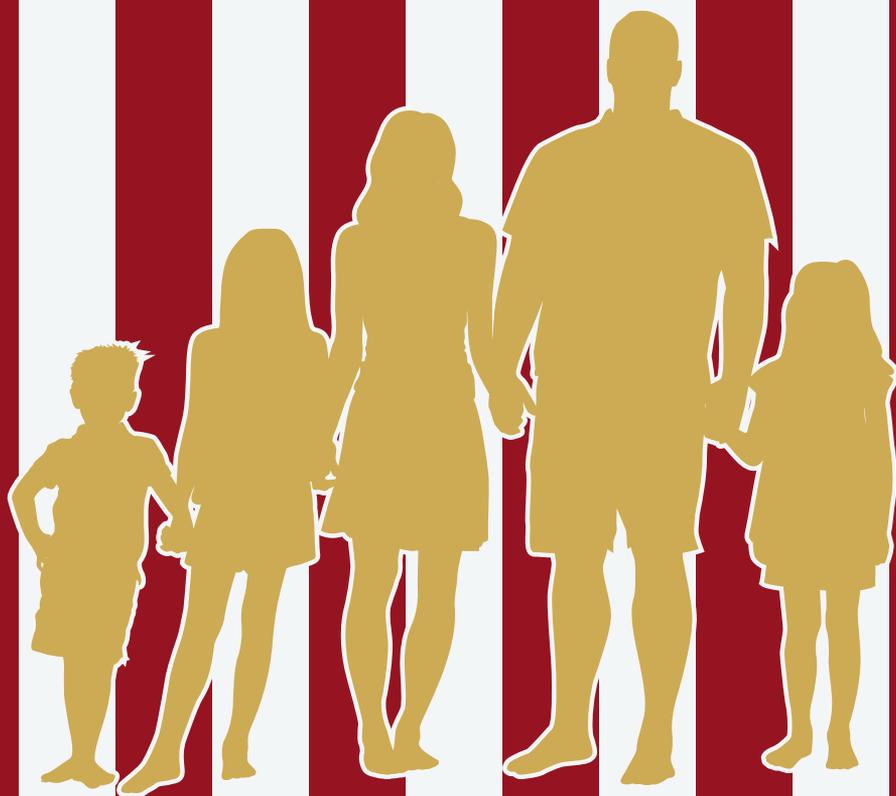


WHAT GOD SAYS *to military families*



a series of devotions



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ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGES

“I am love”



1 Corinthians 13:4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

He said, “I promise...” but she knew it wasn’t true. Or at least that’s what she told herself. She and her husband hadn’t had an intimate conversation in weeks. “This is day 92 of deployment. Doesn’t he know what it’s like back here? Doesn’t he know how lonely I am? It’s just me and the kids... ugh... the kids... don’t get me started.”

He was on the other side of the world having nearly the same thoughts. He had only shut himself off to her because he thought she was being unfaithful to him. “There are plenty of guys back there,” he thought, “She has been so distant lately. Can I trust her?”

The truth was when he left on deployment they had merely put a bandaid on a marriage that had suffered some deep wounds over the years and now they both were paying the price 6,000 miles apart. The distance and their own assumptions were a combination that seemed to be too much for any passion they once had. The feelings of love had vaporized.

Even in the midst of fleeting feelings there is hope—marriage can survive without feelings of love. That’s because love is not primarily a feeling. In 1 Corinthians 13, a section which is often read at Christian weddings, the author Paul describes love over multiple verses. He defines love in sixteen different ways and not one time does he describe love as an emotion. By the end of his list Paul says, “Love never fails.”

Love is less a something and more a *someone*. Paul’s understanding of love is not founded in humans, but in God’s love for us. God saw us for who we are: fickle, selfish, and dispassionate lovers, and he loved us anyway. He loved us by giving up the riches of heaven for us and by becoming human. He loved us by living a life of perfect persistent love.

Christ is love and he loved you so deeply that he died to forgive you. He took your broken and tattered marriage vows and he fulfilled them with his own life and love. Love certainly never fails because Jesus has never failed you.

The pursuit of a feeling of love in marriage is endless. But Jesus promises you his enduring love and he sealed that promise in his blood shed for you. Jesus gives you his patient, selfless, forgiving, protecting, and persevering love with no strings attached. Jesus’ love draws you into his faithful love and equips you with a new kind of love with which you can love your spouse.

ABOUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

“I will strengthen you and help you”



Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

His new job was only part of the problem. He was growing more tired and more worn out. When he was home, his phone would ring at the most inopportune times. On top of job stress he knew time at work meant time away from family. His wife wanted him home for dinner and his kids wanted nothing more than to play with dad. The last few months had been rough and no one in the family was sure how much more they could take.

Maybe you buy into the adage, “Stay strong!” You try to gather those last few drops of inner strength, but really you’re feeling worn and frayed. Maybe you self-medicate so the problems which make you weak disappear for a moment, but they are only there once you come to. Maybe you surround yourself with friends to whom you can vent and vent. It seems like free counseling, but only in that short moment.

What you need is help and strength which is not only outside of yourself but also beyond this world. God intersects your life with this promise, “I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you.” God promises to uphold you in a way that is greater than just solving the problems before you right now.

He has saved you from the darkest things which threaten your soul. Your sin cannot burden you because he took your sin from you. Death cannot keep you because Jesus rose from death and he now grants you life. These are foes which we are much too weak to face by ourselves, but where we are weak Jesus is strong. Where we fail Christ succeeds. Where we need help Christ comes to the rescue.

Certainly God can strengthen you for life, but more importantly, God strengthens your soul and spirit. What do you have to fear whether heavenly or earthly, if you know that you are upheld by your Father’s hands?

In moments of weakness and frailty, flee to the one who is your strength. In moments when you feel like you don’t even have the strength to flee to him, remember his promise to you, “I will strengthen you. I will uphold you.” He has and he will—the Lord is on your side, and you have nothing to fear.

ABOUT THEIR FUTURES

“I will always be with you”



Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

The middle of the night came and she woke up with a start. Her mind was racing, “How will the kids adjust? Will we like it there? What will happen to all our friends?” All she wanted was the assurance that things which seemed so unpredictable would, in fact, turn out to be alright. She wanted to be able to make a plan, but there was so much uncertainty. The future was becoming hard to control.

Control was being pried from her hands and she didn’t care for it much. She would make excuses like, “Well, I’m a planner. It’s who I am.” Behind that excuse, she wanted to plan so that she could have complete control of their lives. She wanted a God-like control over the future.

Though every person’s future looks different, there is one commonality. We can make the best of plans, but life happens and those plans will inevitably be upset. As much as we might wish we had a glass ball to peer into, we don’t actually know what will bear upon us in the future. If we actually think we have much control then we are deluding ourselves.

Even God doesn’t tell us what is coming around the bend in the impending future. But he does provide something that is consistent in the midst of the unpredictable. He promises to be with us no matter where we may go, no matter what has happened, what is taking place, or what lies in the future.

God says, “No matter what, I am with you to save.” That is a promise which is enough to sustain you for a lifetime because it is the one promise that God makes to you that does show you the future. It’s a promise which will sustain you until that future is reality.

In this sense you know your future. It lies on the other side of uncertain moves and unpredictable deployments. It lies on the other side of raising kids and retirement. Your future is laid up with God in heaven and you will one day be there with him.

Until then, he gives you a promise, “I am with you wherever you go.” He is with you every step of the way, carrying you in his loving arms, until he ushers you past the uncertainty of life and brings you to your heavenly home. Don’t be discouraged—your God is with you all the way home.

ABOUT THEIR FAMILIES

“I love you all”



1 Peter 4:8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

The baby wouldn't stop crying, her other two kids just wouldn't stop bickering. Instead of her children being a joy, they were becoming a burden and she was starting to blame her husband. While living in the midst of strangers, these were the people she was supposed to love the most. But she was finding it exceptionally difficult as her patience wore thin.

Her husband too was growing low on patience. After spending most of the day on the job and coming home at night he just wanted a nice home to come back to, but more often than not he found himself on the receiving end of sharply pointed verbal jabs. Add to the mix that family was coming for their first visit at the new duty station and love was growing faint. Their family home seemed more like a giant ball of stress rather than a place of love.

Whether during the holidays or every day life, the ideal of the happy loving family is often put to the test. Even loving a stranger can be tough. Loving a stranger might be slightly easier when compared to loving a person we have done life with—a person we have hurt and have been hurt by. Loving people consistently and deeply can seem nearly impossible.

Right after he makes his admonition to “love each other deeply” he says, “Love covers over a multitude of sins.” Peter isn't blind to the realities of life. Love certainly does cover over a multitude of sins. It covered over yours.

In love Jesus Christ took on your selfishness, he took on your belligerence, and he took on your own rudeness. In place of the multitude of your sins he gives you his life of compassion, gentleness, and civility. Jesus covers over your life with his own so that he sees you as a person who loves deeply.

He did the same for your family. Your child—when they're throwing a fit, God loves them. Your spouse—when they are being belligerent, God loves them. Your in-laws—when they are invading your space, God loves them. Your parents—when they have crossed the line, God loves them.

Though you may see things in your family that make them difficult to love, God sees them as his blood-bought children who are covered in Jesus' perfect life. When you understand God's love for you, then you are in a perfect place to show love to others. You are in a perfect place to remind your own family that God loves them—he's covered over their sin— and so you love them too.

ABOUT FEELING OUT OF CONTROL

“I am in control”



John 16:33

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

Their family had finally received orders and they were thrilled. They began looking into housing. The spouse began looking into job opportunities. They were even dreaming of all the things they could do when on leave.

Then the unthinkable happened. The orders were cancelled. They were going to a place that wasn't even on their list. All the hard planning and the hopes of fun were ruined. They were left feeling bewildered, frustrated, and angry.

Being a part of a military family, you know that you have little control over your future. There may have even been times when you knew that control was better in God's hands. But then in the midst of all of that, there were times when you still felt small, insignificant, and like a pawn.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples after he broke some pretty bad news to them. He was going to be betrayed, they wouldn't see him again, and life was going to get hard for them. They must have felt out of control. One of their own was going to hand their teacher over to Jewish authorities. Life didn't look too hopeful. There wasn't much they could do.

In the midst of a troubling situation, the disciples needed assurance that someone was in control, so Jesus made them a promise. “Don't worry,” he said, “What happens might cause you to be bewildered and frustrated, but I have overcome the world that causes you trouble.”

When someone has overcome something, he has conquered it. The victor holds control. When you feel small you have a big God who has cared enough to overcome the world that causes you trouble. When you feel insignificant you have a Savior who conquered death. When you feel like a pawn for others you have a God who is in control every step of the way.

He overcame the world by not only dying, but then rising to life. The world may get you down, but it cannot bury you because you too will rise to life. In this promise there is peace.

The surprises and troubles of life that come your way cannot trouble the peace that God has given to you. In the midst of a chaotic life and out of control world, Christ gives you everlasting peace. He gives you the promise that he is in control and he will bring you to eternal life.

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