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Devotional Thought
What’s in a WORD?

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“All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:8–9, NASB)

Like the text from 1 Peter 3, the military culture has key and important words. Words that grant freedom. Words of restraint. Words of commendation. Words of discipline. Words that flawlessly move thousands of tons of material and equipment. Words that make the enemy cringe in fear and our allies breathe a sigh of relief.

Sometimes we say long and complex things. An Operations order, or OPORD, to move over 50,000 soldiers and execute a command can be rather complicated. Or it can be one word. That word could be “Fire!” or “Attack!”, or something simple as “Go!”, the last word from a jumpmaster as you exit an aircraft.

Words form our identity. Words like “never leave a wounded comrade” and “protect and defend this nation” are more than just words. They are promises made and promises kept.

Look at what the apostle Peter says. Not just words, but powerful guidance for our lives as children of God redeemed under Christ. Look at the list! This is hard! We are called to live in harmony, with gentleness and respect, and not repay evil for evil.

Once, on a training exercise in the southern part of the United States, I became terribly thirsty. I was dry. I stopped sweating. I began to feel cold

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ENCOURAGEMENT
(in the middle of discouragement)

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“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Ps. 32:11)

There are many forms of discouragement: leadership lets you down, family disappoints you, your body fails, equipment fails. We all know what it looks like. It never seems to end. We live in a world where some of our simplest expectations often fall flat. A fellow member of the team lets you down. Ugh! Now everyone else has to work harder and longer to make “mission.” Perhaps you are minding your own business, working out regularly, watching your diet, and getting enough rest. Then, out of the blue, you injure yourself. A pulled muscle, a twisted ankle, a thrown-out back, or a wicked case of shin splints. After being laid up you feel like you are weeks behind your planned timeline to success and happiness. To make it worse, perhaps you are accused of malingering. Everyone has heard the phrase, “Pain is weakness leaving the body.” It’s not true. Pain means stop! Seek medical attention! It can be so discouraging.

Our Lord God, Who loves you, has something to say about discouragement. Scripture is filled with words of encouragement. But let’s cut to the chase! Even though you are a child of God redeemed under Christ and live as a baptized child, the ravages of what Paul in Romans calls the “Old Adam” still wreak havoc on your Christian walk. Take time to walk through Holy Scripture and discover the hundreds of passages addressing discouragement. The Lord God points to Him, the eternal Hope, Jesus, to overcome discouragement.

The first place to look for encouragement is in Holy Scripture. Joshua 1 is a beautiful and fitting passage:

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 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” (Joshua 1:7–9).

When God speaks we are to listen. He tells us to be strong and courageous. The Lord also tells us how to be valiant
and brave. Tie yourself to God’s Word (the Bible) by way of prayer and meditation on His Holy Word. The second item to remember is that God goes with us and stands by our side. Wow! Martin Luther wrote a hymn in which he calls this to mind:

“A mighty Fortress is our God
A trusty Shield and Weapon
He helps us free from every need
That hath us now overtaken
The old evil Foe
Now means deadly woe
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight
On Earth is not his equal.”

Jesus, Who destroys sin and brings newness to life, fights by your side and hands you the victory of life eternal.

Another passage to consider is in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The Apostle encourages readers to trust completely in the promises of Jesus. The result is placing anxiety on the back burner, replacing it with joy.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (PHIL. 4:4–7).

The greatest encouragement we have is in Jesus. He is our “Lamb of God” who took on Himself the sins of the world, including yours and mine. His death crushed death forever. We can never repay Him for what He has done, but we can rejoice. We celebrate His victory every day of our life. We do so by way of thanksgiving, the singing of hymns, going to chapel, and encouraging one another.

It’s tough out there! We look to our Lord and Savior Jesus to uplift us, sustain us and continue to pour out His wonderful gifts. Share that encouragement with others!

‘SANCTIFIED AND SAVED’

For our greatest encouragement, Luther points to Christ’s death — for us

If you were to ask Martin Luther where we find our greatest encouragement, he would respond:

“Thanks be to God, who has given us His Word and, besides, had His own Son die for us. Surely He did not do it in vain. Therefore, let us think of ourselves as sanctified and saved, which will appear when Christ has been revealed. Since He accepted the thief on the cross and received Paul after so many blasphemies and persecutions, we have no reason to doubt. Moreover, all of us must come to salvation like a robber and like Paul. Good God, what do you think? He gave His own Son. Therefore, He adds to this gift everything good He has. So, we have no reason to be afraid of His wrath.” (Dec. 14, 1531)

In this short paragraph, Luther tells us to:
➢ BE thankful.
➢ STAY in His Word.
➢ ACCEPT that God is doing a great work in your life. You do nothing.
➢ LIVE in hope and joyful anticipation and not in anxiety or fear.

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— not the appropriate sensation when training in a high-heat environment. The instructors wanted to know who was ready to quit. They would drop us for push-ups and flutter kicks. Then we would stand at attention. To my horror, I was out of water. Both canteens were bone dry. I felt so defeated. With no hope or pride, I turned to an unknown soldier next to me in formation. I asked him for a drink. He didn’t hesitate: He gave me his canteen. I drank a “short pull.” It was as if I drank pure joy! Water had never felt so invigorating or so refreshing! I was never so revitalized. I made it. I’m almost certain I would have failed out of this course were it not for that drink of water.

Could it be that something as simple as water got me through a difficult training event? Could it be that God placed this person in my life at the right moment so that I would continue to serve Him in the military? Of course, I say yes to both questions. Something as simple as giving someone something to drink can lay the foundation for salvation. In my case, it saved me from getting kicked out of an Army school.

So, when it comes to encouragement, check your canteen. There is enough for you to give to someone else. Be that person who offers a drink to one hurting and so thirsty. We do this by following the words of Peter in 1 Peter 3: “Be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.” These words are like fresh cold water to a person dying of thirst. This is not a lesson in civility, politeness, or good manners. Showing encouragement by way of actions can lead someone to Christ!

In the Gospel of John, Jesus engaged a hurting person, an individual living in sin. Her sin was killing her. Jesus engaged her at a well and they conversed about water. But it wasn’t just about water — His words were about forgiveness and eternal life. He concluded his comments in this way:

“Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:13–17, NASB).

We can lift one another up in simple ways that glorify the risen Jesus. Look for someone in your life, at your unit, in your formation that is “thirsting” and refresh them. Point them to Jesus, the “canteen of salvation” that will never run dry and leads to eternal life.