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## Section One

TAKING EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE:

### *Training Our Minds to a Biblical Perspective*

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*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

by Jocelyn Green

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# THE *Gift* OF SOLITUDE

*Be still and know that I am God.*

PSALM 46:10



IT WAS A FAMILIAR RITUAL OF MINE: after dropping my husband off at his ship for a month-long patrol, I drove home with the radio on and steeled myself for the empty house awaiting me. Since we were in Alaska, it was usually still dark at this time of day and would be for several more hours, which only seemed to sharpen my sense of loneliness. When I arrived home, I'd flip on all the lights and turn on the TV to fill the void of silence that always came when Rob was at sea.

I was newly married, with no children yet, and living off base. I kept myself as active as I could. If I was particularly lonely, I called another Coast Guard wife. While quiet solitude offered itself to me every day, it was the absolute last thing I wanted (remember this is *before* I had children!).

And yet, by casting solitude aside, I also shrugged off the opportunity to reflect, to fellowship with God and hear His voice, to just be still and know that He is God. Solitude means withdrawing from conversation, from the presence of others, from noise, from the constant barrage of stimulation. It is something that Jesus himself sought after while he was on this earth. The gospel of Luke says that "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16 NIV). If Jesus, who was perfect and divine, needed to seek out solitude to be renewed

and restored, and to receive grace and direction from the Father, how much more do we as mere mortals need to do the same?

Jill McMillan, whose Marine husband was often deployed, thrives in the company of others. She says, "And yet, the Lord told me, 'You don't need to be always in on the action. Go to the lonely places like Christ did.' That's when I really grow close to the Lord."

One writer says this: "Strength is in quietness. The lake must be calm if the heavens are to be reflected on its surface. Our Lord loved the people, but how often we read of His going away from them for a brief season. . . . The one thing needed above all others today is that we shall go apart with our Lord, and sit at His feet in the sacred privacy of His blessed presence. Oh, for the lost art of meditation! Oh, for the culture of the secret place! Oh, for the tonic of waiting upon God!"<sup>1</sup>

While I was trying so hard to withdraw from what I thought were the lonely places, I should have taken my cue from Jesus and let myself enter into those places of quiet to pray. To dwell on the fact that no matter what I was going through, God is still God, and miraculously, He wants to spend time with me.

### *Ask*

Am I jam-packing my life so much that I have no time to pause before the Father? What is keeping me from sharing moments of stillness with God?

### *Pray*

*Lord, You see how hard I fight against loneliness. You know I am trying to stay engaged in my community so that I don't have time to notice the pangs of emptiness that seek to assault me. But in my efforts to crowd out those aching feelings, let me not neglect my time alone with You. I need to be recharged by Your Spirit. Comfort me with Your presence today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

by Jill Hart

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# Blessed CONTENTMENT

*I have learned to be content  
whatever the circumstances.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:11 NIV



DURING OUR FIRST YEARS of marriage we, like many military families, lived frugally. I worked full-time at a job I dreaded each morning, but dreamt of starting a family and staying home to care for them. As time went on, it became my focus and each day began to revolve around my desire to be a stay-at-home mom.

While the goal was admirable, my attitude was not. I began to resent having to work, which caused stress on my marriage. Fed up with my constant grumbling, my husband made a comment that changed my life. He said, “Jill, why don’t you stop complaining, trust God to see you through, and start looking for a way to work from home?”

His statement made me reevaluate my attitude, and it ultimately launched what would become my own home-based business. However, what he said to me that day did even more than that. It made me realize that instead of being thankful for all God had given me and looking forward to what He may have in store, I had been focusing solely on the negative aspects of my life.

How could I possibly have a good attitude or find success when the only things I could see were the things I was



unhappy with? That day, I sat down and made a list of things both big and small that I am grateful for. I keep the list in the top drawer of my desk and anytime I find myself with an attitude of discontent or grumbling, I pull out that list and read through it. It's such a powerful reminder to be thankful no matter what my situation in life. Even in times where we have found ourselves with more bills than money, He has been faithful and seen us through.

A great example of contentment in the face of trials is Horatio Spafford. Spafford lost much during his life—real estate that provided his living burned in the Chicago Fire of 1871, a son died about that same time, and four daughters were lost when their ship sank crossing the Atlantic. In the midst of these tragedies, Spafford met with his good friend, evangelist D.L. Moody. He reportedly told Moody, “It is well. The will of God be done.” It was these words that eventually led him to pen the well-known hymn “It Is Well with My Soul.”

During his time as a missionary, the apostle Paul was loved by some, beaten and imprisoned by others, and yet always content. Philippians 4:11b–13 (NIV) gives us a glimpse of his attitude: “...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

*Ask*

What is my attitude?

Am I grateful for all I've been given or focused on what I don't have?

How can I develop an attitude that pleases God?

## *Pray*

*Dear Lord, You know how hard it is to be grateful when circumstances are difficult. Help me to keep my eyes on You, knowing that You have what's best for me at heart. Help me to be content no matter what my situation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

by Sarah Ball

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# IN *Everything* GIVE THANKS

*In everything give thanks; for this is  
God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18



GIVE THANKS in all circumstances? I think I'd be much more comfortable with this verse if it said: "Give thanks to God in as many circumstances as possible, excluding car breakdowns, child behavior problems, and deployments." After all, who could possibly expect me to be thankful during deployments?

The uncomfortable answer to that question: God does. God expects and desires my thanksgiving in all circumstances. God does not command us to be thankful *for* everything, but we are expected to give thanks *in* everything. I was relieved to realize that I didn't have to be thankful for deployments, but convicted of my need to continue praising God even during deployments.

Picture the scene of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego with me. Three young Jewish men, taken from their homeland to serve in a foreign land, are going head to head with the king of an empire. King Nebuchadnezzar orders them to bow and worship his statue, and they refuse. He threatens them with death in a fiery furnace, and this is their reply:

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego replied to the king,

‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Daniel 3:16–18, emphasis added).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not know how God would act in their circumstances. In their lives, they had seen times when God provided safety and times when God allowed His people to suffer. They did not know if God would intervene, but they trusted Him completely, and they were prepared to praise Him all the way to the furnace.

The challenge is to recognize that God could choose to shower us with blessings—but regardless of whether He chooses to do so, we are to give thanks. God could keep my husband here at home with me all the time, but if not, I will thank God for the husband He has given me. God could give my children hearts of perfect obedience every day, but if not, I will thank God for being their Heavenly Father, who holds my children in His own hands. God could PCS (permanent change of station) my family to a warm and sunny climate near the beach where housing is abundant and the cost of living is low, but if not, I will thank God that He never leaves me alone, no matter where I am.

*Ask*

Do I give thanks in all circumstances,  
even those that are challenging or difficult?  
Does my attitude of praise give glory to God  
in front of other people?

## *Pray*

Dear Lord, I thank You for Your Word, which challenges and encourages me. I thank You for sending Your Son to provide my salvation, so that I can live in hope, regardless of my circumstances. I thank You also for \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your own list here, as long as you like!). Give me a heart of gratitude so that I may praise You in every situation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

by Jocelyn Green

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## COMPARING *Trials*

*Bear one another's burdens,  
and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*

GALATIANS 6:2



I SAT IN OUR BIBLE STUDY and watched another woman share a prayer request. She was having a hard time dealing with the fact that her parents and sister's family had moved across the country. After years of living in the same small town of Homer, Alaska, this woman missed them terribly and was growing bitter about it.

As I listened to her share with broken voice and many tears, I'm ashamed to admit I had no compassion for her whatsoever. The first thing that jumped into my mind was, "You call that bad? Try being a military wife! We hardly ever get to live near our extended families. We don't even live with our own husbands half the time!"

I carried my "I have it worse than you" attitude home with me that day. I snuggled up to it to make myself feel more virtuous or worthy somehow. But the tighter I held on to it, the less Christ was able to use me. I used my own trials as something to be proud of. What a ridiculous thing to boast about!

Proverbs 14:10 says, "The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy." When I read that verse, it seems to tell me that each person's burden causes him or her a pain that should not be diminished just because someone else

has it worse. It is impossible and worthless to compare trials. A truly humble person would have compassion and bear others' burdens no matter how they "rank" next to my own.

John Ortberg says this: "Humility . . . involves a healthy self-forgetfulness. We will know we have begun to make progress in humility when we find that we get so enabled by the Holy Spirit to live in the moment that we cease to be preoccupied with ourselves, one way or the other."<sup>2</sup> When we are with others, we're not assigning value to their prayer requests and feeling more spiritual if our own trials seem more acute.

In Galatians 6:2, Paul does not say, "Bear one another's burdens only if you deem the burden of sufficient magnitude. If it isn't a big deal to you, go ahead and let your sister in Christ figure it out on her own. She'll get over it." We are to "bear one another's burdens"—period.

Philippians 2:4–5 tells us, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Now, if anyone had the right to consider other people's complaints as petty, Jesus did. Jesus knew He would die a horrific death on the cross to pay for the sins of the people who put Him there—and yet He took time to comfort and heal thousands of people with lesser trials. May we seek to model Jesus' humility and compassion in our own lives.

*Ask*

Am I harboring feelings of being more spiritual because of the difficult circumstances the military has given me?

How can I communicate love and understanding for other people this week?

## *Pray*

*Lord, It's so easy to focus on my own troubles. Please grant me the humility to set them aside so I can be genuinely available to minister to my brothers and sisters in Christ without comparing our burdens. Help me get my mind off myself by serving other people this week. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*



by Marshéle Carter Waddell

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# Rank

*Man looks at the outward appearance,  
but the Lord looks at the heart.*

1 SAMUEL 16:7



ONE MORNING, as my husband dressed for the day, I sensed his anxiety. He was to be the ringmaster of a dog and pony show for several captains and admirals scheduled to arrive that day. I put my arms around his neck, looked deep into his green eyes, and said, “Remember, Honey, the admiral puts his pants on one leg at a time, just like you.” Mark relaxed.

There is danger in putting too much emphasis or value on a person’s military rank. All personnel, from E-1 to O-10, share the same heart, mission, and vision for our nation. The only difference is in the duties assigned to each person. Rank and responsibilities differ; their souls, significance, and sacrifices don’t.

The saying “You can’t take it with you” is trite but right. Once an admiral, general, master chief, or sergeant major retires from military service, they can no longer command the same respect from the civilian world that they once did from the military realm. Sooner or later, the reality hits home that respect is earned, not assigned.

Our pastor has said that we should remember to take our “vitamin E” every day. He meant that a daily dose of looking at the eternal and getting our eyes off the things that pass away promotes health. God, His Word, and people are eternal. The

black shoulder boards, gold stars, red stripes, colorful ribbons, and shiny medals will one day be placed and stored in a shadow box. Our bodies and worldly achievements, likewise, will be laid in a slightly larger box and given back to the dust. In the end, all that matters is our love for God and His highest creation, people. Friends and family are the only treasures that will survive beyond the grave. A daily dose of vitamin E-ternity can do much to correct an impaired view of people.

There is no partiality with God. Christ died for the private and the general alike. He came and died to redeem the seaman and the admiral, their wives and their children. Because He values and loves all of us equally, there should be no partiality in us. “Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe” (2 Chronicles 19:7).

A chest full of ribbons and a shoulder heavy with stripes are not impressive to Him. “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Only humility, faith, and service move the heart of God.

Governments, rules, regulations, protocol, and etiquette are temporary. God wants us to live humbly in the present and to keep our focus on the eternal.

*Ask*

Do I assign value to people based on their rank?  
How would the Lord rank my heart in comparison to His?

## *Pray*

*Lord, Thank You that You love us all the same. Thank you that You do not show partiality among Your children. Please give me eyes to see others the way You see them. Live Your life through me and cause me to love each individual regardless of where they currently rank in the world's value system. Enable me to give respect where it is due and keep my eyes focused on the eternal, priceless soul of each person who intersects my life today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*