

**Devotional**  
**25 September 2011**  
**Ch Rick Cavens**

The silent General from the Pentagon sat across from me with his hands in his lap. We had chatted some. In a few minutes we would march together with another officer following an Honor Guard. Nine men in perfect military uniforms would walk out to receive the bodies of three soldiers who had fallen in Afghanistan. It was a sunny day at Dover Air Force Base where the military mortuary receives our dead. Yet, the sun did not shine in our hearts. The General had just returned from meeting with the families of these three fallen. He looked up and said, "Chaplain, we will never know what we have truly lost in these wars. What would these outstanding young men have given their families and country if they had returned from this war alive?" "You're right sir, we will never know."

We will never know as warriors what we have lost by being engaged in our wars on terrorism. We can make a mental score card of events away from family, friends wounded, those killed, how many times we have been deployed. But what did we lose in our soul by dipping our hands in war's violence? Only time will tell. But you can and should seek that insight into what was lost. In Karl Marlantes book, "What It Is Like To Go To War" he talks of the warrior going to "The Temple of Mars." At the Temple of Mars we are trained to unloose the savage from within so that civilization can survive. Marlantes book is not an apology for war, but an open look at the cost upon the individual who goes into battle. He flat out says, "You can't force consciousness or spiritual maturity". But in the act of war the maturity and spiritual consciousness will arrive; and that takes some time and sorting out. Yet when the warrior returns home the family may not allow time for sorting and seeking post-battle maturity. They are about living and may tell the veteran in not so many words, "Let the dead bury the dead."

The best scripture for preparing spiritually for war is not Joel, chapter three, "Beat your plowshares into swords...Let the weakling say, "I am strong!" Or Micah chapter four, they will beat their swords into plowshares... nor will they train for war anymore." Both Bible quotes in their absolutes bring warrior guilt; a guilt that is not needed. For war makes people both saint and sinner. We have no reason to be filled with more guilt, we've got enough.

The best scripture to prepare spiritually before and after battle is from Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans chapter seven, "Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me...waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. This Bible verse allows you to vacillate in your vocation of violence before and after battle. As we step in to do a military mission we may have a mixture of patriotism, feelings of strength, and wanting to do our best against a common enemy; this can be all wrapped in a holy fear of messing up, seeing death, getting wounded, or getting dead. How do we understand what we will have to face?

Marlantes also writes, "Inside Mars Temple I experienced a surprising love for those who entered with me. There I prayed for deliverance from horror, carnage, and death. Never have I felt closer to God and more baffled by the problem of evil." It is love, God's love that will release the prisoner from the Temple of Mars. Paul continues in Romans chapter seven, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" God's love will pull us through when we finally come home to stay. Our ability to love will bring war's healing.