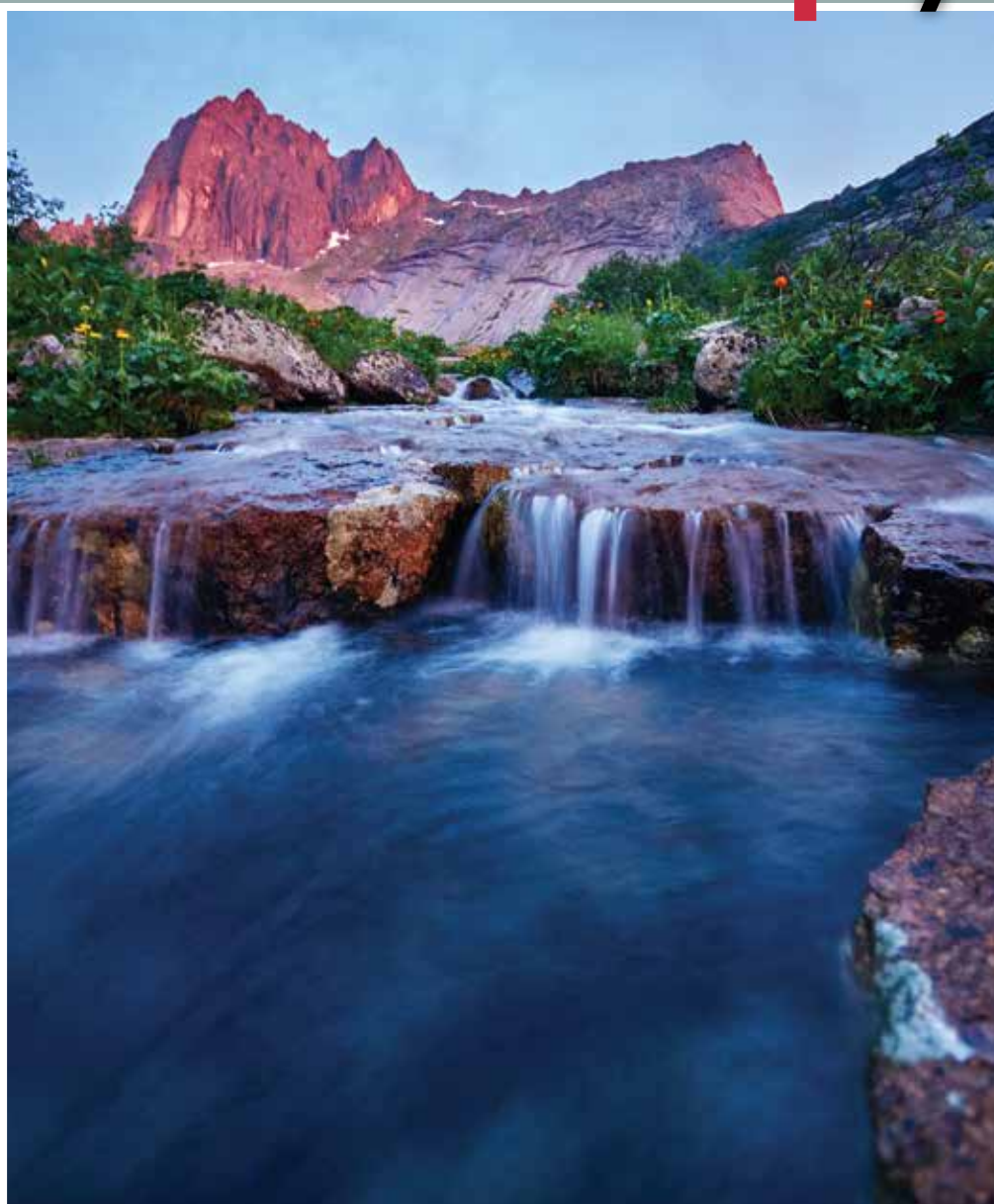


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Adventists in Military and
Public Service*





SERVANTS OF A LIVING GOD!

By **Ivan Omaña**, Assistant Director,
National Service Organization-North American Division
and **Mario E. Ceballos, D.Min.**, Director,
World Service Organization-General Conference

Many times, our service to the nation and allegiance to God feel as though they are on a collision course. At some point, each of us asks how can we keep a balance in our service to God and country.

Since the time of Daniel in Babylon, when the King *hired* him,¹ people of God have struggled with keeping that balance. For Daniel and many others, their allegiance to God was the key to their success. In the case of Daniel and his friends, their unswerving devotion to God made their contributions

valuable to their government employers. Their example provides a framework for us to follow in our service to God and country.

Jesus took it upon Himself to teach His disciples through modeling service. John, the beloved apostle, gives us an interesting account. He begins with the statement, “Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His people all the years He was here, He continued to love them to the very end.”²

I’d like to suggest here that the

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Jesus took it upon Himself to teach His disciples through modeling service.

entire lesson of servanthood Jesus was about to teach His disciples is based on the reality and certainty of His love.

Jesus, Himself, demonstrated true love by serving His disciples. Talk about changing the paradigm! All of the disciples waited for someone else to start serving. Out of love, their Master decided to humble Himself to serve them! And then, the teaching began.

I like the way *The Clear Word* renders this episode: “After He had washed all of the disciples’ feet, He put His robe back on, sat down at the table, and said, ‘Now let me explain why I washed your feet’”³ He had just shown what it meant to be a servant leader.⁴ Jesus washed all of their feet, including those of the one who would ultimately sell him out, and those of the other disciple who, before the end of the night, would three times deny knowing Him. Yes, the one who asked to be completely washed later denied knowledge of Him!

As we embark on a contemplation of our service, let us remember that we serve a God who took it upon Himself to personally teach the model of true service. Although Jesus had the power to send angels to serve, when service was needed, He took it upon Himself to be present and delivered salvation in person. I characterize

Jesus’ model of excellence in service as disinterested benevolence.⁵

In today’s pluralistic society, we may fall into the trap of believing service, especially the kind of service we as Adventists render, as a commodity. But I would like to suggest that the minute anyone steps into our space, they should realize who we are and what we represent. Providing a Christian Seventh-day Adventist-guided service is the expectation of both our government employer and the One who has sent us.

Our ethos and identity is that of Seventh-day Adventists and as servants of a Living God who expects we will represent Him with excellence. This is the reason for serving our country to the best of our abilities. Our God is the One who will complete our shortcomings, because He knows what it means to serve.

¹ Daniel 2:48

² John 13:1

³ John 13:12

⁴ http://www.englishcompass.org/articles/the_leader_as_servant

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 2*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, p. 534.



STRIKING A BALANCE

**By Chaplain (Major-promotable) James
Hall, U. S. Army, M.Div., D.Min.**

During a career of service to a government entity, most Seventh-day Adventist Church members are challenged on their beliefs at some time. There are often what seem to be conflicts between what we believe and what our nation or local municipality asks us to do. Of course, this isn't distinctive of Adventist believers. Many of us know devout believers of various faiths who also must weigh their commitment to God or religion and their duties as a military member, firefighter, law enforcement officer, or other public servant. Oftentimes,

the distinctive Adventist beliefs (e.g. Sabbath Sacredness) we hold near and dear to our hearts make it even more challenging than for those in public or military service who don't claim the same doctrinal beliefs. How does an Adventist serve in uniform and keep God first? How do Adventists function in a pluralistic environment? How do we strike a "balance" while serving a secular government? Some difficult questions indeed.

There must be a few basic tenets that we understand to approach the answers to these potentially complex

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questions. As Seventh-day Adventist believers we honor the *solo scriptura* concept. This is critical to answering the pressing questions of our world in general, and within this article it is crucial. The essentials to keeping God first and wearing a uniform is found in our grounding in Scripture.

Romans 13:1-7 offers us one of the best scriptures in understanding how to measure the importance of a government/Christian relationship. What's interesting is that in Romans 12, Paul advises the reader to be pure and clean in all activity before God. Later, in Romans 12:21, Paul tells the reader to "overcome evil with good."

There are other inferences to this "defeat of evil with good" theme in Romans 12:9-21. Participation in a public service career, and especially a uniformed service, fulfills the thematic meaning of Romans 12, and helps the reader understand this service in context of Romans 13:1-7. In other words, being informed by Romans 12 (orthodoxy) reveals the understanding and context of how "every soul be subject to the governing authorities" is played out in everyday life (orthopraxy). Specifically, Romans 12:3-8 encourages believers to use their God-given talents or spiritual

gifts with the crux found in verse 6: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them.*" By using gifts and talents to serve others, the uniformed Adventist can make a ministry out of his/her job. This then puts God in control. With God in control, we often suffer less from the dichotomy of the government/Adventist relationship. It becomes much easier to put God first.

In his book, *Military Chaplains and Religious Diversity*, Kim Philip Hanson studied mostly Navy Chaplains at all ranks. The results of the study revealed how most military chaplains understand the function of being endorsed by a denomination, yet working for the U.S. Military. Most of the chaplains that he interviewed (one was a Seventh-day Adventist), remarked that becoming a chaplain helped them to understand God better than when they were a church pastor.

In working with people who were not from their own religious beliefs, most chaplains discovered that they were "profoundly changed by their experience in the Chaplain Corps."¹ And it appears that the change was positive for most. One chaplain stated: "I think coming into the Chaplain Corps, that became very clear to me, that my role as a clergyman is expanded to be inclusive...something in Civilian Ministry that I didn't have to face that . . . that much, it seems."² This is very telling, because this experience of inclusiveness and diversity that is a result of the pluralistic environment that chaplains work in daily, may also "water down" the distinctiveness that separates Adventism from other faiths.

Adventists who serve in a governmental environment, may still maintain the distinctiveness. Adventist Christians, including

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Chaplains are not to be considered interchangeable within the Christian faith. Maintaining the Adventist's distinctive belief system is crucial to maintaining an Adventist identity and is the benchmark action when working in a pluralistic environment. That identity is rooted in the doctrinal beliefs of our denomination, as well as, our role in ministry highlighted by the use of God-given talents and gifts. Simply, the Adventist identity is rooted in calling. If you're called into the career path you are in, then you will succeed when you identify as a distinctive Seventh-day Adventist.

Pluralism may be a potential challenge to the Adventist identity. The military recognizes religious diversity and celebrates it as a positive value. With the emphasis our church maintains for religious liberty, Adventists must understand that free exercise of religion depends on the bolstering of that right to all people of faith. The challenge to identity is not diversity, but the



perceived requirement to compromise a doctrinal truth for the sake of pluralistic unity. Here is where Adventists are often tripped up. The important thing for us to remember is that we should respect with dignity others beliefs while still standing for the distinctiveness of the Adventist truths. After all, all are created in God's image, but called into ministry for a specific mission.

The bottom line questions that Adventists who work in government must answer are plain. What's expected to come first, denomination or institution? Are we military or police or public servants who are also Adventists, or are we Adventists who are called to be in the military, police force, or public servants? The ultimate question is, which comes first in our priorities? Many of the chaplains in Hansen's book attempted to help the readers understand that they were Navy Chaplain's first, and denomination came second. It seems that in actuality they are both—God's servants who are called to be chaplains (see 1 Corinthians 7:20). This is a solid identity that includes a “both/and” mentality rather than an “either/or.”

Paul also helps his reader understand how he or she may have a robust connection with God while serving a secular government that has authority over him or her and that he or she has sworn to serve. Another look at Romans 13:1-4 shows an ideal that the government employee is to serve the government as best as he



or she can. Chaplain (Colonel) Gary R. Councell, U.S. Army, Retired, highlights the core of this discussion in his 2012 article “Adventists and Military Service” in *Spectrum*. He states: “The Apostle Paul declares government officials to be God’s ministers (Romans 13:1-7). Except where there is obvious conflict (Acts 5:29) Christians are commanded to give responsible, ethical service in the earthly realm, like rendered by Joseph, Daniel, and Esther.”³ A critical nuance to Councell’s statement is the phrase “responsible, ethical service.” Seventh-day Adventist Christians should be examples of the hardest working, responsible, and ethical employees of any institution.

PRACTICING FERVENT SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Our connection with God is dependent on fervent spiritual disciplines. Daily prayer and Bible study maintain a connection with God that is important to survival in any secular environment, but especially for those who work in government. Humanity can be confused by governmental policies and even laws

Sola scriptura—belief that the Bible and the Bible only is the authoritative Word of God. Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as the only source of our beliefs.

Orthodoxy—having a belief that is consistent with biblical teaching.

Orthopraxy—life practices that are consistent with biblical orthodoxy.

because they may conflict with the Word of God. Having that solid foundation of regular prayer and Bible study allows for clarity of mind. In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 8, Ellen G. White states: “Let nothing, however dear, however loved, absorb your mind and affections, diverting you from the study of God’s word or from earnest prayer. Watch unto prayer. Live your own requests. Co-operate with God by working in harmony with Him.”³ Perfect guidance for understanding the role of Seventh-day Adventist Christians in government service.

¹Hanson, Kim Philip. *Military Chaplains and Religious Diversity*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, NY), 2012.

²Hanson, *Military Chaplains and Religious Diversity*, p.213.

³Councell, Gary R. “Adventists and Military Service.” *Spectrum*, July 2012.

⁴*Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 8, Ellen G. White, p. 53.

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GIVE ME THIS *Mountain*

By **Deena Bartel-Wagner**, Editor, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries-General Conference



Many days had passed since the Children of Israel jubilantly walked away from 400 years of slavery and their taskmasters. God demonstrated His power to them at the parting of the Red Sea, gave them manna to eat and, then, when they cried for meat, provided them quail.

These former slaves witnessed Moses' ascent on Sinai to meet with God and receive the Law. They'd debauched themselves as they danced around the Golden Calf, asked for forgiveness, and at times became a murmuring and unruly crowd.

The day arrived when the mixed multitude stood at the border of Canaan. The dream to enter their homeland lay within their grasp. Moses sent 12 men in to spy out the land. Expectantly, day after day, the camp scanned the horizon eagerly anticipating their return.

One day the shout went up! "They're here! They're here!" The spies had returned and brought amazing stories and evidence with them. Grape clusters so large that it took two men to carry them. Tales of a land flowing with milk and honey. Excitement reverberated throughout the camp. The Promised Land seemed to be everything these people hoped for and even more.

Then, one of the spies spoke the words that turned excitement into terror. There were giants who lived in fortified cities waiting to be fought. The crowd cowered in fear as they

listened to the reports. More spies spoke up, outlining the dangers, the strength of the enemy, the thickness of the walls of their fortifications. And the crowd murmured once again—just not quietly. Above the din of the complaining people, one voice rose loud and clear. Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the Kennizite, said, "Let's go at once to take the land, . . . We can certainly conquer it!"¹

Caleb's fellow spies continued in their negative vein and convinced the people taking Canaan was out of the question. The multitude became so upset they wailed in anguish throughout the night.

The next day, Caleb and Joshua again tried to lead the people to make the correct choice—to trust God and follow Him completely. Incensed even more, the cry went up to stone Caleb and Joshua.

The majority won that day. God spoke and said that none of the adults would see past the border of Canaan and were condemned to wander the rest of their lives in the desert.

Then God publically recognized Caleb's heart. "But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."²

What did God mean when He spoke of Caleb's different spirit and following him wholeheartedly? Caleb obviously possessed character traits that caused him to act and live differently.

Caleb and Joshua again tried to lead the people to make the correct choice—to trust God and follow Him completely.

Caleb bided his time, kept silent, and continued to put his faith and energy into being a faithful servant of God.

A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE

Numbers 13 and 14 provide clues to this different spirit or attitude that Caleb possessed. In Numbers 13:30, Caleb demonstrates that he is a conqueror at heart. He urges the people on to go and take the land. In that moment, Caleb held unwavering faith in God's promise that the land would come into the possession of the Children of Israel. Delays weren't in Caleb's mindset. He wanted to go now!

After the people had time to think about it and were ready to turn against Caleb and Joshua, a demeanor of positivity continued to surround Caleb. Again, he and Joshua described what they saw. "The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land! And if the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the Lord is with us! Don't be afraid of them!"³

MAJORITY RULES

Once God made His pronouncement, Caleb and Joshua had to return to the desert along with the majority who won. For the next forty years, they wandered along with everyone else.

Caleb bided his time, kept silent, and continued to put his faith and energy into being a faithful servant of

God. He witnessed rebellion in the ranks (Korah, Dathan, and Abiram), watched water pour forth from a rock, participated in military victories, and watched the adults one-by-one die, forever losing hope of seeing their promised homeland.

Finally, the day arrived when Caleb and Joshua stood once again on the border of the Promised Land. At last it was time to claim what Israel turned its back on so many years earlier.

Battles were fought, territory conquered, and eventually, the land was to be divided among the Tribes of Israel. Caleb remembered God's promise to him and was ready to see it fulfilled. At 85-years-old, retirement was not in Caleb's vocabulary.

In fact, he declared, "Now, as you can see, the Lord has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old. I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. So give me the hill country that the Lord promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns." But if the Lord is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the Lord said."⁴

When Caleb received the land inheritance, he promptly encouraged others to follow his lead and take possession. Caleb defeated the

Anakites, and the land was at rest from war.

In 45 years, Caleb didn't lose his different attitude and character traits. In fact, if anything, he became stronger in his belief that God would keep his promises. He was still a conqueror with a positive attitude and unwavering trust in his God. Although other's choices caused Caleb to wander for 40 years, he didn't allow that to change his heart and integrity.

In today's world, holding true to character traits such as those Caleb possessed is increasingly difficult. Following the majority is often simpler than being in the minority. Even if we stand for principle, we may have to wander in the desert a little longer. The Bible doesn't specifically describe how Caleb maintained his connection with God. It's apparent by his actions and words, it wasn't something he picked up when it was convenient.

As Christians, does God see us possessing a *different spirit* than others? Do we reflect positivity in a world of negativity? Is our trust in God's faithfulness unwavering? In a world used to instant gratification, can we wait patiently, even if it means until we are 85-years-old, to see God's handiwork? Are we ready to declare as Caleb did, "Give me this mountain"?

Today we need men of thorough fidelity, men who follow the Lord fully, men who are not disposed to be silent when they ought to speak, who are as true as steel to principle, who do not seek to make a pretentious show, but who walk humbly with God, patient, kind, obliging, courteous men, who understand that the science of prayer is to exercise faith and show works that will tell to the glory of God and the good of His people...To follow Jesus requires wholehearted conversion at the start, and a repetition of this conversion every day."

— *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 207.

1 Numbers 13:30 NLT

2 Numbers 14:24 NIV

3 Numbers 14:7-9

4 Joshua 14:10-12



ON NORTH DAKOTA'S HIGHWAYS & BYWAYS

By Ryan Panasuk, Sergeant, North Dakota Highway Patrol
with Deena Bartel-Wagner

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, Ryan Panasuk prays each day that the decisions he makes will be the right ones. Millions of Christians around the world speak those same words. For Ryan, they carry a heavy burden with them. As a North Dakota Highway Patrol officer, he knows that too often decisions can mean the difference between life and death.

Ryan didn't enroll in college to become a highway patrol officer. "I started out as a music education major, but then switched to and English education major," says Ryan. "Eventually, I decided that teaching wasn't my area of interest. It was then I enrolled in a criminal justice degree with the intent of becoming a peace officer."

Service to the community is a natural by-product of Ryan's upbringing. "My dad served as a volunteer on our local EMS crew and my mom's career experience included nursing and



The Ryan Panasuk family

working as a probation officer," says Ryan. "Their example demonstrated to me the importance of serving humanity and God."

Ryan's decision to enroll in a criminal justice degree set the course of his life for the past 10 years. "After I finished my degree, I learned the North Dakota Highway Patrol

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY IS A NATURAL BY-PRODUCT OF RYAN'S UPBRINGING.

had an opening,” says Ryan. “The public service side of the work highly appealed to me. I submitted an application and was accepted to begin the hiring process.”

RIGOROUS TESTING AND TRAINING AHEAD

Becoming a highway patrol officer involves a rigorous application process. Applicants must pass a written psychological inventory, which appraises their interests, attitudes, and other characteristics.

After successful completion of the written tests, oral interviews are scheduled. The interview board poses questions to determine proper qualifications, temperament, and attitude. Qualities they are looking for include honesty, integrity, moral character, emotional stability and the applicant's interest in serving people.

If the applicant receives a positive recommendation from the interview board, the next step is a background check. Next begin the physical examinations, agility testing, and psychological testing.

After an individual passes all previous rounds of interviews and testing, their name is placed on an eligibility roster. When an opening occurs, the names are considered and hiring takes place.

When Ryan receive notice of his hiring, the next step was to attend the Law Enforcement Training Academy in Bismarck. The 10-12 week-long training is basic law enforcement training and prepares recruits for the multi-faceted work they face in the field. “The greatest emphasis of our training is how to keep ourselves and



Balancing career and family are part of every parent's life. For Ryan, family time offers a break from the stressors of work and helps him recharge.



Active in his local church, Ryan has used his talents on the music worship team, the audio-tech team, and on the church school board.

others safe in any situation that may transpire,” says Ryan.

Highway patrol recruits spend another 10-12 weeks in specialized training that equips them to deal with defensive tactics, crash investigations, search and seizure, federal laws governing commercial motor vehicles and trucks. They also learn the administrative side of their work including victim and witness statements, investigations, active shooter scenarios, traffic law enforcement, weapons training, dealing with violators, pursuit driving, emergency equipment use, first aid and CPR, and more.

A TYPICAL DAY ON THE JOB

Highway patrol officers in North Dakota are assigned to one of four quadrants. “We have a total of 160 officers spread across a state that is 70,762 square miles,” says Ryan. “I currently serve in the Grand Forks post of the Northeast region. Our territory is 120 miles north to south and 160 miles east to west.”

Officers are scheduled to work 10-hour shifts, which rotate throughout the month. A typical day’s duties could include crash investigations, sobriety

testing, speeding violations, and death notifications. “My daily job is to assist individuals who are not having a good day,” says Ryan. “Incident management and getting it under control helps to maintain order and protect citizens.”

WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY

Merging his work and his faith have been a natural fit for Ryan. The justice system is based on the rule of law. When that law is broken, there are consequences for actions. “I’ve learned to look differently at situations,” says Ryan. “God established a set of laws for humans, which were ignored in the Garden of Eden. He extends grace and mercy and doesn’t base my salvation solely on the law. When I make a traffic stop or intervene in any situation, I look at each individual as a someone God created. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, even though the penalty of law may be rendered.”

Trained law enforcement officers also understand the signs of excuses that aren’t legitimate. “I can stop a car to issue a citation or make an arrest for a violation,” says Ryan. “Some people will have a legitimate reason for their



"I BELIEVE THAT KEEPING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK TOWARDS OTHER HUMANS MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN MY OVERALL WELL-BEING."

actions, but that doesn't necessarily negate the consequences of the law. Others will have justifications that I can see right through. That's where training and discernment become a vital part of my job."

Serving others sometimes means dealing with hard issues. "A crash scene is difficult to work," says Ryan. "There are injuries, perhaps loss life, grieving family members, and the need for answers. I always want to do my best work in these investigations. This allows me to provide the family with accurate answers as to why the accident occurred. This can help them in dealing with the results of the accident."

KEEPING HEALTHY WITH SELF-CARE

For uniformed officers who serve the public, cumulative stress is a serious issue. Witnessing accidents, injuries and death, and confrontations take their toll. "The aftermath of a fatal crash and death notification is massively stressful. If a situation presents a threat of harm to an officer, officers take that very personally," says Ryan. "If you have more than one of these incidents in a short period of time or numerous smaller daily incidents over a longer period, the cumulative stress affects your ability to cope."

Officers don't like to ask for help, but Ryan strives for awareness of what is happening with his fellow officers. "If I know of a stressful situation, I arrange for a meeting with the Critical Incident Stress Management team,"

says Ryan. "I also talk to the officer involved and remind them that they did what they were trained to do. I emphasize they relied on their training and did the right thing."

Ryan relies heavily on his faith in this area, also. "I believe that keeping a positive outlook towards other humans makes a difference in my overall well-being," says Ryan. "I also keep active physically, which often helps relieve the stress."

BLENDING WORK AND FAITH

As a member of the Grand Forks Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ryan's served on the music worship team, the audio-tech team, and on the church school board.

Family plays an important role in Ryan's life. "My wife, Mandy and my two children are who I look forward to spending time with during my days off," says Ryan. "Balancing work and home can be challenging, but I try to leave work at work as much as possible."

As an officer of the law, Ryan maintains knowing what you believe and why you believe is a crucial part of remaining true to your faith identity. There are times in his work that difficult decisions need to be made. And daily, Ryan continues to pray that the decisions he makes will be the right ones, whether it is apprehending a criminal, issuing a ticket for a violation, or bringing unwanted news to the doorstep of a home. Along with his fellow officers, Ryan takes pride in protecting society, bringing justice, and maintaining order on the highways of North Dakota.



RESILIENT. OBSERVANT. READY.

By Craig Nazareth, Lieutenant Colonel,
United States Army with Deena Bartel-Wagner

Growing up in a close-knit Catholic family, Craig Nazareth learned as a young child the qualities that would guide his life. “My parents taught me a lot about prayer,” says Craig. “We prayed often in our home. Another strong impression they made on me was the importance of loving others and being willing to sacrifice for others.”

Surrounded by his extended family, Craig’s life during elementary through high school was filled with family events, attending local Catholic schools, and participating in church.

Awareness of a Saviour came at

an early age for Craig. “I remember being in the church and looking up at a life-sized crucifix,” says Craig. “I knew that God existed and believed that Jesus is my Saviour.” When he was old enough, it was a natural thing for Craig to serve as an altar boy. The local rectory priest, Father Finan became a mentor to Craig during that time and helped him to solidify his burgeoning faith.

In his late teens, Craig began to sense a disconnect with what he personally believed and the teachings of the church. “I began to lean away from the church as it increasingly



seemed that what I was learning didn't gel with going to church every Sunday," says Craig.

As he felt the growing discontent, Craig began engaging in other behaviours that caused his father concern. "I knew my parents were not happy with some of the choices I was making," says Craig. "Although I did well in my high school classes, I didn't have much drive and I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. My dad coordinated a meeting with a local National Guard recruiter and I ended up liking the idea. I joined up, attended my high school graduation and spent the next few months preparing myself for Basic Training (BCT) and Advanced Individual Training (AIT)."

BOOT CAMP SURPRISE

BCT and AIT took Craig through the necessary paces of preparing for his Military Occupational Specialty/MOS-31R or multichannel transmission systems operator. Soldiers in

this specialty supervise, install, operate, and perform the necessary maintenance on multichannel line-of-site communications. They also oversee the use of tropospheric scatter communications, which is equipment that uses microwave signals.

During BCT, a conversation with a Drill Sergeant surprised Craig. "This particular sergeant encouraged me to attend West Point, the United States Military Academy for the Army. I was totally fine to remain as an enlisted soldier." We make our plans and then God leads in the way He has for us.

BECOMING AN OFFICER

Eventually, Craig applied for admission to the United States Military Preparatory School. "My father's encouragement and his assistance in helping me complete the application process played a large role in my decision," says Craig. "My drill sergeants helped administer qualifying physical tests and ensured I completed any required physical exams." His time in the Prep School would hone Craig's



academic and leadership skills, while ultimately preparing him to meet or exceed the standards for admission into West Point.

"The Prep School helped me mature and grow physically," acknowledges Craig. "I was older than most other cadets when I arrived at West Point, but this served to my benefit." As a military academy first-year student or *plebe*, knowing your place and doing what others instruct you to do is part of the training.

Each succeeding year, cadets gain privileges and responsibilities. Craig joined the Corps Squad Soccer, managed a lacrosse team, and became an officer in the Christian Fellowship club. One of his greatest pleasures came through his involvement with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program. "I love working with kids, and mentoring them is really important to me," says Craig.

With his training completed, Craig graduated and began his career as an Army officer with a specialty in military intelligence. New experiences, new spiritual questions and answers lay ahead for this young Lieutenant.

During his first deployment to Korea, Craig met another lieutenant by the name of Isabel. "We became friends and often talked about spiritual things," says Craig. "I learned she was a Seventh-day Adventist. As we talked, I didn't realize that seeds of truth were being planted. Because there wasn't an Adventist worship service on base, Isabel attended a weekly non-denominational worship service that I attended."

Growing up in the Catholic church, Craig had never been exposed to contemporary praise music. The order of service was different than anything he'd ever attended. He soaked in the experience and enjoyed the fellowship.

Conversations between Isabel and Craig continued when he had a permanent change of station and moved to Arizona. "Our letters were filled with what we each believed," says Craig. "I began to really examine my Catholic beliefs and ask hard questions of myself about my faith tradition."

A deployment to Afghanistan meant more letters mailed back and forth between Craig and Isabel.

“After I returned to the States, Isabel and I were reunited in Hawaii,” says Craig. “I finally began to attend the Adventist church with Isabel. One of my greatest struggles was with the issue of the Eucharist. I kept asking myself why Catholics and Protestants couldn’t agree on this matter.”

DEEP DIVE INTO THE BIBLE

The friendship between Craig and Isabel grew into a deeper relationship. In 2005, they committed their lives to each other through marriage.

Shortly after their marriage, Craig and Isabel deployed to Iraq as a dual military couple. In his free moments, Craig dug even deeper into the Bible. “I compared what I had been taught with my personal study in the Catholic tenets and Christ’s teachings, even going as far as reading in depth letters and early church writings and attempting to trace the origins of Catholic teachings concerning the Eucharistic, Sunday worship, and other fundamental beliefs,” says Craig.

In Iraq, Craig met another spiritual mentor who impacted his life. Camp Slayer, located about nine miles west of central Baghdad, was the former main residence of Saddam Hussein. “In this forward deployed setting, in the palace of a former country leader, I met Chaplain Steve Torgersen, an Adventist chaplain,” says Craig. “Our worship group met in a small meeting room within the former palace. Chaplain Torgersen led out in a flexible and diverse service. His demeanor and how he conducted the Bible studies and worship made an impression on me.”

The worship models that Craig witnessed both at the Honolulu Central Church and in the worship group in Sadaam’s palace are what he uses today in his ministry others.

“I resonate with looking at people how Jesus sees them,” says Craig. “We are all sinners and suffering until Christ comes. I long for people to come together for worship and feel welcomed.”

COMMITTING TO WORSHIP

As Craig resolved each of his questions from the Bible, he realized that he needed to make the decision to study for baptism. In 2008, Craig stood in the baptistry of the Honolulu Central Adventist Church.

“Following my baptism, I wanted everyone to discover the knowledge that I gained,” says Craig. Sometimes his eagerness to share got in the way of his message. “Initially, my family struggled with the idea that I am no longer Catholic.” With spiritual maturity and growth, Craig realized he needed to use a different touch in reaching his family and others.

Worship isn’t a certain moment and place for Craig. “I can spend time with God in any place and moment,” says Craig. “If I have duty late at night I ask myself, ‘How can I turn this into a moment of opportunity to worship. I have developed a self-confidence in my faith and been able to vocalize that.’”

During those years of searching and intense Bible study, Craig sought out the similarities and differences between his childhood and adult faith. He’s experienced the high points of attending and graduating from West Point, being pinned as a Major in Iraq, and more recently as a Lieutenant Colonel and knowing that he had what it took to become a field grade officer. His marriage and birth of his children were exciting times also. “For my job, I stay resilient, observant, and ready,” says Craig. In following his God, Craig Nazareth does no less.

EVERYDAY FAITHFULNESS

The noise of the other recruits swirled around Harold as he sat on his bunk in the barracks. Boot camp was tough, but Harold realized the more difficult thing at that moment was that he hadn't planned ahead. That would have made all the difference.

"When I completed high school, six or seven of my friends and I contemplated joining the military," says Harold Thomas, III. "I checked out every branch of service and considered joining the Air Force. Eventually, I chose the Navy."

The first Friday night at boot camp, eighty-three recruits congregated in their barracks. The noise of laughter, talking, and jesting swirled around



By Pastor Harold Thomas III,
with Deena Bartel-Wagner



Harold. This was much different than the quiet Friday nights spent with family. “As everyone around me busied themselves, I noticed one of the Jewish recruits excuse himself from the fray,” says Harold. “In that moment, I thought about the Friday nights in civilian life and realized I had something special and now I missed it. When you have regular access to prayer meeting, church services, and youth group it becomes easy to take them for granted.”

As Harold admitted to himself that he hadn’t made his stance clear for Sabbath observance, he made a decision. “I told myself that as I moved forward with my military service, I would request duty times that would allow me time for Sabbath observance.”

With Basic Training and Advanced Training completed, Harold began his Navy service as a Dental Technician. “My journey was different than most,” says Harold. “The dental office held regular offices hours Monday through Friday. An emergency clinic was open on the weekends. When I was assigned to be at my post then, I was usually able to trade with other Sailors.”

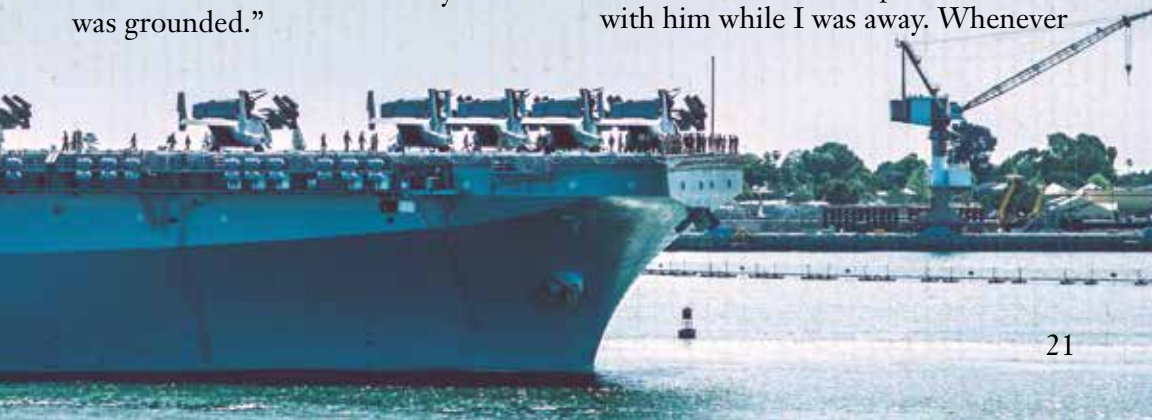
Joining the military wasn’t an attempt to escape the faith Harold’s parents raised him in. “I personally wanted to stay connected with the church and my faith,” says Harold. “Before I joined the Navy, I regularly participated in the youth group activities of our church and my faith was grounded.”

“I told myself that as I moved forward with my military service, I would request duty times that would allow me time for Sabbath observance.”

A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

As Christians, we are instructed to join together and uphold each other through the good times and the difficult circumstances. “This support became very important to me while I was on active duty,” says Harold.

After he’d enlisted, Harold’s parents encouraged him to remember his spiritual ties and not to break them. Local churches and members stepped in and continued to support and mentor a young Sailor far from home. “A church member from my home church gave me a key chain that held the message ‘Jesus Loves You,’” says Harold. “A simple message, but it meant a lot to me. I kept in contact with him while I was away. Whenever



I came home, he celebrated me and what I was doing.”

Upon arrival at his first duty station, Harold learned that the nearest Adventist church was more than 30 miles from his base. “A friend of mine loaned me his car and I visited the Breath of Life Church in Jacksonville, Florida,” says Harold. “That church family took me in, provided meals, and fellowship, and blessed me.”

Harold discovered that many of the churches he visited were welcoming and attentive. Although he didn’t own a car, church members faithfully picked him up each Sabbath on their way to church. Life in the barracks distracts from worship. “Having a place to be on Sabbath made an important difference in my worship experience,” says Harold.

While serving at Camp Lejeune, Harold attended another Adventist church. “Brother Wilson served as the first elder,” says Harold. “He had an eye for the military service members. His influence played an important role in my spiritual life. Brother Wilson believed service in the church is an integral part of your spiritual experience. Under his mentorship, I served as a Deacon and as an Elder-in-Training.”

Harold also first met then Navy Chaplain Johnathan Ward at Camp Lejeune. “Chaplain Ward ministered to me on the base,” says Harold. “His guidance and words of encouragement made me think about my future.”

On a regular basis, Harold received mail that contained church magazines and devotional books from the National Service Organization.

“My friends saw that I received these items,” says Harold. “Such personal outreach by my denomination impressed them.” The printed word served as another tie between Harold, his faith, and his church.

Relationships are integral in building trust and keeping young people engaged in the church. “Throughout my time in the Navy, there were other Adventist military personnel who were supportive and included me in activities, worship gatherings, and more,” says Harold. “Each person who reached out to me made an impact on my life.”

The spiritual growth Harold experienced during his military service helped him make a difficult decision. “An opportunity presented itself for me to complete my degree while I was in the Navy,” says Harold. “*‘What a fantastic thing,’* I thought at first. Then I learned classes would be held on Sabbath. I knew I couldn’t disobey God just to get an education. I decided I would take the long route and attend traditional college courses.”

CELEBRATING THE GIFTS

During his time at Camp Lejeune, a sense of purpose and commitment grew in Harold’s life. “I began to feel impressed to become a pastor and serve in full-time ministry,” says Harold. “When I left the Navy, I decided to attend Oakwood University and enrolled in both a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree program,” says Harold. “Eventually, I would attend the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and earn my Master of Divinity. God faithfully

provided during these years of education. I believe He rewarded my faithfulness to not attend classes on Sabbath while I was in the Navy.”

Today, Harold pastors the Atlanta Boulevard Seventh-day Adventist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

GIVE THEM A SAFE PLACE

“My Naval experience and the spiritual guidance and friendship offered by so many directs me today in my interactions with young adults,” says Harold. “Young people don’t always need information. Sometimes they just need a safe place to grow and question their beliefs. If we can give them that space and build a friendship with them, they are more likely to develop a faith that they truly own. Information is crucial, but relationships are critical as well.”

Harold also encourages churches near military bases to reach out to Adventist service members. “Many times, a young Sailor or Soldier just needs a Sabbath meal and a small group to spend time with during the Sabbath hours. If the service member has a family, the church can find ways to offer meaningful support, especially if a deployment has separated family members.”

“Having a place to be on Sabbath made an important difference in my worship experience.”

Whether you are in the military, lay ministry, or a vocational calling, Harold Johnson believes a standard applies to all Christians. “In the military, you are given an assignment. In ministry, you are given an assignment,” says Harold. “You are to be at your duty post and be faithful in your work.” As Christians, our duty post is to share the gospel of Jesus with the world.

In a noisy, crowded barracks Harold Johnson made a conscious decision to be at his duty post as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and make arrangements to attend Sabbath worship. He reaffirmed his faithfulness when he declined to take the easy path to a college degree by choosing not to attend classes on Sabbath. And along the way, he had others to encourage, mentor, and guide him. Whose life can you touch today?



So **MANY** QUESTIONS



Recently, I have discovered that I am experiencing calcification. Relative to my bones, I have become acquainted with arthritis. The best antidote, I am told, is

flexibility exercises, weight lifting, and diet modification.

The playlist on my portable devices has also calcified. Many of the songs that I have cataloged are decades old. Good stuff, but old. Perhaps I need to add some flexibility there too by exposing myself to new songs and include them.

This week I stumbled upon an old song that I had not heard in a while. It was written by Kaize Adams in the 1980s and is titled “Questions.” Some of the lyrics are:

*So many questions I must ask myself today.
I wonder if Jesus thinks I've done my share.
Will I wake in the morning to find regrets upon my mind?
Will I leave a trace of Jesus somewhere?
So many questions I must ask myself today.
What will I leave behind when life has passed my way?
Will people remember my name, or, forget me all the same?
Will I leave a trace of Jesus somewhere?
Have I been a light in dark places, or, brought a smile to sad faces?
Have I shown the world that I really care?
Have I lived my life the way He wants me to each and every day?
When someone stumbled was I there?*

The lyrics are admittedly old, but profound. Questions are the catalyst of genius. Questions are the engine that drives personal, corporate, or technical productivity and improvement.

Albert Einstein said, “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.” Questions awaken the creativity and purpose within us all. Once we have answered the significant questions

of life, ask them again. Why? Because life undulates like ocean waves. As long as we live, there will be another wave of creativity, opportunity, challenge, or transformational stimulation.

Jim Rohn is one of the motivational speakers that I have grown to appreciate. One of his lectures ends with four questions. I share them here for your consideration.

1. WHY?

What is the *why* that drives you to do more, earn more, share more, develop more, help more? You must answer this question personally. When your *why* is strong enough, the *how* becomes easy.

2. WHY NOT?

Why not see how much you can learn, earn? Why not see how far you can run, how much you can lift? Why not try some new experience and stretch yourself? Dreams don't have a deadline. What noble thing did you dream of doing in your youth that you have not done yet? Why not?

3. WHY NOT YOU?

You have enough within you to figure out how to do whatever it takes to make your dreams come true. Why shouldn't you have mountaintop experiences? Why shouldn't you take that cruise or that class? Why shouldn't you learn a new language or learn to play another instrument?

If you feel like you deserve it and are willing to work for it, why shouldn't you get it? Why shouldn't you be effective in changing your corner of the world?

4. WHY NOT NOW?

Now is the only time that we have. I don't know who said it first, but someone said, "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called the present." What is done in the now defines the past and creates the future. Why not now?

Take these four questions and apply them in your life. As they have for me, I am sure that they will lead you to new adventures, opportunities, realizations, and/or breakthroughs. When this happens, celebrate, share, then ask them again. As long as God is infinite, we will always have questions. He will forever have the answers. Why? Because He is!

We were going to the airport. I was in the right lane. A big 18-wheeler truck was on my left. I was boxed in. Traffic was moving steadily, but not fast. It had rained, and the roads were wet. Suddenly, I felt an incredible and immediate urge to stop and stand up. When we got back on the road, there was a traffic jam. About a mile down the road, we saw that the very same truck that had been beside me was now jackknifed and overturned. The urgency that I felt was providential.

Also, be open to the providence of being the miracle that someone else is praying for in their life.

The secret to all of this is having a spirit of praise. Don't forget to praise Him.

If prayer is the key that unlocks heaven's storehouse. Praise is the bat signal that summons the presence of God. Praise is the dwelling place of God. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, another law of nature is that God inhabits the praises of His people. So, pray. Preach with passion. Persist in your pursuit of faithfulness. Persevere through the tough times and praise Him all the time.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him." Similarly, James 4:2 says, "...You have not because you ask not."

There are many questions in life. Stop running from them. Ask the questions and see what great thing may accrue. Why? Why Not? Why not you? Why not now?

Paul A. Anderson

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

For God and Country is designed for you, our readers. If you are a Seventh-day Adventist in public service we want to yearn from you!

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Seventh-day Adventist military members and chaplains are encouraged to support World Service Organization and Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries as their “local conference.” These organizations provide pastoral care and religious materials for their spiritual well-being. Also support your base chapel program. Military members for countries outside the North American Division are encouraged to contact their conference/union/division ACM leadership for further guidance on how to return their tithes and offerings.



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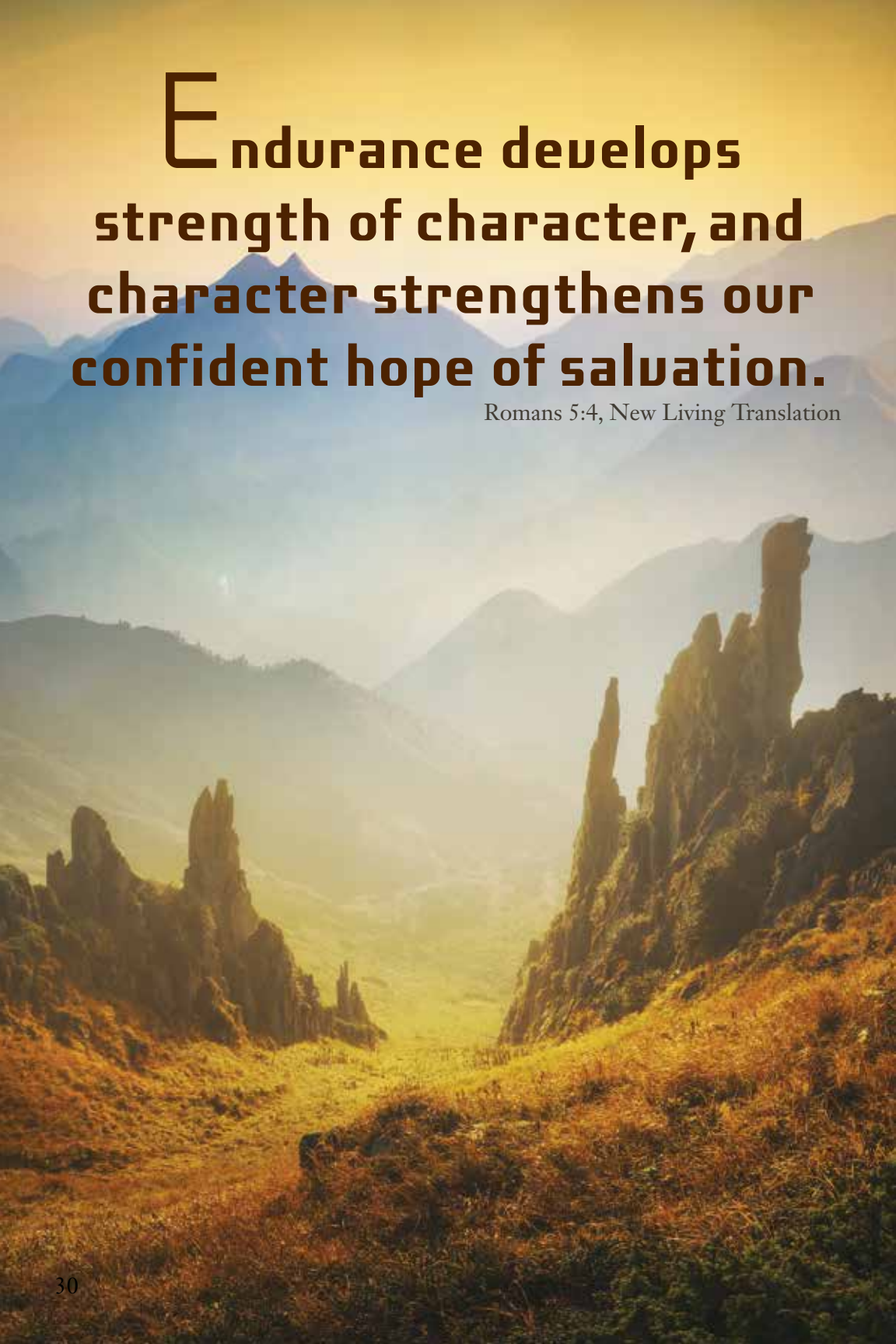
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A scenic landscape featuring a valley with a path leading towards distant, hazy mountains. The foreground is filled with dry, golden-brown grass and low-lying vegetation. On the right side, there are prominent, jagged rock formations that rise steeply from the valley floor. The sky is a soft, hazy yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and majestic.

Endurance develops
strength of character, and
character strengthens our
confident hope of salvation.

Romans 5:4, New Living Translation

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*"I long for nothing more earnestly than
to serve God with all my might."*

— Charles Spurgeon



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