



Christian Report

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40 Good Soldiers for Christ!

Sebaste, Cappadocia (now Sivas in Turkey) – March, 320 A.D.

Roman Emperor Valerius Licinius had already ordered that all Christians in Cappadocia abandon their faith and worship pagan gods, including every member of the famous “Thundering” 12th Legion, whose record in combat was unparalleled in the annals of the Imperial Army. Forty soldiers of the Legion, however, refused to recant their faith, declaring before a military tribunal (court-martial) that they would devote their love to God and only God!

Agricolas, Captain of the Legion and the local pagan governor, would not humor this obstinacy. When imprisonment of the whole stubborn company could not break them, he decided on a novel sort of pressure.

It was a bitterly cold March and the pond outside the city was frozen over. The governor, therefore, ordered that the 40 be herded out to the center of the lake stark naked and allowed to rethink their decision. Meanwhile, he set up on the shore statues of the gods to be worshipped, a nice fire, and a pleasant warm bath. He hoped that the offer of warmth might change the minds of the freezing men and induce them to apostatize. But the prisoners retained their solidarity. Together they prayed,

“Lord, we are 40 who are engaged in this conflict; grant that we may not fall short of that sacred number.”

During the three days of their lethal exposure, only one of the group gave up, stumbled towards the shore and

sought the comfort of one of the hot baths provided for any who would recant their faith. The same hot bath that rewarded his apostasy also brought about his death. Ironically, the sudden heat was too much after the long chill, and he died of shock.

Although the soldier-victims were saddened by this defection, their prayer was heard. Aglaios, a jailer watching the horrifying spectacle of the freezing soldiers had heard their shouts of “40 soldiers for Christ!” when they first headed out across the frozen lake, and now heard a fainter shout, “Thirty-nine soldiers for Christ!”

What happened in the heart of the jailer Aglaios at that moment, only he and God will ever know. He wrenched off his own armor and girdle, and dashed to the edge of the lake. There, after lifting his right hand and crying, “Forty good soldiers for Christ!” he disappeared over the ice and into the darkness.

Fast forward to the 21st Century. . . .

Colorado Springs, CO – 1 March 2007



A small group of soldiers from the 10th Special Forces Group gathered at Red Rock Canyon in Colorado Springs for a ‘spiritual fitness’ run and induction of Christian warriors into ‘The Order of the Cappadocian Martyrs,’ led by 10th Group Chaplains Darren Chester and Terry McBride.

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I've never uttered the words, "I'm blessed." Shamefully, I'm more likely to describe myself as lucky to live a good life. I don't even believe in the philosophy of luck, but it's just a flip-pant phrase I can use without attaching any deeper spiritual meaning to it.

Admittedly, I should probably find a better phrase to use.

But the reason I've struggled with describing myself as blessed is because the phrase is used so casually that I've had a sneaking suspicion it's actually not often used correctly.

For some, they are "blessed" because of the delicious bagel they ate this morning. Others are "blessed" because they just received a job promotion. Another is "blessed" because they survived cancer.

Can all of these situations be equally described as a blessing? Are there ranges of blessings, or should we limit our use of this word to certain situations?

To define yourself as blessed has always been trendy. One popular rap song even says, "I'm not lucky, I'm blessed." It seems like anything can be described as a blessing, and maybe it's a good thing to view every moment in life as a blessing.

Nevertheless, as common as the word is among Christians and non-Christians alike, I must admit I've never truly understood what it meant to be blessed. Based on its usage, to be blessed means something good has happened in your life. But the issue with defining "blessing" this way is how challenging it becomes to apply that definition to biblical descriptions of blessing.

Blessed are those who are persecuted...

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial ...

Blessed are those who mourn...

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Certainly, there are many other verses in Scripture that more fittingly describe the way we use the term blessed today. After all, I don't imagine anyone who is mourning the loss of a loved one is signing off their social media post with #blessed.

Nevertheless, the Bible offers a far more expansive vision for what it means to be blessed than the common understanding.

Types of Blessings

Often times, our framework for blessing is a material gift from God. But if we were to take every biblical mention of blessing, we walk away with three categories or types of blessings.

Blessings From God

The language of God blessing his people is abundant within the Old Testament. The very first blessing from God to humanity is found in Genesis.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen. 1:28)

The very first blessing given from God was the ability to multiply and to govern the earth. This was a gift from God to his creation. It is accurate to understand blessings from God as the physical things that often come to mind, but this is not the only category of blessings God gives.



In Ephesians, Paul describes the spiritual blessings he received from God.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." — Ephesians 1:3-14

This is only one example of the spiritual blessings God provides.

As we look to Scripture for an understanding of true blessing, it's important to talk about the theme of blessings and curses in the Old Testament. Under the old covenant, God would extend blessings for the obedience of his people and curses for their disobedience.

Today, Christians do not operate under the old covenant. We are under the New Covenant that was ushered in with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The operating system of blessings and curses is no longer the appropriate way to understand our relationship with God. His blessings are freely given to his people, regardless of their obedience, because of the obedience of Jesus that is attributed to us.

Blessings to God

The idea of us blessing God may seem suspicious and uncomfortable. We don't often think of having the ability to bless God. He is the Creator and we are the created. He is the Savior and we are the saved. How could we possibly bless God? Yet there are many examples in Scripture that describe people blessing God. This language is primarily found in the Psalms.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." —Psalm 103:1-2

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ." —Ephesians 1:3

It is not that we are a blessing to God, but that we ought to praise him for the blessings he provides to us. This is just an expression of thankfulness and praise from humanity to God.

Humanity is not able to help, strengthen, or make God better.

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Matthew 6:10 literally says, “Whatever You wish to have happen, let it happen immediately. As Your will is done in Heaven, so let it be done on earth.” That’s a prayer of active commitment to God’s will.

Many people don’t pray like that because they don’t understand God’s character. They think their prayers don’t matter and that God will impose His will on them no matter what they do. They tend to pray with passive resignation, indifference, or resentment.

I remember praying such a prayer. After my freshman year in college, I was in a serious auto acci-



dent. The driver lost control of the car at about seventy-five miles per hour, and it rolled several times before coming to a stop. I was thrown clear of the vehicle and ended up sliding down the highway on my backside for about a hundred yards. I lost a lot of skin and had some third-degree burns and other injuries, but fortunately I didn’t break any bones.

I was conscious during the entire ordeal and vividly remember thinking, All right, God. If You’re going to fight this way, I give up! I can’t handle this! You see, I knew God was calling me into the ministry, but I’d been focusing my life in another direction.

I think God used that experience to get my attention, and my prayer of passive resignation soon turned to active commitment as He refined my heart and drew me to Himself.

Perhaps God has dealt severely with you, too. If so, it’s only because He loves you and wants to produce the fruit of righteousness in you (Heb. 12:11). Don’t despise His chastening, and don’t be fatalistic or resentful in your prayers. Godly prayers make a difference (James 5:16); so commit yourself to praying expectantly, knowing that God is gracious and wise and always responds for His glory and your highest good (Rom. 8:28).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1993). Drawing Near—Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith. Crossway Books.

Blessed—More than a Hashtag (Cont.)

When the biblical writers use the phrase “Bless the Lord” or “Blessed be God” they are expressing gratitude, worship, and honor.

Blessings to Others

We are more familiar with the understanding of blessing others than we are blessing God. This is seen through Christian sayings like “God bless you” or “Bless you.”

The blessing of others was common practice in the Ancient Near East. It was common for parents to give a blessing to their children, and these blessings were often material things that took on legal elements. This is seen often in the Old Testament. One example is the debacle of Isaac blessing Jacob instead of Esau, wherein Jacob stole Esau’s blessing, which was apparently legally binding. In the New Testament, Jesus himself is often shown as blessing others. He is the ultimate model of what it looks like to be intent about orienting yourself for the good of others.

We are called to bless others. The goodness of Jesus’ love that is poured into us should intentionally be poured out into our interactions and intentions with others. We should long to bless others. We have the ability to most fully display the blessings given to us when we live with a posture of self sacrificial giving for the sake of others. The understanding of God blessing us so that we will bless others goes all the way back to Genesis. God promised to bless Abraham so that he would be a blessing to the world. This, of course, spoke very directly of Abraham’s offspring. The same theme of God blessing his people so that they would bless others makes its way into the New Testament.

Ultimately, whether spiritual or material, the blessings we receive from God lead us to be more satisfied in him. Blessings are a receiving of God’s favor, regardless of circumstances. These don’t always come in the form of our commonly understood idea of material gifts. Sometimes, blessings are in the trials. They are anything that will draw us closer to Jesus.

That’s why all throughout Scripture we read about the blessed person being the one who abides in Jesus, the person who walks with God, the person who meditates on Scripture day and night. The person who is most satisfied in the Lord is described as blessed.

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Are You Interested in Becoming a Local Leader?

Christian Military Fellowship exists to help you fulfill your calling in Christ to share the hope that is in you with those with whom you interact as part of your daily life.

Briefly, CMF Local Leaders will start, and sustain a CMF fellowship made up of members of the military community in their area. While CMF is an “all ranks” ministry, our area of focus is on enlisted personnel. Local leaders institute and lead the military community in Bible study, prayer, and fellowship,

keeping in communication with participants. They should also seek to build relationships with the chaplains and the chaplain team.

Toward that end we encourage you to study and complete the CMF briefing material:

Orientation (Brief #1) that shares an overview of the CMF ministry.

Developing a Local Ministry (Brief #2) that shares the Biblical foundation

for and delineates the logical steps in beginning your local ministry.

Pray and Plan (Brief #3) that shares the most important activity of all! Asking Jesus what He would have you to do and then being obedient to follow His leading in your local ministry.

If you choose to begin this process, please reach out to us at: leader@cmfhq.org.

We’re praying for you!

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It was a cold, windy, and icy morning. The late snowfall from the previous afternoon and evening left a few inches of new snow on the ground and a lot of dangerous ice on streets and roadways. While such conditions sometimes cause outdoor physical fitness training to be cancelled, there would be no change of plans on this morning! The announcement of, and invitation to the event had stated, in part:

“Note: Weather will not affect this run. If you can get there, we will run. Yes, it will be cold. That is the point. The martyrs for whom this order is named froze to death naked on a pond in the course of 3 days. If they can do that for Jesus, surely we can stand an hour or so in the cold.”

The event was scheduled to begin at 0630 sharp. The rendezvous point was a snow-covered public parking lot just off of Highway 24, heading west out of the city proper. As soldiers arrived, they remained in their vehicles rather than stand in the biting wind any earlier than necessary. At the appointed time, they gathered around the map of the canyon at the edge of the parking lot for the route briefing given by Chaplain Chester. After the briefing, they headed into the small canyon, along a trail that gradually climbed in altitude for nearly a mile. After winding their way through the canyon for 2-1/2 miles, they gathered at the end of the run at another spot in the canyon, a flat open area near a small frozen pond.

Chaplain Chester spoke to the group, relating the story of the 40 martyrs from Sebaste who died on a frozen lake, not only refusing to recant their faith, but proclaiming their faith to the cold, bitter end! The men were encouraged to stand firm no matter what they faced in this life, especially the persecution that all believers face at times when they live righteously before God and in an unbelieving world.

Each member of the group was given a patch symbolizing the martyrs of the “Thundering” XII Legion, Special Forces warriors of today, and emblazoned with a golden Cross of Christ against the canopy of a deployed parachute, a Green Beret, and the crossed arrows. Each man also received a small card on which was printed the following oath of allegiance:

“I am a Soldier for the Lord Jesus Christ. I am prepared to speak any word, do any deed, and go anywhere As He leads Me. His will is my mission. When the enemy attacks I will stand firm. When tempted I will persevere. When persecuted I will not forsake my Lord. I will do good to those who hate me, I will bless those who curse me, I will pray for those who mistreat me. Though pressured I am not crushed. Though perplexed I am not in despair. Though persecuted I am not abandoned.. Though struck down I am not destroyed. I will always carry the death of Jesus in my body, that the life of Jesus may be revealed in my body.”

One can only imagine what the response of the mighty host of Heaven was when the sound of earthly warriors’ voices joined as one in allegiance to the Lord of Hosts and filled the air of a small canyon on a cold windy morning!

The short ceremony concluded with the men in a circle, arms around each other’s shoulders and heads bowed as Chaplain McBride closed in prayer. Certainly, this was an event to be followed by more similar occasions, as more warriors of the 10th Special Forces Group step forward in faith and join this ‘Band of Brothers!’



SGM Daniel Cartwright, USA (Ret.) is a 28-year veteran of the U.S. Army Special Forces and long-time member of Christian Military Fellowship. Dan is a Local Rep at Ft. Carson. He also serves on the CMF Board of Directors.

CHRISTIAN MILITARY FELLOWSHIP

An Indigenous Ministry • Discipleship • Prayer • Community • Support
Encouraging Men and Women in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are pleased to announce that MinistryWatch has listed CMF as one of their “Shining Light” Ministries. To become a MinistryWatch “Shining Light,” a ministry must have earned a 5-star rating on MinistryWatch’s 5-star financial efficiency scale. Further, those ministries on this list have a Transparency Grade of “A.” That’s MinistryWatch’s highest transparency grade. Out of 700 ministries, only 13 meet these strict criteria.

<https://ministrywatch.com/ministrywatches-annual-list-of-shining-light-ministries/>

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