



"There is in the worst of fortune the best of chance for a happy change."

—Euripides

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Soldier On! (Part Two)

We all face trials in life, some of them quite difficult. A few of them may be so devastating that our first reaction is to curl up in a ball and give up. [God](#), though, does not want us to allow hardships to paralyze us. Instead, He wants us to learn the lessons inherent in the trial and move forward in [faith](#), better and more mature for the experience. As the apostle Paul writes in [Philippians 3:12-14](#), "I press on . . . reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal." His life was an example of soldiering on despite adverse circumstances.

We need to consider Jonah as well. The prophet flatly refused to do the job that God had commissioned him to do, to preach a dire warning of impending judgment to the Ninevites. Instead, he turned from Him and fled as far as he could in the opposite direction!

The Ninevites, Israel's enemies, were a horrible, vicious, and sadistic people, and this fact undoubtedly put Jonah in a state of inner turmoil. He knew that God was patient, [merciful](#), and forgiving. What if they listened and repented? Would He forgive the cruel foes of His people?

Clearly, Jonah's attitude was less-than-perfect, but even so, after God granted him [repentance](#), he ultimately obeyed His charge, spending just under a month and a half preaching God's threats of the Ninevites' coming destruction. The results were the remarkable contrition and repentance of a thousand times more people than [Jesus](#) converted during His three-and-a-half-year ministry! Despite his qualms, Jonah forged ahead, and God worked mightily through him.

Mark, also called John Mark, authored [the Gospel](#) that bears his name. His mother was named Mary, and it was in her house that the brethren gathered to pray for Peter when Herod imprisoned him ([Acts 12:12](#)). Peter came to her house after an angel released him.

Later, Mark went with Paul and [Barnabas](#) as they traveled on their early missionary journeys ([Acts 12:25](#)). Barnabas was Mark's cousin, and it is possible that he encouraged and inspired the younger man to accompany them as they preached the gospel. The Bible does not say exactly why, but Mark abandoned them in Pamphylia, returning to Jerusalem ([Acts 15:38](#)). His departure must have been controversial because, when Paul wanted to revisit the cities that they had preached in, he adamantly refused Barnabas' suggestion to take Mark with them.

Perhaps Paul was set against Mark coming with them because he thought his attitude was not suitable for one doing God's work. Barnabas, whose very name highlights his compassionate nature, seems to have had a less-harsh view and sought to give Mark another opportunity to redeem himself for his earlier actions. However, the strife between the two apostles was so intense that they decided to separate in their missionary work. Barnabas and Mark sailed to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas through Syria and Cilicia, where they strengthened the churches of God ([Acts 15:39-41](#)).

Happily, the story does not end on that sour note. The split occurred during their first missionary journey, about AD 46-48. However, some fifteen years later, near the end of his life, Paul calls this same Mark a "fellow [worker] for the [kingdom of God](#)" ([Colossians 4:10-11](#)), and later asks Timothy to bring Mark when he came because "he is useful to me for ministry" ([II](#)

[Timothy 4:10-11](#)). We can infer that, although Mark apparently shirked his responsibilities at first, he repented, and Paul welcomed him back to the ministry.

The remorse exhibited by Jonah and Mark led to a change for the better in their conduct. They did not sink into depression and listlessness but picked themselves up and took steps to remedy their situations. They had a never-give-up attitude that eventually bore fruit.

In the decades since his "friendly fire" incident in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, narrated in Part One, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Hayles has not given up either. He cannot bring back the men he killed, but he is diligently seeking to save the lives of today's soldiers. He asserts, "I want this fixed. . . . We're hurting and killing people with friendly fire all the time. It's a terrible problem."

Undeterred by his mistakes and with a dedication that few others understood, Hayles worked with another engineer to develop a system that could distinguish between friendly and enemy troops. They have invented and patented a transmitter that sends microwaves through a weapon-mounted scope to its target. A small transponder carried by every U.S. and allied soldier answers with a coded signal bearing the soldier's name and unit.

As Hayles embarked on his quest to prevent such horrific accidents from ever happening again, a friend gave him a Bible inscribed with a portion of [Jeremiah 29:11](#): "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD." His determination almost ruined him financially, but in 2008, Congress finally funded his project. Now in his early seventies, he is the president of a small electronics company in Texas. He holds several U.S. patents, including at least three he developed in the aftermath of his own tragedy.

Braelyn Leggett of Louisiana State University writes on [Odyssey.com](#):

Mistakes don't define you. What defines you is how you learn from them and how you bounce back. . . . [They're] done and over with. You can't take it back now. What you can do is move on and grow and learn from whatever happened.

She later offers some encouraging words similar to what I have written in the front of my own Bible: "Each day is a new day," and she concludes, "Own your mistakes, don't try to hide them and deny them. Keep going, become better."

Knowing our penchant to make mistakes, our God is merciful. Besides His forgiveness, He has also given us a purpose and a hope, both of which push us forward. We need to use the lessons we have learned from our mistakes and move on. As Paul urges us, forget those things that are behind and press on toward the goal.

Such are our marching orders: Remain on station. Do not run away from responsibilities. Never, ever give up. Admit shortcomings and failures, repent, and soldier on.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Looking Forward \(Part 2\)](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Which button would someone have to push in order for us to leave the truth of God? The doctrines of grace and Christian liberty have been perverted to become synonyms for tolerance of sin. Similarly, the doctrine of faith was twisted into spiritual inactivity or an anti-works mentality. Faith and works were never meant to be mutually exclusive or adversarial concepts, but instead complementary; faith without works is stone dead. Peter warned us that people unskilled in the Word (scoffers) have deceptively twisted Paul's letters to advocate deadly, lawless heresies. These intellectually gifted heretics have been extraordinarily persuasive, but obviously lack the fear of God. We must be sufficiently skilled in God's Word (using prayer, Bible study, and meditation through the help of God's Holy Spirit) to safeguard ourselves against the enticements of Satan, our human nature, and these scoffing false teachers, guarding the truth, developing an iron-clad steadfastness and progressively developing Christian virtues (identified by

Peter as knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love) clear-sightedly and diligently practicing these godly behaviors, following the example of Jesus Christ, producing abundant spiritual fruit, enabling us to make our election sure.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part Two\): Vision](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

If we don't know where we're going, we aren't going to get there! John Ritenbaugh illustrates that our vision of our goal—the Kingdom of God—is a compelling motivation to overcome, grow, and bear fruit in preparation for eternal life.

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