

BOOT CAMP

As a child growing up in Canada, I really wasn't affected all that much by the Second World War.

Oh, there were certain items such as sugar, etc., that were rationed, but on the farm, there was always plenty to eat.

However, I can remember my mother shaking cream in a sealer for ever so long to make a little extra butter.

I don't think the farmers were supposed to skim off their cream, but everyone was doing it.

Years later, when Eleanor and I met, she told me about a labour-saving method her mother used to do the same thing.

She would wrap her jars of cream in towels,
so they wouldn't break, and then tie them
to the agitator of her washing machine.

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Well, in those days, all of the neighbouring
farms were connected on a single
telephone line.

In the country, where customers were miles
apart, a party line was really the only
economical way of doing it.

But there were certain limitation.

For instance, subscribers were encouraged to
keep their conversations short, and, of
course, there was always the possibility
of eavesdroppers.

Basically, the system worked like this.

Each customer had a wall-mounted telephone
in a rather large wooden case.

On the side of the phone, there was a handle
you could crank to generate the

electricity necessary to ring your phone and everyone else's on the line.

In order to distinguish who was being called, each customer had their own code. You might be a long and a short, while your neighbour's would be a long and 2 shorts, and so on.

Also, each phone contained a battery that powered your transmitter (or your mouthpiece) and the earphone of the person you were calling.

If someone picked up the phone to eavesdrop, their receiver would drop the voltage just a little, and, as a result, lower the volume.

So, if you listened carefully, you could tell if anyone else was on the line.

Well, there was a lady in the neighbourhood who was not well liked.

First of all, she was suspected of being a hoarder, which meant she was getting food illegally that was supposed to be rationed.

And not only that, but this nosy lady was listening in on other people's conversations.

Yes, she was one of those detestable eavesdroppers.

Now, as a man, I have no idea how the ladies knew that particular lady was the eavesdropper.

Nor do I know how they discovered she was illegally hoarding food.

If you really want to know the answers to those questions, you'll have to ask your wife when you get home.

Well, anyway, a couple of the ladies decided they were going to get even.

As pre-arranged they phoned each other, and when they knew this lady was on the line, the one of them told the other that the food inspector was coming up the road.

According to some very reliable gossip, the detestable eavesdropper panicked, and dumped a large bag of sugar down the cistern.

So you see, not all of the *fighting* was done on the front line.

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And it's surprising how much we kids knew, or thought we knew, about the war.

We collected cards out of cereal boxes that contained pictures of airplanes and tanks, etc., and along with the adults, we listened to the news on the radio.

In fact, I remember asking my mother if there would be news anymore when the war was over.

After all, what else would there be to talk about?

Well, that was many years ago, and there's still enough bad news going around to fill the airwaves.

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And, of course, every kid knew about that dreaded introduction into the army called *boot camp*, or basic training.

During that time of intense activity, the new recruits were pushed to the point of exhaustion by officers who showed no mercy.

You were up at dawn, forced to march with a heavy pack on your back, and in all kinds of weather.

And then, of course, there were those obstacle courses.

You climbed over and slithered under every type of barricade, and often in the mud.

But all this seeming brutality had a very practical goal in mind.

The army was taking store clerks, delivery men, factory workers, and accountants, and turning them into an army that could face life-and-death situations, and, hopefully, prevail.

Basically, you learned two lessons.

You must *obey* your superiors, and you must *ignore* your physical needs.

You would never be too tired to stay awake on sentry duty, and you would never be too worn out to obey orders.

You must endure hardship, and carry on.

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Certainly, that makes sense under such life-and-death situations, but why do we find the apostle Paul insisting upon the same thing?

Yes, Timothy, you ---"**must endure hardship
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.**"

His instructions were the same, because the situation was the same.

No, Timothy wasn't a Roman soldier, but he was *under siege*, and so are we.

Yes, we are living in the middle of a war. It is a war that began in heaven, and has spilled over onto the earth.

Ever since that fateful meeting in the Garden of Eden, there has been a spiritual war going on down here.

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And even though Satan's cohorts are invisible, there was no one more aware of their existence than that great warrior, the Apostle Paul.

And there was no one more determined to warn the believers of the dangers they faced.

Listen to his admonition in Ephesians 6:11-12---**"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

Yes, Paul was a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and one who had spent many years on the front line.

And at the end of a lifetime of faithful service, he could say ---**"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."**

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And now, as he finishes the race, he passes on the imperatives of being a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

2 Tim.2:3 **"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."**

We discover two pieces of advice in this verse which are closely connected.

I would like to look at the second one first.

"No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

Paul is envisioning a soldier with his pack on his back.

Although it is heavy, in terms of his needs, it has been reduced to the bare essentials.

Certainly, there are a great many comforts that would have made his life more pleasant, but he would have needed a U-Haul to carry them.

No, a soldier must not get entangled with non-essentials or he will be rendered ineffective.

That's the hard facts of warfare.

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And, in spiritual warfare, the principle is just the same.

Certainly, there are a great many things in this world that can be enjoyed, and it might be God's will that you enjoy them.

But if they stand in the way of God's particular purpose for your life, then they must be set aside.

There is only so much time and effort that can be expended in a lifetime and God's agenda must come first.

So then, **"No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."**

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And then Paul points out another imperative, an imperative that we are going to focus on in this particular lesson.

"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Hardship comes in many forms, and has the potential of producing discouragement.

And as I'm sure we all know, discouragement often leads to defeat.

And, in my opinion, there is almost no one more qualified to speak on the subject of hardship than the Apostle Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, we get a bird's-eye view of his experiences **"---in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure,**

in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."

As you might have noticed, Paul's trials fitted into three categories.

First of all, there was outright *persecution* from those who were the enemies of Jesus Christ.

Paul was whipped, stoned, and thrown into prison, and not only by the Gentiles, but by his own countrymen.

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Secondly, there were the normal consequences of *travel* in that day.

It was both exhausting and dangerous, but absolutely necessary for someone who was the apostle to the Gentiles.

And added to the physical hardships of travel, Paul often found himself hungry and thirsty, and suffering from lack of sleep.

Nevertheless, he was determined to endure physical hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Or to put it in his own words, "--- I
**discipline my body and bring it into
subjection, lest, when I have preached to
others, I myself should become
disqualified."** 1 Corinthians 9:27

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But in addition to these physical
privations, he had a much more personal
burden to bear.

It was the burden placed upon him by the
churches.

In fact, the epistles are principally
written to address problems in the
assemblies.

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So then, Paul was well acquainted with
hardship, and he was convinced that it
was the natural consequence of spiritual
warfare.

Nevertheless, you must carry on.

Yes, Timothy, you **"---must endure hardship
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."**

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And it's a lesson that continues today.

When Eleanor and I were raising our little family, we had the privilege of becoming friends with a missionary couple by the name of Frank and Erne Stanley of the Sudan Interior Mission.

After many years of faithful service in Nigeria, they had returned to Canada, and were visiting in our home.

In fact, during that last visit, Frank had his first bad spell which took him home a year or two later.

I remember an incident that he told us about concerning his early days as a young missionary in Africa.

He had been assigned to a veteran missionary by the name of Tommy Titcomb.

One day, after trekking for hours, Frank laid down on the path, thoroughly convinced he could go no further.

The old missionary didn't say a word in rebuke.

He simply marched around him, singing *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

The young missionary got back on his feet and carried on...and on...and on.

Years later, after a life of faithful service, he and his second wife Erne (for his first wife had died on the mission field) said goodbye to the African brethren who loved them so dearly.

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But there is more than one reason for enduring hardships, and not all of them are legitimate.

Yes, as in everything else, Satan has his counterfeits.

In the same way that he substitutes good works for the finished work of Christ, so he encourages the abuse of the body for the wrong reason.

The theory is, if we punish our bodies, if we do penance, we can wipe away our sin debt or gain a greater degree of holiness.

But that's not what the Word of God teaches.

In fact, Colossians 2:20-23 includes the neglect of the body in a long list of the doctrines of men.

"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These

things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

Nevertheless, thousands of sincere individuals still practice the punishment of the body as a pathway to holiness.

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I remember a young man I met while working at Canadian Westinghouse in London, Ontario.

His father was English and his mother was East Indian, but somehow he ended up as a homeless urchin living on the streets of India.

Had it not been for the Anglican Church who rescued him and brought to Canada, he would have probably died there.

But now he was a well groomed and likable young man, and very active in the Anglican Church.

I remember him telling me about a holy man in India.

This poor man had spent years sitting cross-legged in the street, looking straight into the sun.

And by the way, if there are any children listening to this, don't do that, not even for a minute, as it will damage your eyes.

Of course, by now, this poor man was totally blind, but following the heat of the sun on his face, continued his daily ritual.

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And, in the history of the Catholic Church, we can read about monasteries where monks practiced the punishment of the body.

They endured self whippings, cold and hunger, and loss of sleep, in a search for holiness, or in a vain attempt to accomplish what Jesus has already secured.

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Well, I don't want to show any disrespect for such suffering, but a little humour might be a welcome relief from what has been a rather sobering subject.

As the story goes, and it's only a story, a young man decided to join a monastery. As was the custom, he placed himself under a vow of silence.

In fact, he was only allowed to say *two words* at the end of each year.

After his first year of silence, he was brought before the abbot to say his two words.

With a very earnest expression on his face,
he said "Bed hard."

And then he went back for another year of
silence.

At the end of the second year, his two words
were "Food bad."

And then, after three years of silence, he
simply said "I quit."

To which the abbott replied---"I thought you
would.

I've heard nothing but complaints ever since
you got here."

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Well, we've gone from the sublime to the
ridiculous.

I think it's time we looked at our greatest
example of enduring hardship.

Of course, I am referring to our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Matthew 4: 1-4 "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

And there were two more temptations to follow, but we will only be looking at the first one today.

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As you will remember, Jesus' temptations occurred just before He was to begin His public ministry.

If we had anything to do with it, we would have suggested a period of rest before embarking on such a stressful 3-½ years. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways.

So instead of a rest, the Holy Spirit prescribed a test.

And the first test would be completely focused on the physical.

Jesus was to be denied of His basic need for food until further notice.

Oh, we know it was to last for 40 days and 40 nights, but I don't really think Jesus knew.

And the longer it lasted and the hungrier He got, the more He had to trust the wisdom of His Heavenly Father.

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Sometimes I think we are unduly biased by the fact that we realize Jesus is God.

Sometimes we tend to forget that He lived among us as a *real man*, operating under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, being virgin born, He hadn't inherited Adam's sin nature as we have.

But aside from that very important difference, He was subject to all the physical limitations that we are so familiar with.

He could feel pain, get hungry when He missed a meal, and feel the effects of a hard day's work.

Or, to put it in the words of Hebrews 4:15, He **"---was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."**

Yes, during those 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus would be just as hungry as we would be.

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Now, I'm sure we all understand why Jesus' incarnation was necessary.

Only a *real* man, and a perfect man, could be an acceptable sacrifice for man's sins.

However, at least in Satan's opinion, the incarnation was a chink in Jesus' armour.

Down through the ages, the Son of God had always been invincible.

But, as a man, and particularly as a helpless *baby*, Satan saw a unique opportunity.

And he wasn't long in pressing his advantage.

Through that evil man Herod, all the babies in Bethlehem were slaughtered in an attempt to destroy Satan's ancient enemy.

Yes, he saw the opportunity of ridding himself of the One who was destined to crush his head.

Of course, Satan's evil scheme was doomed to failure.

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But now, after 40 days of fasting, he saw his second opportunity to derail God's agenda.

However, this time he wasn't interested in destroying Jesus.

No, he wanted to save Him.

Or to be more correct, he wanted Jesus to save Himself.

You see, there were two aspects to this temptation that made it so lethal.

First of all, Jesus was a man and a man in desperate need.

And secondly (and this is what made it such a great opportunity) being the Son of God, He could do something about it.

So, with all this in mind, Satan chose his words very carefully.

Matthew 4:3 **"If You are the Son of God,
command that these stones become bread."**

Now, there are two points we must consider here.

First of all, Jesus didn't know *when* His Heavenly Father would end the fast.

And secondly, He knew He could end it whenever He liked.

He was the Creator of all things.

But the moment Jesus stepped outside of His God's will, the moment He ceased being God's obedient servant, Satan saw the possibility of making Him *his* servant.

In fact, it wouldn't be long before he would make that offer---"**All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.**"

Yes, one temptation leads to another, and we need to remember that when Satan tries to slip in the thin edge of the wedge.

But in Jesus' case, Satan was beat before he started.

No, Jesus' intense hunger was not even considered.

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

And to put it in a nutshell, that was the guiding light of Jesus' entire ministry.

In spite of all the suffering that lay ahead, Jesus would live according to *every word* that proceeded **"from the mouth of God."**

Or to put it in the words of Hebrews 5:8---

"though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

He would leave His comfortable bed and the well-established trade of a carpenter to

spend most of His nights sleeping on the ground.

Yes, that would be His only accommodation at the end of many a long day.

And it would be the only accommodation He could offer His disciples.

Remember His response when a scribe expressed a desire to follow Him.

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

Oh, there might be a few nights spent at Mary and Martha's house, which would be a welcome relief, but for the most part, it would be camping out without a tent.

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And for the Master Himself, there was not always the possibility of any rest at all.

Sometimes, even after a very long day in the midst of a demanding crowd, He would find it necessary to spend the night in prayer.

And in the garden of Gethsemane, prayer would continue to be His top priority even while His disciples slept.

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And His need for food was not always His priority either.

Remember the time when He was at Jacob's well just outside of Sychar?

He had walked a long way that morning, and it must have felt good to be sitting down.

But being the middle of the day, and with the sun directly overhead, He was thirsty.

Actually, that wasn't the real reason why He asked for a drink, but it was a legitimate reason.

I don't know if He ever *got* that drink.

Initially, the woman gave Him an argument, not a drink, and when she found out who He really was, she **"left her waterpot"** and rushed into the city.

And not only was He tired and thirsty, but He was *hungry*.

In fact, He had sent His disciples into the city to buy food.

Well, that wasn't the real reason why He sent them away (after all, it doesn't take 12 men to buy dinner), but it was a legitimate reason.

Yes, Jesus was hungry, but when they got back, He was too busy to eat.

"I have food to eat of which you do not know."

And when they asked Him what that food might be, He said---"**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.**"

And then, possibly looking at the Samaritans coming out of the city in their white robes, He added---"**Do you not say, 'There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!**"

Yes, Jesus was hungry, but dinner could wait.

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Getting back to Jesus' first temptation in the wilderness, the one characteristic that made it so lethal was the fact that He was completely capable to *doing* something about it.

He could have ended His extreme suffering simply by speaking the word.

And it was this same ability to overrule that made those last decisive hours so excruciating.

No, Jesus was never a victim of circumstance.

For instance, He had the power to destroy that ugly mob when they came out to arrest Him.

And when Peter stepped in to fill the perceived deficiency, He stopped him with the words **"---do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"**

But then He added **"How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"**

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And then, there was the extreme physical suffering preceding His crucifixion.

He was beaten so violently about the head that Isaiah 52:14 tells us----**"His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men."**

And Psalm 129: 3 describes the merciless flogging He received, with these words---**"The plowers plowed on my back; They made their furrows long."**

And yet He steadfastly refused to accept deliverance.

Yes, **"---He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."**

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But even the most disciplined body has its limitations.

Jesus had been up all night.

He had lost a lot of blood, due to the flogging He received.

And now He was required to carry a heavy cross to the place of execution.

And He made every effort to do so.

John 19:17 **"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place of a Skull*, which is called in Hebrew, *Golgotha*."**

But somewhere along the way, His physical strength deserted Him, and He collapsed under the load.

That's when those rough Roman soldiers commandeered Simon, a Cyrenian, to carry His cross.

Relieved of His burden, Jesus walked on, step after painful step to the place of execution.

Actually, it *wasn't* the place of execution.

It was the place of *sacrifice*.

And Jesus was determined that His physical
body would reach that place of sacrifice.

Yes, **"Sacrifice and offering You did not
desire, But a body You have prepared for
Me."**

Oh, I'm sure the cruel lash was applied to
drive Him on, but that wasn't His
motivation.

No, it was Jesus' determination to keep His
divine appointment ---**"Behold, I have
come--In the volume of the book it is
written of Me--To do Your will, O God."**

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Yes, Jesus' temptations were always the
same.

**"If You are the Son of God, command that
these stones become bread."**

"If You are the Son of God," call for those
"twelve legions of angels."

And then, as He endured all the physical suffering that crucifixion guarantees, and as God's judgment for our sin was about to fall upon Him, Satan played his last card.

"If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."

But He *wouldn't* come down.

He had given His back to those who struck Him and His **"cheeks to those who plucked out the beard."**

He had not hidden His face from shame and spitting.

He had endured the agony of the cross and the mockery of the crowd.

And now He would commit Himself to the righteous Judge Who would make His soul an offering for sin.

No, He would *not* come down.

He would hang there between heaven and earth
until He could utter that cry of victory--
--"It is finished!"