “forgive” or “forgiveness.”

#### 1. Old Testament

- *calach* – verb (1) to forgive or pardon (2) to be forgiven
- *nasa* – verb (1) to lift (2) to bear up (3) to carry (4) to take away
- *celiychah* – noun (1) pardon (2) forgiveness

#### 2. New Testament

- *aphiemi* – verb (1) to send forth or send away (2) to remit or forgive
- *charizomi* – verb (1) to bestow a favor unconditionally
- *apoluo* – verb (1) to loose from (2) to release
- *aphesis* – noun (1) a dismissal or release (2) remission

### Forgiveness Explained

The words used in the Bible for “forgive” or “forgiveness” NEVER mean to forget. This is an obstacle that the devil uses to entrap people in the unending web of bitterness. The fact is that once we have been wronged, it is unlikely that we can consciously forget what happened. Our brains are designed to retain the memories of life-changing events, including the negative experiences.

Forgiveness is NOT an action that absolves the perpetrator of guilt. Whatever the wrong was, forgiveness does not free the perpetrator from judgment (both physical and eternal).

Forgiveness is NEVER earned by the perpetrator. Sometimes we assume that we cannot forgive someone until the person repents. Obviously, this is the ideal situation, but the fact is that forgiveness is not a reaction to repentance. Forgiveness is a choice the victim makes independently, and it is a decision that is made, not based on the merits of the perpetrator, but rather on the basis of the mercy or grace of the victim.

Instead, forgiveness is a decision that releases you from the right for retribution. Forgiveness conjures up images of a courtroom. The offender is guilty, but as the victim, you release the guilty party from your right for vindication. This does not mean that the guilty party will receive a pardon, because you are not the judge who holds the position of authority that makes the final judgment. Ultimately, forgiveness frees us from the emotional need for resolving the situation within our own means, and then trusting God that He will resolve the situation as He sees fit. Of course, this is the challenge that we all face. To trust God in handling justice when we have been wronged requires a step of faith on our part.

#### The Command to Forgive

Matthew 6:14-15

14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Mark 11:24-26

24 Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.

25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.

Jesus' command is clear. We will not experience God's forgiveness if we will not forgive others. Many times we cannot forgive others in our own strength, but once we have a relationship with Christ, He will give us the supernatural ability to forgive those who have wronged us. The fact is that once we realize how much we have been forgiven by God, it makes it possible to forgive others. This does not mean it is easy, but if we pray that God will give us the strength to forgive, He will.

Luke 17:4 – And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, “I repent,” forgive him.

The religious leaders in the days of Christ taught that you were only obligated to forgive someone three times. Jesus had an entirely different perspective on forgiveness. Jesus is not saying that we should simply forgive no more than seven times. He is using

the symbolism of the perfect number “7” and teaching that perfect forgiveness far exceeds the human standard for forgiveness.

### The Consequences of Bitterness

The New Testament word “bitterness” comes from the Greek word *pikria*, which means “bitter gall or extreme wickedness.” The use of this word creates a very colorful image. Bitterness is a choice that people make when they refuse to forgive. The unresolved anger regarding the past offense controls the victim and ultimately leads to self-destructive behavior. Bitterness not only destroys an individual from the inside out, it eventually affects every other relationship. Once this bitterness affects other people, the individual is allowing a past offense to bring grief upon others. In the end, the failure to forgive can have a far more lasting affect than the actual consequences of the original offense. For this reason, God commands us to forsake bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 – Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Ephesians 4:31-32

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

### Conclusion

The greatest example of forgiveness is Jesus Christ. He paid an unbelievable price on the cross so that we could receive forgiveness of sins. Sometimes we do not have the ability to forgive those who have wronged us, but nothing is impossible with God. If we ask God to help us forgive those who have wronged us, He will enable us to do so and we will be liberated from the oppressive power of bitterness.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the greatest challenge a veteran faces in forgiveness?
2. How difficult is it to forgive the enemy when what they did was so wrong?

### Memory Verse

Ephesians 4:32 – And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

## Lesson 7: Betrayal

Feelings of betrayal can arise during and after a combat deployment. For those who feel they have been betrayed, this is a profound experience. The perpetrators of betrayal can be anyone: leaders, friends, family, media, etc. The impact of betrayal on combat veterans is significant because the betrayal took place during combat, which is obviously in a life and death situation. For those who lose a friend as the result of betrayal, this can be a truly traumatic event.

The words translated as “betray” or “betrayal” appear more than a hundred times in the Bible. The Bible is filled with many stories of betrayal. Many times these stories do not address the emotional impact of betrayal, but we find comfort in how to overcome this life event in Psalm 41 and Psalm 55.

### Betrayal Defined

1. *galah* – verb (1) to uncover or remove (2) to be disclosed or revealed
2. *ramah* – verb (1) to cast or throw (2) to beguile, deceive, or betray
3. *paradidomi* – verb (1) to give into the hands of another (2) to give over into one’s power or use (3) to commit (4) to deliver by narrating a report (5) to allow of something being done such as the ripening of fruit

### Examples of Betrayal

1. Joseph – sold into slavery by his brothers
2. Samson – betrayed by his girlfriend Delilah; he was then beaten, enslaved, and his eyes were gouged out by the Philistines
3. David – he was betrayed many times during his life: Saul, Ahimelech, Absalom, and Ahithophel
4. Jesus – betrayed by His disciple, Judas Iscariot

### Scriptures

Psalm 41 and Psalm 55 offer believers hope following betrayal. This profoundly painful event is hard to comprehend for those who have never been betrayed; but the Word of God addresses this issue. Jesus Christ personally experienced betrayal and He can comfort those who have been betrayed as well.

Psalm 41

- 1 How blessed is he who considers the helpless;  
The LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble.
- 2 The LORD will protect him and keep him alive,  
And he shall be called blessed upon the earth;  
And do not give him over to the desire of his enemies.
- 3 The LORD will sustain him upon his sickbed;  
In his illness, You restore him to health.
- 4 As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me;  
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."
- 5 My enemies speak evil against me,  
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
- 6 And when he comes to see me, he speaks falsehood;  
His heart gathers wickedness to itself;  
When he goes outside, he tells it.
- 7 All who hate me whisper together against me;  
Against me they devise my hurt, saying,
- 8 "A wicked thing is poured out upon him,  
That when he lies down, he will not rise up again."
- 9 Even my close friend in whom I trusted,  
Who ate my bread,  
Has lifted up his heel against me.
- 10 But You, O LORD, be gracious to me and raise me up,  
That I may repay them.
- 11 By this I know that You are pleased with me,  
Because my enemy does not shout in triumph over me.
- 12 As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,  
And You set me in Your presence forever.
- 13 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
From everlasting to everlasting.  
Amen and Amen.

Psalm 55

- 1 Give ear to my prayer, O God;  
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.
- 2 Give heed to me and answer me;  
I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted,
- 3 Because of the voice of the enemy,  
Because of the pressure of the wicked;  
For they bring down trouble upon me  
And in anger they bear a grudge against me.
- 4 My heart is in anguish within me,  
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
- 5 Fear and trembling come upon me,  
And horror has overwhelmed me.
- 6 I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest."
- 7 "Behold, I would wander far away,  
I would lodge in the wilderness."
- 8 "I would hasten to my place of refuge  
From the stormy wind and tempest."
- 9 Confuse, O Lord, divide their tongues,  
For I have seen violence and strife in the city.
- 10 Day and night they go around her upon her walls,  
And iniquity and mischief are in her midst.
- 11 Destruction is in her midst;  
Oppression and deceit do not depart from her streets.
- 12 For it is not an enemy who reproaches me,  
Then I could bear it;  
Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me,  
Then I could hide myself from him.
- 13 But it is you, a man my equal,  
My companion and my familiar friend;

- 14 We who had sweet fellowship together  
Walked in the house of God in the throng.
- 15 Let death come deceitfully upon them;  
Let them go down alive to Sheol,  
For evil is in their dwelling, in their midst.
- 16 As for me, I shall call upon God,  
And the LORD will save me.
- 17 Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur,  
And He will hear my voice.
- 18 He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me,  
For they are many who strive with me.
- 19 God will hear and answer them –  
Even the one who sits enthroned from of old – Selah.  
With whom there is no change,  
And who do not fear God.
- 20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him;  
He has violated his covenant.
- 21 His speech was smoother than butter,  
But his heart was war;  
His words were softer than oil,  
Yet they were drawn swords.
- 22 Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;  
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.
- 23 But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction;  
Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half of their days.  
But I will trust in You.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Did you ever feel betrayed during or after your combat tour?
2. Have you observed others who felt betrayed?

#### Memory Verse

Psalm 55:22 – Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.



## Lesson 8: Anger

There are many things in life that can make us angry. This is certainly true of a combat tour. Almost every day there is cause for anger or frustration, whether it is caused by leaders, the environment, or the enemy. After months of these emotions building up, it becomes more difficult to handle these emotions. Following a combat deployment, veterans find themselves more easily provoked to anger. Many times these moments of provocation are unexpected and alarming because we find ourselves responding to situations in a manner that we would consider out of character. Combat changes us, but that does not mean we must continue holding on to our feelings of anger and frustration. God can help veterans overcome these feelings and give us victory over anger.

### Causes of anger

- Frustration
- Alienation
- Physical Threat
- Emotional Threat
- Physical Pain
- Emotional Pain
- Injustice
- Fear

### Effects of Anger

#### 1. Withdrawal

- Physically leaving the situation
- Becoming a workaholic
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Reckless behavior
- Denial

#### 2. Turning Inward

- Physical problems such as headaches, ulcers, high blood pressure, or heart problems
- Psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, tension, or depression
- Negative thinking that can even lead to suicide
- Thoughts of revenge or reenactment of the situation

### 3. Attacking Others

- The real object is not available so others are attacked instead
- Spouse or significant other
- Children
- Parents
- Siblings
- Friends

#### Biblical Passages on Anger

Psalm 4:4-8

4 Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.  
Selah.

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.

6 Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?" Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD!

7 You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound.

8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

Psalm 37:7-11

7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing.

9 For evil-doers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.

10 Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there.

11 But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

Proverbs 12:16 – A fool's anger is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor.

Proverbs 14:29 – He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

Proverbs 15:1 – A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:18 – A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute.

Proverbs 16:32 – He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Proverbs 19:11 – A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

Proverbs 19:19 – A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.

Proverbs 22:24-25 – Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and find a snare for yourself.

Proverbs 29:8 – Scorners set a city aflame, but wise men turn away anger.

Proverbs 29:11 – A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.

Proverbs 30:33 – For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife.

Galatians 5:22-23

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Ephesians 4:25-27, 31-32

25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another. (Zechariah 8:16)

26 **BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN**; do not let the sun go down on your anger, (Psalm 4:4)

27 And do not give the devil an opportunity.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:8 – But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

James 1:19-21

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

20 For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

## Conclusion

Overcoming anger is not easy, but the Lord can help us overcome even the most difficult struggles in life. God gives us strength through the Holy Spirit to understand why we react with anger and His Spirit will also help us to control our anger.

## Discussion Questions

1. Were you more easily provoked to anger following your combat tour?
2. What were some of the things that made you angry?
3. What do you do to control your anger?
4. What advice do you give to other veterans about anger?

## Memory Verse

Proverbs 16:32 – He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

## Lesson 9: Grief

A common experience among combat veterans is grief. Grief is the natural, emotional response to a significant loss, particularly of life. When someone is wounded or killed in combat, this event is a profound experience that will have an emotional impact on everyone in the unit, especially for those closest to the individual. Unfortunately in war, there is little (if any) time to grieve because the combat operations must continue. As a tour of duty progresses, there is an increase in the number of casualties. By the end of the deployment, the combat veteran has been bottling up emotions of grief for months without any substantial time to contemplate or express these emotions. Upon return to the United States, there is finally time for grieving, but often it is difficult because there are so many events that have been ignored for so long. In a society that claims “grown men don’t cry,” veterans are poorly equipped to handle the overwhelming emotions of grief that are produced by the events of combat.

### What Is Grief?

Grief is an important emotional response when an individual experiences a profound loss. A traumatic injury or death in combat should produce an emotional response in those close to the casualty. Everyone will respond in a different manner, but it is important to know that this is normal.

Each person will have a different response to a loss depending upon their religious beliefs, personal history, personality, social environment, and the circumstances of the event. Each of these factors plays an influential role in the duration and intensity of grief. Regardless of these factors, there are both healthy and unhealthy responses to grief.

### Typical Cycle of Grief

The typical cycle of grief is different for everyone, but for some people, grief can last as long as three years. Grief can be a powerful and intense emotion for some people, while others are not as dramatically affected by grief. Though there is some flexibility in what is considered healthy grief, typically it will follow a pattern similar to what is described below.

#### 1. Denial

This is a temporary stage when an individual refuses to believe or in some cases acknowledge that the event has transpired.

#### 2. Anger

The next stage is anger. The person may act out or bottle up this feeling. The anger may be directed at themselves, others involved, or God Himself.

3. Bargaining

In cases where the loss is not immediate, this stage is an emotional attempt to bypass the inevitable death to come. This bargaining with God often takes place in secret.

4. Depression

It is easier to be angry than sad, but once the reality of death settles in, the anger transforms into sadness.

5. Acceptance

This is the final stage where the grieving individual has come to terms with the unfortunate reality of the loss and has learned how to function in this new reality.

### Unhealthy Reactions to Grief

There is no exact process for grieving, but it is possible to grieve in an unhealthy manner. Though grief can be a slow process, it should be a process, which implies that there is movement toward the end state of acceptance. Unhealthy grief can appear similar to the typical grief cycle, but the difference is that the individual never gets to stage five: acceptance. There are three types of responses that impede the progress of grief.

1. Dissociation

This response is when an individual intellectually acknowledges the loss, but emotionally behaves as if nothing has happened.

2. Internalization

This response is when an individual ignores the loss by focusing on the internal presence of the one lost.

3. Externalization

This response is when an individual becomes preoccupied with an object once possessed by the deceased, whether it is a picture, article of clothing or any other object that takes on an unhealthy significance after the loss.

### Physical Effects of Grief

There are several physical effects of grief. Those who grieve often experience sleeping problems, digestive problems, and feelings of exhaustion.

## Emotional Effects of Grief

Grief is an intense emotion that cannot be described alone because it is a powerful mixture of emotions that are felt simultaneously. The following emotions are often experienced during the grieving process.

1. Fear

This emotion is often left unsaid, but the fact is that if someone in your unit was injured or killed, this is a reminder of your vulnerability and your mortality.

2. Guilt

There are feelings that there was something you could have done different that could have prevented the situation that took place. There are also feelings of regret because unresolved conflict with the one lost will remain unresolved.

3. Helplessness

Once the loss has taken place, there is nothing you can do to change or prevent what happened. This is an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness.

4. Anger

There may be anger at a variety of parties that could be deemed responsible. There can be anger toward the enemy that caused the casualty. Anger can be directed toward leadership in the unit for making wrong decisions. There can be anger toward politicians for leading the nation to war. There can even be anger toward God for allowing the loss.

5. Loneliness

A friend lost in combat is a loss only other veterans can understand. The loss creates a pain inside that emotionally does not easily heal.

6. Doubt

The question that is frequently asked is “Why?” It is difficult to emotionally comprehend the loss of another when we feel that God had every reason to prevent it. Difficulty in resolving this question often leads to doubt in God.

7. Relief

If someone suffers prior to an inevitable death, those who grieve may experience relief from the anticipation from the loss. Feelings of relief can also trigger feelings of guilt.

## Old Testament Promises

1. God will comfort those who mourn.

Psalm 23:4 – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 46:1 – God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2. The Bible gives us strength when we mourn.

Psalm 119:28 – My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your Word.

3. There is a time and a place to mourn.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4

1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--

4 A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.

## Old Testament Examples of Grieving

1. Job

Job 2:13 – Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

2. David

Psalm 6:5-7

5 For there is no mention of You in death; in Sheol who will give You thanks?

6 I am weary with my sighing; every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears.

7 My eye has wasted away with grief; it has become old because of all my adversaries.

## New Testament Promises

1. Jesus taught that God comforts those who mourn.

Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.



John 16:20 – Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.

John 16:22 – Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.

John 16:33 – These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

2. Death is not the end for believers.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (Isaiah 25:8)

55 O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? (Hosea 13:14)

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

## Jesus Christ Is the New Testament Example of Grieving

1. Jesus grieved when John the Baptist died. (Matthew 14:12-21)
2. Jesus grieved when Lazarus died. (John 11)
3. Jesus grieved in anticipation of His crucifixion. (Matthew 26:38)

## Conclusion

It is normal and natural to experience grief after the loss of a loved one. Veterans need to express their grief rather than bottle up their emotions. Jesus is the greatest example of one who grieved. He was comforted by God and God will comfort us in our losses as well.

## Discussion Questions

1. What challenges have you faced in this area?
2. Did you find it easier to grieve in theater or back home?
3. What are some observations you have made on how veterans grieve?

## Memory Verse

Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

## Lesson 10: Shame

There are many things in life that we regret. We make wrong decisions and hurt people with our words and actions. Sometimes we have regrets over experiences that we have no control over. Following combat, it is common for veterans to experience various degrees of guilt for things done (or not done) during combat. Unfortunately, some veterans never explore these feelings and bear the burden of shame for years. God does not want us to bear this burden alone, but sometimes we do not know how to let go of these powerful, negative feelings.

	<b>Unproductive Shame</b>	<b>Productive Sorrow</b>
Person focused on	Yourself	God or others
Actions focused on	Past failures	Hurt caused on others and how to correct the problem
Motivation for change (if any)	To avoid feeling bad (guilty feelings)	To help others, promote restitution, or honor God
Attitude toward self	Anger and frustration	Love and respect, combined with a concern for others
Result	a) External change driven by various motivations b) No change due to the paralyzing effect of guilt c) Further acting out to pull focus away from the feelings of shame	Acknowledge what happened cannot change. Then allow God to change future thoughts and actions.

*Source:* Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Josh McDowell's Handbook on Counseling Youth* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 45.

### Causes of Guilt

1. Unrealistic Expectations
2. Inferiority Complex
3. The Holy Spirit

## Effects of Guilt

1. Condemnation
2. Rebellion
3. Denial
4. Rationalization
5. Confession
6. Genuine Repentance

## Scripture Passages

1. The first example of shame in the Bible.

Genesis 3:8 – They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

2. God judges us on the basis of our motives.

1 Samuel 16:7 – But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

3. The book of Psalms reminds us that God is ready and willing to forgive us and absolve us from the guilt that torments us.

Psalm 32:1-11

1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD;” and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

7 You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

9 Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.

10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.

11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

#### Psalm 51:1-19

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise.

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

18 By Your favor do good to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Psalm 139:1-4

1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.

3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all.

4. Once we have received God's forgiveness, we have no reason to feel shame.

Isaiah 43:25 – I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 55:7 – Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 31:34b – “For they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Micah 7:18-19

18 Who is like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.

19 He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Hebrews 8:12 – FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE. (Isaiah 43:25)

5. The Holy Spirit helps us discern when we have sinned.

John 16:8 – And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;

John 16:13 – But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

6. We must confess our sins to God and through the shed blood of Christ, God will grant us forgiveness. We can then live free from the captivity of shame.

James 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

1 Peter 3:18 – For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

1 John 1:8-9

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

### How to Handle Feelings of Guilt

1. Pray
2. Read Scripture
3. Express your feelings of guilt with a mentor or a friend

### Discussion Questions

1. Did you ever struggle with feelings of shame for things you did (or failed to do) during your combat tour?
2. How do you address these thoughts?
3. Have you observed others who cannot accept what they did (or did not do)?

### Memory Verse

Jeremiah 31:34b – “For they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

## Lesson 11: Fear and Anxiety

Fear is an ever-present reality in combat. Fear heightens our senses and insures our survival. After serving in combat, the human body does not easily adjust to the change in environment. Veterans can find it overwhelming to be in an environment that reminds them of the situations they were in during combat. Something as simple as an interstate overpass can cause great fear among those who traveled in convoys in Iraq. After serving in a hazardous environment, anxiety and fear become ingrained in the very thinking processes of a human being. Unfortunately, this change in thinking is hard to undo following a combat tour. The Bible can help us understand why we struggle with fear and anxiety. The Bible can also give us confidence that God can help us overcome all of our fears and worries.

### Causes of Fear and Anxiety

1. Threats
2. Conflict
3. Past Failures
4. Unmet Needs

### Effects of Fear and Anxiety

1. Physical Effects
  - Headaches
  - Rashes
  - Backaches
  - Upset stomach
  - Shortness of breath
  - Sleeping problems
  - Fatigue
  - Loss of appetite
2. Behavioral Effects
  - Changed sleeping habits
  - Drug use
  - Alcohol abuse
  - Denial
  - Disagreeable
  - Outbursts of anger



### 3. Spiritual Effects

- Inability to pray
- Difficulty concentrating in Bible reading and at church
- Impatient
- Bitterness

### Scripture Passages

#### 1. God Will Meet Our Needs

Matthew 6:25-34

25 For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

29 Yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

31 Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?"

32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Philippians 4:4-9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

1 Peter 5:7 – Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

2. It Is Okay to Have Realistic Concerns

2 Corinthians 11:28 – Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

Philippians 2:20 – For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

3. Spiritual Music Can Calm Our Fears

1 Samuel 16:23 – So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

4. God Knows All of Our Needs

Psalms 127:2 – It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Psalms 131:1-3

1 O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me.

2 Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.

Psalms 139:1-24

1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.

3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all.

5 You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

10 Even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,"

12 Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day.

Darkness and light are alike to You.

13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.  
14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.  
15 My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;  
16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.  
17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!  
18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.  
19 O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.  
20 For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain.  
21 Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?  
22 I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies.  
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts  
24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Proverbs 12:25 – Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad.

Hebrews 13:6 – So that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”

1 John 4:18 – There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

#### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways did you struggle with the effects of fear/anxiety?
2. What helped you overcome those struggles?
3. Have you observed others who could not overcome this struggle?

#### Memory Verse

1 Peter 5:7 – Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

## Lesson 12: Prayer

Prayer is a prominent topic throughout the Bible. One can hardly read the Scriptures without reading countless examples and commands regarding prayer. Jesus made communication with God possible through His death on the cross.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 – For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Hebrews 7:25 – Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Believers are reminded that prayer is not only a privilege, but it is also a command. Yet many times, we fail to obey God in this important part of our Christian lives. This lesson will explain the importance of prayer and how prayer can enable veterans to overcome the challenges they face when readjusting to life after combat.

### Commands to Seek God

Deuteronomy 4:29 – But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

Psalms 105:4 – Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually.

Isaiah 55:6 – Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.

Hosea 10:12 – Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.

Matthew 6:33 – But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Luke 11:10 – For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Acts 17:27 – That they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

## Prayer in the Scriptures

### 1. Prayer to the Father

Nehemiah 4:9 – But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

John 16:23-24 – In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

Acts 12:5 – So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

### 2. Prayer to Jesus Christ

Acts 7:59 – They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”

1 Corinthians 1:2 – To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

### 3. The Holy Spirit’s Power through Prayer

Romans 8:26-27 – In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Jude 20 – But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

### 4. God’s Promise to Answer Prayer

Isaiah 41:17 – The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst; I, the LORD, will answer them Myself, as the God of Israel I will not forsake them.

Isaiah 58:9a – Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, “Here I am.”

Isaiah 65:24 – It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

Jeremiah 33:3 – Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

Zechariah 13:9 – And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, “They are My people,” and they will say, “The LORD is my God.”

Luke 11:9 – So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

John 14:14 – If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:7 – If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

## 5. Conditions for Answered Prayer

### a. Contrition

2 Chronicles 7:14 – And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

### b. Whole-Heartedness

Jeremiah 29:13 – You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

### c. Faith

Mark 11:24 – Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.

### d. Righteousness

James 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

### e. Obedience

1 John 3:22 – And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

## The Content of Prayer

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. We are familiar with the beautiful simplicity of the Lord's Prayer, so let us be reminded by this passage of Scripture what God expects of us as we pray.

Matthew 6:9-13

9 Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

### The Four Elements of Prayer (ACTS)

1. Adoration
2. Confession
3. Thanksgiving
4. Supplication

### Discussion Questions

1. How was your prayer life during your combat tour?
2. Has your service in combat affected your view of prayer?
3. Did you experience the power of prayer during your combat tour?
4. Have you seen God answer prayer since returning from combat?

### Memory Verse

John 15:7 – If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

## Lesson 13: Spiritual Warfare

Combat stress is a really important issue that veterans face as they readjust to life after combat. For Christian veterans, the issues related to post-combat stress become spiritual battles as they readjust to life after combat. It is important for believers to understand that the issues addressed in this Bible study are likely to resurface again in the future. Does this mean that God has failed to help you overcome these issues? Certainly not, but sometimes it may feel this way. God knows that we will struggle throughout life with the invisible enemy of the evil one and the powers of darkness. Christ is already victorious and has equipped us for success in this spiritual war.

Ephesians 6:10-20

- 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.
- 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.
- 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
- 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.
- 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, (Isaiah 11:5) and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, (Isaiah 59:17)
- 15 And having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; (Isaiah 52:7)
- 16 In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
- 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Isaiah 59:17)
- 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
- 19 And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,
- 20 For which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Comments

- 10 God commands believers to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” God is reminding us that He will be the One who empowers us through our relationship with His Son. (Philippians 4:13) Christ has already secured victory, but the battle is not finished. In this light, we will fight a spiritual battle until the day of Christ’s return. The same power of God that



raised Jesus from the dead and saved us from sin is the same power that God will employ within us in this spiritual war. Let us be reminded of the words found earlier in Ephesians 1:19-23.

19 And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

20 Which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

23 Which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

- 11 In light of this spiritual battle, God is calling believers to prepare for combat. A soldier is not prepared unless he is wearing the proper gear, which is described in the following verses. The key word in this verse is the word “stand” which comes from the word *stete*. This word is a military term that conjures up images of both defensive and offensive warfare. This makes sense because a military unit is not able to launch an offensive campaign unless the position that unit holds is secure. This is a true analogy to this spiritual war. This verse reminds us of Paul’s admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 – “But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”
- 12 The word for “struggle” is translated from the word *pale*, which literally means “wrestling.” This is not a battle from afar. This is hand-to-hand combat. This spiritual war involves those who seek legitimate physical control of the world, but use these positions to inflict evil upon others. This war also involves the spiritual realm of demons that will employ any form of deception necessary to steer people away from the truth.
- 13 This verse reiterates the importance of this war and that Christians must be on the alert and battle-ready. The phrase “evil day” can also be translated as “when things are at their worst.” The importance of being prepared is relevant regardless of circumstances.
- 14 The first phrase refers to the belt a warrior wore in battle. If a soldier were not wearing his belt, this would be an indication that he is not on duty. Without the belt, the breastplate does not fit properly and there is no where else to mount the sheathed sword. In other words, the belt is the foundation of the soldier’s equipment. Clearly, this is a perfect analogy of the Word of God because it is the foundation of the Christian’s spiritual armor. This phrase is quoted from Isaiah 11:5 – “Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.” The next piece of equipment is the

breastplate. The breastplate is essential to protect a soldier's heart. The analogy is true for the believer. The righteousness that is imparted on us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross is essential to protect the believer's heart from the attacks of the devil. This reminds us of the words found in Proverbs 4:23 – "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." This phrase is a quotation from Isaiah 59:17 – "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle."

- 15 The distinct advantage the Roman army had over the armies of the world is that their soldiers all wore spiked sandals, similar to combat boots with cleats. This enabled the Roman army to move quicker and more efficiently than the forces that opposed them. The Christian needs to be ready at any given moment to speak the truth of the Gospel. This verse is a quotation from Isaiah 52:7 – "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"
- 16 "In addition to all" can also be translated as "through thick or thin." This paints an interesting picture, because regardless of the circumstances, God is commanding us to take up the shield of faith. The shield provided unbelievable protection, especially when soldiers lined up together, creating a virtual wall. There was one instance where a soldier counted no less than two hundred darts stuck in his shield following a battle. Our faith in God protects us from the onslaught of the devil. There is no place for doubt when we cling to the truth of God's Word. His promises comfort us and give us strength, particularly during our greatest spiritual struggles.
- 17 Both the helmet and the shield are placed upon a soldier. A soldier cannot put them on by himself. The word for "take" in this passage can literally be translated to mean "receive." This is a beautiful analogy because faith and salvation are received from God. The soldier had to receive his shield first, and then his helmet. This is true of the Christian life because we receive faith and that faith leads to salvation. The helmet of salvation is an allusion to Isaiah 59:17 – "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle." The sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon the Christian possesses. Jesus demonstrated the power of this sword when He literally drove Satan away during His temptation by countering each temptation with the Word of God.
- 18-20 These verses demonstrate the importance of the Christian armor. Every believer will struggle, but we must remain vigilant. Just like Paul, we must take up the Christian armor. We must also be faithful in prayer because God's Spirit is the one capable of empowering us for this spiritual war.

### Discussion Questions

1. We have discussed many topics in this Bible study. Have you struggled with any of these issues resurfacing again and again?
2. What do you do when this happens?
3. What do you say to someone else who is discouraged because of past failures?
4. Is spiritual warfare a common problem among veterans?

### Memory Verse

Ephesians 6:10 – Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

## Memory Verses

### **Lesson 1: Introduction**

Psalm 55:22 – Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

### **Lesson 2: Faith**

Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

### **Lesson 3: Meaning of Life**

Ecclesiastes 3:22a – I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot.

### **Lesson 4: Hope**

Romans 5:1 – Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

### **Lesson 5: Existence of Evil**

Isaiah 55:8-9 – “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

### **Lesson 6: Forgiveness**

Ephesians 4:32 – And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

### **Lesson 7: Betrayal**

Psalm 55:22 – Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

### **Lesson 8: Anger**

Proverbs 16:32 – He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

### **Lesson 9: Grief**

Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

### **Lesson 10: Shame**

Jeremiah 31:34b – “For they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

### **Lesson 11: Fear and Anxiety**

1 Peter 5:7 – Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

### **Lesson 12: Prayer**

John 15:7 – If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

### **Lesson 13: Spiritual Warfare**

Ephesians 6:10 – Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

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