

LIVING IN THE COMBAT ZONE

Many of us sometimes feel as if we're living in a combat zone. It's as if a battle is raging on all sides and we can't seem to get focused. In combat, a critical factor for every soldier is whether he/she can outlast the battle in order to secure the victory. Therefore, *surviving* (coming through the struggle) means one of two things: (a) *either you have gained the victory*, or (b) *you have escaped to fight again*. But keep in mind, in spiritual warfare there may be spiritual captives! Many believers do not come through and end up defeated, bitter, backslidden and blaming God for what's happened.

2 Timothy 2:3,4 says, ***"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. For no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier (his commanding officer)."*** Enduring hardship as a good soldier is 'militaristic commitment', and this is essential in all spiritual warfare. God is looking for good soldiers, and the Greek word for "good" implies 'one who is fit, excellent and capable'. Therefore, a good soldier must possess all the correct virtues - he must be *committed, skilled, disciplined, fierce in battle, driven and hardworking*. You cannot live in the combat zone, and survive, without these characteristics.

Western society and the culture in which we live has little or no knowledge of real hardship. Hardship to many of us is driving a car that is four years old - rather than this year's model. And also, because hardship means 'commitment', we veer away from committing to anything.

The moment things get tough, instead of digging in and staying where God has called us, we say, *"Well, if it's tough, it cannot be God. So I'd better bail out quickly."* And most of the time we bail out into oblivion!

However, the devil hates it when he is confronted 'head-on' by believers with the right attitude. Those with a militant attitude, those who are committed enough to stand their ground in the face of any attack. When it gets tough, the tough get going! Timidity, apathy and slothfulness have no place in the life of a good soldier. So why don't we purpose in our hearts today, to take our rightful place in the ranks of God's mighty army and confront every situation head on. I believe, the fundamental key to victory is simply **walking in love, faith and hope**. In fact the nature and essence of an "overcomer" is being free of fear (*perfect love*), walking in faith (*living in the present*) and seeing the victory (*having future hope*). With this in mind let us now read **1 Thessalonians 1:2,3....** ***"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."***

Most of you have been taught to focus on faith and consider hope to be a weak alternative. However, God's word seldom separates the two because they should be operating side by side - in equal strength and with equal priority. Hope is merely an extension of your faith. When in spiritual warfare, it's what you've received now that will encourage you and build you up (*faith*), however, it is also what you see for the future that causes you to stand your ground and endure (*hope*).

You cannot be victorious unless you are grounded in love, walking in faith and filled with hope! Much has been said concerning faith, so let us examine 'hope' a little more closely. The scripture we have just read says, **"...and patience of hope."** The Greek word for patience which is used here is the same word that appears in **Hebrews 10:36**, **"For you have need of endurance (patience), so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."** It describes the unique capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances, not with passive complacency, but with hopeful fortitude that actively resists weariness and defeat. Quite simply, this is a steadfast commitment to outlast the battle - no matter what!

In the same way that *love*, *faith* and *hope* operate together; *love*, *endurance* (patience) and *hope* operate together also. *Hope* is an extension of *faith*, and *endurance* (patience) is an extension of *hope*. And they both flourish in an atmosphere of love! **Faith is the present possession of God's promises** (*believing you've received it right now*); **hope is the confident expectation** (*based on a solid certainty*) **that all of God's promises will be fully performed** (*in the near future*).

Faith puts substance to the things hoped for (*Hebrews 11*), and endurance (patience) is the evidence that hope exists. When engaged in spiritual warfare, if you have no 'hope' then our 'faith' cannot operate correctly. Likewise, when you have no 'hope', your capacity to endure difficulties or hardships is nullified (made void of power). Note also, endurance requires commitment.

You cannot come through any adverse circumstances unless you are prepared to **commit**. Commit to endure hardship! Commit to stay until you see the victory, until you outlast every battle. This is called endurance! Your affirmative action must simply be to **commit to endure** - to commit to see it through!

When facing hardship you may think, *"I just can't hold out."* You may convince yourself that, to expect anyone to continue under such circumstances, without giving up, would be expecting the impossible. So you may justify yourself for lack of trust in God. But remember, the Bible tell us that we can endure. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says God will not allow us to face a temptation that is beyond our ability to endure. Every temptation will be accompanied by a way of escape so we *can* endure it. This means you can endure **every** trial. If you think you just *"can't do"* what God said to do, or if you ever justify disobeying God, you have believed the devil's lie. What you need to do is to quit looking for excuses and look instead for the way of escape - or even better, the way of victory!

Psalm 34:19 - "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all." God may not remove all our troubles, but He makes sure we are able to endure them faithfully - all of them. **Romans 8:35-39** declares that no temptation or trial can separate us from the love of God. In them all, we are **"more than conquerors."** We are also **more** than conquerors because the problem can actually make us better people. The battle you are in does make you a better soldier! **"God is your refuge and your strength. A very present help in times of trouble"** (Psalm 46:1).

God has promised to help us “endure”, but we must make use of the help He provides. **Romans 15:4 - "...Through patience and comfort of the scriptures we might have hope."** There are several ways the scriptures will comfort and strengthen us when we are suffering hardship:

- (1) They help us understand that we may have to go through difficult times, but good can result from it.
- (2) They give us assurance that we can endure like others have - the Bible heroes mentioned.
- (3) They give evidence of God's wisdom and power, and His faithfulness to His promises.

All this strengthens your **faith** that God can and will help you endure. But only you have the power of choice! You can choose to carry on or choose to give up. The key to realizing your dream is to never give up and to know that it's never too late. Let me say that latter part again... It's NEVER too late to win the battle! When you start thinking it's too late you begin to believe time has passed you by and opportunities have been missed. But it's never too late if you never give up! Failure happens when you decide not to continue or think that the circumstances can not change. But in reality, opportunities are always there when the time is right - and time becomes right when you never give up! To achieve is to **commit to endure**. It takes a strong commitment to achieve but you must continue to **persevere** (at any cost).

Winston Churchill said, ***"This is no time for ease and comfort. It is time to dare and endure."***