

I would like to thank the fellow veterans who opened their hearts in preparation for this message. The insights and experiences they shared were sometimes tough to verbalize, but were invaluable in the completion of this message.

We have seen and heard of the term PTSD a lot the last several years. It stands for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A quick definition of this disorder can be found in a local Veterans Center brochure:

PTSD is defined as:

"A normal set of reactions to a trauma, such as war, which could be experienced by almost anyone. Sometimes, it becomes a Disorder (PTSD) with the passage of time when feelings or issues related to the trauma are not dealt with, but are suppressed by the individual."

It has been identified as the cause of most of the stresses, problems and difficulties experienced by veterans as they try and readjust to civilian life. **A Veterans Administration study has shown that 1 in 5 (20%) returning veterans experience this Disorder.**

This disorder has also been misunderstood, fostered misconceptions and caused apprehensions about returning service personnel. Families and friends are always asking, "What do I do, how do I help?" Or, they flat out state, "I don't know what to do!" Others just prefer to avoid all contact with veterans who they think are suffering from this disorder.

From the word of God, we are going to see that PTSD is not new. He made provisions for it over 3,400 years ago. In fact, only since Vietnam and the subsequent wars has it been called "PTSD". You may have heard it referred to by different names:

During Korea it was called "battle rattled"
During WWII it was called "combat fatigue"
During WWI it was called "shell shock"
During the Civil War it was called "SOLDIER'S HeART"

Of all these names, "SOLDIER'S HeART" seems to fit best. And that's how we are going to refer to it. Why?

This was borne out while doing the research on this message. I visited the local Veterans Center and had a discussion with one of the counselors there, a very dedicated individual and himself a veteran. He provided good information and insight. One part of his presentation really stuck out. He mentioned the group discussions and said, **"The veterans we see are articulate, intelligent and have tremendous verbal skills. But, here (motioning to his heart), nothing". That "nothing" is Soldier's Heart.**

We are not going to try and diagnose it or cure it. We are not qualified to do that. But our God is. To the suffering vet, we want to show from the Word how God deals with it and the healing and peace He provides. To the families, friends and everyone else our hope is that this same Word will offer practical ways in how to relate to, interact with and minister to veterans.

Because some veterans return with physical and mental wounds that need to be healed. But almost all veterans return with issues of the heart that need to be healed.

Key Idea

Returning veterans enter into camps. These camps are either of the world or of God. The kind of camp the veteran returns to determines his healing.

OPEN to Numbers 31:19-24

We are going to look at one of the first instances of a nation's caring for its returning veterans. Moses, following directions from God, established guidelines so that soldiers were eased back into society and had their needs addressed. By obeying these guidelines, Israel developed a heart for veterans.

1. God's Heart for Veterans (Numbers 31: 19-24)

This camp was the Israelites on a military mission from God against the Midianites. This type of conflict would have been very intense hand-to-hand type of combat. Soldiers endured draft-like conditions and multiple deployments at a moment's notice; citizen soldiers. High priest (chaplain) embedded with troops going into/coming back from battle notes the spiritual emphasis. We read of the ritualistic cleansing of men, equipment and spoils of war—**this reveals God's heart for veterans.**

The reason for all of God's commanded rituals is that He does not want us to forget something important. There is an underlying focus that God wants us to remember. Communion is the most excellent example: In taking Communion we take the cup and the bread in "remembrance of Me"

In the observing the ritual in Numbers 31, God wanted the veterans to remember:

- He had sent them on their mission
- They were His righteous agents
- They were forgiven—they had done nothing wrong
- They were now clean— and ready to return to the camp

Those inside the camp would be aware of what was happening outside the camp. They would have been well versed in the commands of God thru Moses' instructions. What would be their part to play? What could they offer? How could they help?

Again, We look to God's Word for that answer ...

Please turn to 1 Kings 19

2. Caring For A Soldiers Heart – 1 Kings 19

We are going to look at Elijah because he, although not specifically a soldier, was in a war nonetheless. He battled for not only his survival, but also that of the entire nation for over three and a half years.

Had the power to stop rain and bring drought for three years

He was always on the run and in hiding:

- Fed by ravens
- Fed by widow/son; made provisions last; bottomless barrel
- Raised widow's son from dead
- Then took on the evil prophets of the king and queen
- Took on 450 of them, won and had them executed.

Thought the war was over

But then:

He was told by the queen that he was going to die in 24 hours

What is the response from this battle tested veteran?

He was finally overcome with Soldier's Heart.

READ 1 Kings 19:3-10 and 15-18

Elijah thought he was alone and had no camp to turn to for help. So he ran. He would soon find out that this was not the case. God Himself provided the healing necessities for Elijah. These provisions are still applicable and appropriate today.

God provided:

Time (God let him run for a long time and a long way to collect his thoughts) V:3, 4

A safe place V:3b (in Judah, away from Ahab/Jezebel)

A safe place is in the perception of the veteran

God never asked for all the details from Elijah

I know one veteran who received invitations to go to lunch when he returned from war. It seemed to be a safe, kind and harmless invitation. Yet, it became unsafe because he was asked questions no veteran wants to hear: "How many bad guys did you kill? Were any of your friends killed?" It was too many tender, unsafe questions, pressing for information the veteran was not yet ready to share.

I know another veteran who had just the opposite situation. He received invitations, but there were no invasive, "unsafe" or undesired questions. He was accepted. He knew he could trust a circle of safe friends who showed unconditional acceptance. So he felt safe.

Food: v. 6, 8

Sleep and Rest: v. 5, 6b

Loving patience: (let him run over 100 miles and then travel 40 more days)

A job to do (anointing kings and mentoring young prophets): v. 15, 16a

A companion (Elisha): v. 16b

Assurance he was not alone: v. 18

We can provide many of these same necessities. We can have an impact on a veteran's heart. But will we?

Remember our key idea:

Returning veterans enter into camps. They are either of the world or of God. The kind of camp the veteran returns to determine his healing.

We now need to look at these camps ...

3. The Heart of A Camp

What are some of these camps? (adjusted for our time/culture)

We (local church) are a camp

Marriage is a camp

Jobs are a camp

Social/athletic clubs are camps

School is a camp

Classes are a camp

Alcoholism, drugs and other addictions are camps

Homelessness is a camp

When entering and interacting in these camps, a veteran needs to experience the same things that God provided for Elijah. If they are available and administered, he may stay. If they are not, chances are he will keep searching until he finds a camp that offers them.

Looking at the list of what God provided Elijah, you may say that they can be provided by anyone—whether they are of the godly camp or the worldly camp. That is true—should a worldly camp become a provider, the veteran may well stay there. For a time.

But a worldly camp cannot duplicate the way in which they were administered.

READ 1 Kings 19: 11-13a

Elijah not only experienced God's provisions for his healing, but he experienced them through God's power!

This takes the focus from the provisions to a faithful Provider! A Provider Who never leaves or forsakes us.

Many veterans will tell you that wind, earthquake and fire are like the sights and sounds of artillery, rocket or mortar attacks. From personal experience, I can tell you that when you are experiencing these, you are talking to God and are not listening.

That's why it is important for a veteran to be in a place where the noise and confusion of battle are silent, so they are able to listen.

As awesome as these manifestations of God's power are, more powerful is the gentle whisper of our God—the power to change simple provisions from worldly and temporary to life changing and eternal.

So how does the Provider show His power to a veteran or anyone else today?

Through the healed and changed hearts of those within His camp
Through the mercy & compassion they offer because it was extended to them

By observing those in Gods camp, a veteran will see the manifestation of God's power to heal all around him.

The longer he stays, the more he hears God's Word.

One day, he may hear the gentle whisper of God, like Elijah, and begin to heal.

To the camp of God: show mercy and compassion to the hurting heart of a veteran. Do not try to get into his head. Provide what you can to allow the loving Savior and His healing power and grace time to work in his heart.

Do you remember the story of the Good Samaritan? (Luke 10:25)

Let's think of it in this way:

A veteran with "soldier's heart" is beaten and left at side of road

Which camp will pick him up and provide for his needs?

Can you provide food to a suffering veteran?

Can you provide a safe place for this veteran?

Can you be patient with him?

Can you be a companion?

Can you provide him a job?

This is the kind of camp God wants us to be.

To the veteran: Accept the mercy and compassion offered to you by those within God's camp. They only want to share the healing and deliverance of a loving Savior that they have already experienced.

Finally, take heart from David, one of the greatest soldiers who ever lived and "a man after God's own heart. In Psalm 4 David is struggling with soldier's heart and a sleepless night. He is finally given rest and the Psalm concludes with this great promise:

Psalm 4:8 **"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety"**

In conclusion:

I want to ask you these questions:

Do you know the God Who has always made provisions for fighting men and women?

Do you know the God Who can give you peace?

Do you know the God Who can make you dwell safely inside His camp?
Have you met HIM?

“Father in Heaven, thank You for the healing only You can provide. We pray that as we encounter veterans in our daily walk, we will reach out to them and show them a safe place inside of God’s camp. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”