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NEWSLETTER



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY VALEANDRO PENNA

# SO HELP ME GOD

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U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY VALEANDRO PENNA

## DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

### Standing firm... IN CHRIST ALONE

by Ch (LTC) Steven Hokana,  
U.S. Army

*“Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the Devil’s strategies” (Eph. 6:11, ISV).*

**T**hese are powerful words – “stand firm!” His apostolic tone is like a great military leader addressing warriors before a battle. Satan wants to win. Satan wants you to think you’re broken and defeated. Give up! Surrender! The good news, the Gospel, is Satan and his lies are defeated. We are washed in the blood of Christ! He won the victory on the cross. He destroyed sin, death and the power of the devil. The battle is won! Still



U.S. MARINES PHOTO BY LANCE CPL MELANIE E. MARTINEZ

Paul orders us to, “stand firm,” to hold the line. The passion behind “stand firm” carries the tenacity and urgency to hold in place, to fix bayonets and dig in. We have purpose and meaning to our life. We aren’t supposed stand around, leisurely meandering while overlooking some restful scene. No! This is spiritual warfare with a deadly, cunning enemy. Stand firm, be vigilant, keep alert, always be on guard. Luther tells us about the urgency of being alert and standing firm:

“Therefore learn that the devil with his angels is not in India [or] in

Ethiopia, but in [your] room, on the streets, in your house, in your bed, under your table, and where you walk and stand. There they surround you like bees” (Tews 2013).

The devil is prowling and seeking to find a breach in your perimeter. So whether standing watch aboard ship, working on a flight line, or in a fighting position — stay alert! Stand firm means hold your ground — don’t let the enemy through.

This is a desperate battle. It’s the spiritual Battle of the Bulge, Thermopile of conscious, Khe Sanh



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# Helping those who return to civilian life

We have a common bond with all who have and are wearing the uniform of our nation.

by Chaplain Mike Moreno, CDR, CHC USNR

Up at zero dark thirty, and ready for another day in the armed forces of our nation. There are many conversations with brothers and sisters with whom you have deployed. You have a family which you love dearly, but this family...this is the family that has seen you through life and death together. They don't displace your family, but they are ... different ... different in the best way possible. You are bound together by traditions and protocols, from the uniform you wear to the sound of colors in the morning. By virtue of your uniform and your experience you belong here, in spite of sergeants and second lieutenants

who believe they are Patton. It's home and it's familiar.

Yet there are so many in our numbers who don't have that familiar home away from home. These are those who have separated or retired, and returned to civilian life. These are those reservists and guardsmen who proved themselves in battle. They have returned home to a grateful nation, but they have returned to a strange place; a place where people get bent out of shape over incredibly stupid things. College students are so concerned about an exam, or a date. The boss believes that if something isn't done his way, the world will end. It's hard for many to make the transition to the civilian sector. As challenging as the military is



at times, the camaraderie and familiarity give a sense of belonging and security. On top of that challenge is the weight of combat upon the human soul. How does one carve a place in this brave new land?

It is these men and women, and their families that Operation Barnabas seeks to serve. They return to a grateful nation, but they return to a nation that does not speak their language, does not understand the culture they just left, and does not understand the scars and wounds that still need care.

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U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY MICHAEL MICHAEL GOMEZ

## What NOT to say...

### *when someone you love is going through a difficult period in their life*

A group of folks going through some difficult times in their lives told me about some of the most unintentional callous remarks they heard. These are people with series medical problems, some

going through depression and others injured; some who lost loved ones. They presented a list of what not to say when someone is hurting from trauma and loss. Again, this is what not to say.

- ⇒ "I know how you feel."
- ⇒ "God needed an angel in heaven, so He took your loved one away."
- ⇒ "It's going to be okay."
- ⇒ "The Lord won't give us more than we can handle. You can handle it."
- ⇒ "It was their time."
- ⇒ "Try looking on the bright side."
- ⇒ "It's God's will."
- ⇒ "Time heals all wounds."
- ⇒ "Be grateful you had him/her for this long."
- ⇒ "Just calm down and try not to get so worked up."
- ⇒ "It's better not to talk about it."
- ⇒ "It could have been worse."
- ⇒ "You know, you should really \_\_\_\_\_."

of truth, Fallujah of eternal salvation and countless other battles where a determined enemy is held in place by a heroic stand. In this case, the warriors are members of the Body of Christ. You hold fast as the enemy gears up for another assault. Stand firm. Hold the line! Don't abandon your post, lock your heels, show others to your right and left that fear is just an emotion easily dismissed.

We fight battles every day. We know the victory belongs to Christ. God's Son and promised Savior suffered, bled and died for all humanity. By His death He crushed Satan and destroyed his schemes to place you firmly in his clutches.

You are a member of the most victorious force in human history, a triumphant army on the march. Christ Jesus stood firm and won. He leads the column! We share in His magnificent victory. The Lord extends His gifts to us. He calls us through the waters of Holy Baptism. The old Adam drowned and the new Adam brought forth. Through the forgiveness of sins Christ touches the soul. In the sacrament of the altar we partake of the great feast of His body and blood. We eat, drink, partake of forgiveness, eternal life, and peace. As the redeemed in Christ, we live a life of vigilance, a vocation where

we stand firm. Through faith, we forever trust in Him. We extend this trust and love to those on our left and right. We reach out in mercy to our enemies and extend a hand of mercy.

However, many people might think it's not so much big battles but rather the daily grind that makes standing firm so difficult. It's a tough world out there. Life dishes ugly portions on our crowded plate. You come to chapel. You are tired. You might bow your head in prayer and look at the person in the next seat over, wondering: "Why is his cancer in remission and my loved one in the final stages of life?" Or, "Why is that person debt-free and happy?"

You hear news of a loved one in legal trouble or a friend struggling with addiction. Maybe you are working through issues of post-traumatic stress or loss of health. You wonder, is life worth it? All this talk of standing firm rings hollow — just a lot of chest thumping, and ultimately meaningless.

But despite life's daily moments of exasperation, there is good news — Christ, who makes all the difference in the world!

We turn to God's promises. In 1 Peter 2:9: "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession."

We take up the call of living as a people belonging to God, despite debt, loss, pain and countless assaults thrown at our battle line. Our only hope is Jesus our Savior, God's Son. Heb. 12:2 makes it clear, "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." It's about Jesus. We stand firm in Him! We persevere by letting Christ take the battle to the devil's doorstep.

Through Christ, we have direct access to God. Through prayer, we speak to our strength and our Redeemer. King David writes, "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven" (Ps. 107:28-30). This emboldens us to stand firm. With Christ, we stand alongside Him as victorious.

We have a responsibility to tell the world how we stand firm. The world needs to know about this vast armada that belongs to Christ. We are called to bring in those who are crumbling under the onslaught of Satan, those who are being crushed by his evil schemes. Start at home. Embrace your family with prayer. Take the good news to the workplace. Tell those going through similar circumstances to put their trust in Christ. At all times, stand firm — in Christ Jesus.





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Upon discharge from the armed forces, one needs to find a home, and a job. Perhaps one may choose to take advantage of their GI Bill and get their college degree. Within months of departing garrison, one is surrounded by 18-year-old freshmen whose greatest challenge is a date for Friday night. It's tough to fit in with that crowd when you have stood fire watch in Ramadi. Perhaps one still needs medical care. Horror stories of the VA are rampant. No wonder that anxiety levels go through the roof when one is discharged from the military, especially so if one carries nightmares from days gone by.

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has started a project named “Operation Barnabas.” Operation Barnabas seeks to train and equip people in our congregations to reach out to veterans and their families. Many volunteers are military who have made that transition. They speak the language and have navigated their way. Others have never served, but have sensed a need and made the determined effort to do whatever they can to offer help and support.

One day, after four years or 20 years, you will leave the military and face these same issues. You will have life-long

friends, but the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard will not miss a beat. They will continue to execute missions, and continue to do their jobs. We have a common bond with all who have and are wearing the uniform of our nation. Why not think about getting involved in Operation Barnabas at an LCMS congregation near you?

Operation Barnabas does train people to provide care to our military families and create a network for those families. However, the greatest gift Operation Barnabas has to offer is Jesus Christ our Lord. He has been a refuge in times of trouble, and as many hang up their uniforms for the last time, Christ again offers His refuge and His peace to them. His forgiveness is offered freely. His love and patience remain constant even as many question the absurdity and tragedy of war. God is big enough to take all the anger, rage, sadness and tears of a warrior. And still, He offers refuge for the weary, who at last stand ready to lay their weapons down, and rest. And when it is time for you to stand down, know that you are welcome in our ranks as we seek to serve our Lord and those He has entrusted to your care...your brothers and sisters in arms.

ENCOURAGEMENT

# Why Faith in the Fight ?

When we go on deployment we take everything necessary in order to win the fight. When a person is struggling with a difficult illness, serious life changes, problems at home, thoughts of hurting themselves or others, faith is so absolutely necessary and life-saving.

On the cross, on that windswept hill, the Lord conquered sin and crushed the power of Satan. He made you His children through the waters of Holy Baptism and He continues to forgive your sins. Faith in Christ Jesus is indispensable as we travel through the challenges of life in the military.

When it comes to struggling with life's many issues, remember the word: S-P-I-R-I-T-U-A-L.

- S**trengthens relationships, God holds us with His grip
- P**ace of mind knowing God is “on point”
- I**nspires us to rise above our situation
- R**econnects us with our loved ones
- I**nvigorates us to move in a positive direction
- T**ransforms us by His love
- U**nifies us into a body, a community, Christ's Church
- A**ttitude of positivity, we can adjust to the “new normal”
- L**ife principle (faith gives us a new mission statement: By God's help I can \_\_\_\_\_.)

