

On Mission
Devotional Guide

Alive Ministries
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ON MISSION #1 – GET IN THE REAL GAME

Well..., here you are, all four of you standing and staring at the door. Beside you is Jenn, – well, actually “Jennifer” – but she thinks that name is too ‘girly.’ And anyone that calls her “Jennifer” finds out real quick that she is no girly-girl. Next to Jenn is her twin brother, Jesse, but everyone just calls him Bub. Like Jenn, Bub grew up working hard on the family farm, so he’s pretty tough – almost as tough as Jenn. Bub may not be the sharpest plow in the barn, but he genuinely enjoys life and that enjoyment is contagious. Guess that’s why people enjoy being around him so much. And then there’s Ethan. Voted by your graduating class as the one most likely to have to be surgically removed from his GameBoy, Ethan’s not so bad for a techno-geek kinda guy.

So, here the four of you stand. On this side of the door is the life you’ve known all your lives – safe, secure, predictable..., and quite honestly, it’s growing more boring every day. On the other side, adventure..., and uncertainty. You take a deep breath, push the door open and the four of you walk inside.

A man in uniform behind the desk stands up tall and straight. “Hello, my name is Sergeant Akers. I bet you are the four that called about joining the Army. So, are you ready for a life of adventure?”

“I sure am!” Bub says. “I always liked going camping. And I like hiking through the woods sometimes. That’s the kind of stuff you do in the Army, isn’t it?”

“Aw, man, it’s like way cooler than that,” Ethan jumps in. “I’ve got this video game like where you can shoot RPG’s and 50 Cal’s, and you can nuke the enemy anywhere in the world. That’s what I’m joining the Army for, dude!”

You and Jenn just look at each other and roll your eyes. The recruiter has each of you sign some papers, and in a few short weeks the four of you are on a bus to boot camp.

To say the least, boot camp is tough. And it’s certainly not what Bub and Ethan expected. The drill sergeant made it quite clear that this isn’t a family camping trip, and it sure isn’t a little nature hike through the woods. And the hardest part of all was when the sergeant made Ethan pack away his GameBoy. “This ain’t no video

game we’re playing here, soldier!” the sergeant nearly shouted. “This is *real* life! And you’ll be dodging *real* bullets! And they will kill you *real* dead! Get in the *real* world, soldier, or you will be *real dead real quick!*”

What do you think Bub and Ethan feel as they find out what real soldiering is all about?

What these guys learned about the real world of the soldier is the same for Christianity. Many people think of spiritual battles as some kind of fantasy cyberspace game and don’t have the first clue about how real it is and what it involves. But notice what Paul said:

Suffer hardship with {me} as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life.... (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

What hardships do you think a Christian (what Paul calls “a good soldier of Christ Jesus”) might have to endure?

What kind of things could a Christian get tangled-up in, distracting him from the things he should focus on as a soldier for Christ?

To make it through the Army the four friends must be tough enough to endure the hardships, and to not let things distract them from their duties. Are you willing to make that same kind of commitment to your service for Jesus? _____

On Mission Truth #1: Real Christianity is serious business. You can do it with God’s help if you won’t wimp out because of the hard times and won’t get distracted by things that don’t really matter.

Today's Prayer: God, I realize that being a Christian is not an easy thing. Forgive me for being weak and giving up sometimes. Help me to see that it is real, give me the strength to do as I should, and help me not be distracted by the things that would keep me from doing my best for you. Amen.

ON MISSION #2 – GET EQUIPPED

The first day of boot camp is not exactly fun. The four of you and the other new recruits were introduced to “MadDog” Guthrey, your drill sergeant – but around him you just called him “Sir.” MadDog – uh, I mean Sgt. Guthrey – seems to enjoy making your first day quite miserable..., and you get the feeling that the rest of boot camp wouldn’t be much better.

As the first day of near torture ends Sgt. Guthrey barks, “Alright, all you new recruits fall out to the supply room. Fallout!”

“Boy, he’s a grouch!” Jenn says, but only after making sure the sergeant wasn’t close enough to hear.

“Maybe so,” Bub tosses back, “But hey, we’re fixin’ to get our BDU’s and other gear!”

“BDU’s?” you ask.

“That stands for ‘Battle Dress Uniform,’” Ethan volunteers. “That’s military talk for our camouflage clothes. And I hope we’ll also get M-16’s, RPG’s (that stands for ‘Rocket Propelled Grenades’), and anti-tank weapons, and . . .”

“Give it a rest, tech-boy!” Jenn interrupts. “I don’t think they’re going to issue us thermo-nuclear missiles on our first day in boot camp!”

“Well..., a guy can dream, can’t he?” Ethan whimpers.

The four of you join the rest of the platoon entering the supply warehouse. While Ethan is disappointed that he doesn’t get all the gear that he was hoping for, he is more than impressed with all the equipment that he sees in the warehouse.

“Look!” Ethan nearly shouts with excitement. “There is the ceramic body armor that can stop bullets. And there are the Kevlar helmets! They protect better than the steel helmet my grandfather wore in Vietnam. And look at....” And on and on he goes.

Bub just stands back and looks in amazement. “Wow! You mean they made all that neat stuff for us?”

What do you think it would feel like to go into battle as a soldier?

What do you think it would feel like to go into battle *without any weapons or protective gear*?

What the four discovered about being equipped in the Army is also true for Christians. Just like the Army commanders provide equipment for US soldiers, the Leader of the Christian soldier has provided the gear that the Christian needs to fight spiritual battles.

In the left column below are items that Paul (Ephesians 6:13-18) tells us the Christian soldier should be wearing. In the right column is the gear that modern soldiers are often equipped with. Connect the spiritual item with its physical counterpart.

<u>Spiritual</u>	<u>Physical</u>
Belt (which is truth) •	• Combat Boots
Breastplate (righteousness) •	• Kevlar Helmet
Shoes (knowing the gospel) •	• Load-bearing equip. (belt, etc.)
Shield (faith) •	• M-16 Rifle
Helmet (salvation) •	• Armored Personnel Carrier
The Holy Spirit’s Sword (Bible) •	• Body Armor Vest
Prayer •	• Radio

Going into battle is scary. But going into battle without equipment is just stupid. As a Christian you go into spiritual battle every day, whether you realize it or not. Do you face the battles with your gear on..., or are you an easy target for your enemy?

On Mission Truth #2: To be a Christian means you either get your spiritual gear on, or you become an easy target for Satan, our enemy. You gear up..., or get shot up – there’s no other option.

Today's Prayer: God, I realize that I haven't been careful to get geared up for spiritual battle. That's probably the reason I feel defeated so often. Forgive me, and please help me stay equipped for the battles that may come my way. Amen.

ON MISSION #3 – GET IN SHAPE

“It’s three o’clock in the morning, for heaven’s sake! Not another five-mile hike!” Bub moans as he heads for formation.

“And this time we have 30-pound packs to carry!” you mutter wiping sleep out of your eyes. “This is totally insane!”

Five miles through the woods with a 30-pound backpack is enough to make even Jenn start to grumble. “What’s he trying to do? Kill us?!”

“What’s he trying to do? He’s trying to set an example for you to follow,” a firm but friendly voice replies. You look around and it’s a lieutenant that you’ve seen around the base the last few days. “You bunch of sissies – moaning about an early morning hike. But did you ever stop to see who is setting the pace you are struggling to keep? It’s Sarge – a man more than twice your age! It’s much harder for him, but you don’t see him moaning, do you?”

“Is he trying to kill you?! HA! He’s trying to discipline you – to *train* you – to keep you *from being killed* once you get to the battlefield, soldier! Four years ago I was right where you are, beat like a yard dog and whining about how Sgt. Guthrey was trying to kill us with all the workouts. Then I went to Iraq, and let me tell you I was glad that Sarge had been so tough on us. Without him getting us in such good shape, we would have never lasted in the heat of the battle. What’s more, these early-morning marches prepared my squad to slip past a group of insurgents in the middle of the night – and my injured buddy that I carried across my shoulders weighed a lot more than that 30-pound knapsack. Yep, without Sarge’s forcing us to build up our strength and endurance, we would have never survived on the battlefield. ‘Trying to kill you?’ Not hardly! He’s trying to save your hide!”

Having to work hard in difficult situations is tough. But seeing someone else making it through even harder circumstances can help

us to see that things aren’t quite so bad and can give us the determination to go on. How does it make you feel to see an old man like Sarge persevering under the same hard work that you want to complain about?

The Bible says that the Christian has a similar example:

Consider [Jesus] who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:3)

According to this verse, what two things should Jesus’ example cause you to not do?

Just a few verses latter it says,

Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines... (Hebrews 12:6)

What do you think the word “discipline” means?

Usually we think “discipline” is some kind of punishment. But really it means “to disciple” or “to train.”

What are some of the difficult things that you deal with?

Since Jesus is our example to follow, what situations did Jesus face that were like yours, and how did He deal with them?

In what ways could Jesus be using difficulties to discipline (train) you for what the future may hold?

On Mission Truth #3: As you go through difficult times remember that Jesus has already gone through worse, and is our example of persevering. And the hard times of today may be what God uses to prepare us for the future.

Today's Prayer: God, I know that I have whined and complained about the hard times that come my way, but I never stopped to see that you went through much worse without complaining. I didn't realize that you may be using these to prepare me for the future. Please forgive me for complaining. Help me to grow stronger through the hard times that come my way. Amen.

ON MISSION #4 – GET TUNED IN

“Squad one-eight-seven,” the radio squawks. Your ears perk up since you are now in Squad 187. Boot camp is over, you’re now on the battlefield, and this is your first time to be in a real battle.

“Squad one-eight-seven. Your objective is the municipal building two blocks north of your current position. The building is occupied by the enemy. Be ready for heavy fire. Do you copy one-eight-seven?”

“Base, this is one-eight-seven. We copy,” your lieutenant replies. “Two blocks north. Prepared to return fire. Over.”

“Squad two-one-niner. Squad two-one-niner. Your objective is building one-three-one one-half mile north-by-northeast of your position. Do you copy? Over.”

Silence. This silence disturbs you because Squad 219 is supposed to be on the street just one block to your right. “Why don’t they answer?” you wonder, fighting back the panic.

“Squad two-one-niner, do you copy?”

The radio may be silent, but in seconds it’s the only thing that is. Suddenly there is a loud explosion just a few feet away from your squad. You hear all kinds of gunfire coming from the municipal building which is now only half a block away. Your lieutenant orders the squad to return fire and then has a couple of mortars shot into the building. Within seconds the radio screams, “Squad 187.

Squad 187. Discontinue your fire *immediately*. I repeat, discontinue your firing.”

“And who is this?” your lieutenant demands, shouting into the radio microphone?

“This is Lieutenant Davis of squad two-one-niner. Your fire is hitting us!”

“Squads one-eight-seven and two-one-niner, this is Major Baker. What in the world is going on out there?! Fall back to your secure positions *immediately*. Lieutenants, in my office *NOW!*”

The squads fall back to their secure positions. The lieutenants go immediately to the major’s temporary office – a small room with no doors just down the hall from where your squad is sitting. The building also serves as a first aid station, and you see that three of Squad 219’s soldiers were hit – *and one of them was Bub!* As you rush over to check on him everyone in the room hears the lieutenants being chewed out down the hall.

“Lieutenant Davis, what were you doing at the municipal building?” the major demands.

“We saw the building, knew it was important and decided that we should take it, sir.”

“Taking that building was an excellent idea, Lieutenant – an excellent idea. In fact, it was so good that *I* had already thought of it and had assigned it to Squad 187. Now, thanks to you we not only *don’t* have the municipal building, we also *don’t* have building 131, and worst of all, *three of your squad have been shot!* And some of those men were hurt by friendly fire! Why didn’t you follow your radioed instructions?” The major is so mad he could nearly explode!

“I guess our radio was out, sir.”

Bub looks up at you and says, “That’s not exactly right. The radio wasn’t *out*, it was *off!* The Lieutenant told our radio man to not turn it on – that he could do just fine without it.”

How does it make you feel to know that your friend was shot because his lieutenant wasn’t listening to instructions?

For the Christian the Holy Spirit is a lot like the radio for the soldiers in the battlefield. Jesus said,

"The Spirit...will guide you into all the truth..." (John 16:13)

What is likely to happen to you and to your fellow Christian soldiers if you fail to listen to what the Spirit is telling you?

Do you regularly "tune-in" to hear what the Spirit has to say? _____

On Mission Truth #4: God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us know what we should do. If we fail to listen to Him, it could hurt us and hurt others.

Today's Prayer: God, I haven't thought much about the need to listen to the Holy Spirit and His directions. But now I know that I need to "tune-in" to Him and He will lead me away from things that will hurt me and others. I'm sorry for failing to listen in the past, and I ask that you help me hear and understand His directions from now on. Amen.

ON MISSION #5 – GETTING INVOLVED

Well, it's been a long day of soldiering, but it looks like you have some free time after evening chow. You decide to check your email, and notice that Jenn sent an email to you, Bub and Ethan.

"You guys won't believe what happened yesterday. You know how disappointed I was that the Army not only split us up after boot camp, but they put me in some backup supply company. How boring is that? It's bad enough that I'm not in the fighting, but what's worse I'm not even in the main company that supplies the front line. This is *not* what I joined the Army for!

"Well, our colonel got a call yesterday afternoon. Seems the primary supply convoy got pinned down by enemy fire, and couldn't make it to the front. The commander on the front line was really upset because they were getting seriously low on ammo and fuel, so

the colonel sent *us* to the front with a new load of supplies. Boy, were those guys glad to see us! By that time they were out of ammunition, and were scared the enemy was going to take them out. But once we got there they were able to continue to fight, and by the end of the day they had secured the village. I may not have been one of the soldiers shooting at the enemy..., but it sure felt good to know that I was a part of team that ran the bad guys out of town!"

How would it feel to work hard through boot camp then feel like you were not helping your side win the war?

Do you sometimes feel the same way about your Christianity and your church work? What kind of contribution are you making to the "team?"

Many people feel something like this: "I'm not the pastor. I'm not a Sunday school teacher, or pianist, or anything else. I'm just not an important part of the church." Do you ever feel that way? _____

How do you think Jenn felt when she realized that she actually was a contributing part of the team?

The truth is, every Christian *is* a part of the team and has an important job to do. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians that although we may have different responsibilities, God gives each of us – that

includes you – a “gift” (here he calls it a “manifestation”) which allows us to be a significant part of the team:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Some of the gifts that God gives His people include:

- Evangelism – A special ability to share salvation with the lost.
- Prophecy – A special ability to proclaim the truths from the Bible.
- Teaching – A special ability to explain what the Bible means.
- Exhortation – A special ability to encourage others by applying Bible truths to their lives.
- Pastoring – A special ability to be the caring spiritual leader of a group of people.
- Administration – A special ability to organize people and things to better do God’s work.
- Giving – A special ability to make money to support God’s work.
- Service – A special ability to help do tasks for the church and for others.
- Mercy – A special ability to help hurting or needy people.

God doesn’t give anybody all the gifts. Instead, He gives each Christian at least one gift, and sometimes even two or more. Ask God to show you which gift(s) He has given you, then start learning how to use it to become a useful part of the team. Your comrades on the front line need your help. The enemy is the only one hoping that you won’t do it.

On Mission Truth #5: God has given you a special “gift” that will allow you to be an important part of His team. You need to find out what that gift is and prepare to use it.

Today's Prayer: God, I've never really thought of being a special part of your team before. I never realized how much you want me to be a part. Forgive me for not taking my role seriously in

the past. Help me to know how you have gifted me and how you wish for me to use that gift in your service. Amen.

NEEDED: A FEW GOOD MEN..., AND GALS TOO

Hello. My name is Don Burke, and I’m the one that wrote these devotionals for you. For years I have enjoyed watching war movies and documentaries. It’s fascinating to learn about the great men and women who are or have been soldiers, and hear the great things they have done. But the truth is, I’m just on the sidelines watching..., I’ve never made the commitment to actually join in the exciting life of a US soldier.

Many people – and maybe you are one of them – are the same way about Christianity. It’s something to watch and to even talk about sometimes, but it’s always from the sidelines. You’ve never stood before God (in your heart), and joined up. Maybe today is the time for you to “sign up.” If you feel God stirring your heart to make that commitment, here is all you have to do:

1. Admit to yourself and to God that you've done things that the Bible says are wrong ("sin"), and you deserve to be punished because of that.
2. Repent – be genuinely sorry for the wrong things you've done, and genuinely desire to turn away from them.
3. Ask God to forgive you.
4. Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you as a substitute for the punishment that you deserve.
5. Ask Jesus to save you.

On Mission Truth: Not everyone that talks about the battle or watches the war is really a soldier. We have all sinned and therefore deserve to die. When God stirs our heart, making us aware of all this, He invites us to repent of that sin, ask for His forgiveness, and accept Jesus as our Savior. Once we've done that from the heart, we are truly a soldier of God.

A Sinner's Prayer: God, I know that I have done things that the Bible says I shouldn't have – that I have sinned. I am really sorry for

that, and I ask that you forgive me. I also ask that Jesus save me – not because I'm good, but because He is. God, I give my life to you, and I want you to make me a soldier of Christ. Amen.

If you make this decision, I'd love for you to email me and tell me about it. Or if you have any questions, I hope you will email them to me. My address is PotosiPastor@gmail.com.