

No Patch?

Brothers, as you are aware, the U.S. Military is becoming increasingly concerned about the problems troops that have been deployed to combat areas are experiencing.

PTSD has long been on the concern list. But now, with increasing signs of other symptoms, the list of concerns has grown longer. Increased incidents of suicide and suicide attempts have demanded attention.

It turns out that an extremely high percentage of people who have experienced problems have not sought out the help that the Military is not only offering, but also strongly encouraging. So, studies are taking place, and the news media is beginning to report stories to the American people.

There are a number of reasons for the reluctance to seek help, even when the person is in great distress. Of course, there is sometimes the *macho defense*. A rough, tough Marine is not going to find it easy to admit he is dealing with something he cannot handle.

But there are also other reasons. One is the *career defense*. There is a fear that going for help will negatively impact a person's career. And, in some cases (some troops would say most cases) this fear is justified.

Talking with a Chaplain is considered to be safer than going to a therapist. After all, the subject matter may be a religious question, or a family problem. Those are OK. The rest of the unit will not begin questioning if this person is still able to watch their back.

Let me use one person as an example. Hopefully, he is not typical. Sgt X talks about the heat slapping him in the face as he stepped off the plane in Baghdad, and the scared children peeking through windows. But, *"After two weeks, you just didn't care anymore."* And, *"After that first IED, that's when the anger in me really came out. All my sweetness, caring, just went out the window."*

He grew to hate the children in Iraq who continually approached him for candy. Ever since, even today, he avoids dealing with his own children because he is afraid he might snap.

He moved into the garage. He reported faithfully for duty, but when he came back home he spent much of his time playing video games—anything to keep from sleeping... and the dreams that were sure to come.

And yet, he was refusing treatment. Once, after his second deployment, he set aside his ego and went to see an Army counselor. *“The meeting lasted twenty minutes, if that.”*

What went wrong? He noticed the bare Velcro patch on the counselor’s right arm. *No combat patch!* He excused himself and left. He was not willing, or not able, to open up to someone who had little idea of what war is about.

So what does that say to us? How many of us have a combat patch? Does this mean that we are excluded from being able to help those who come back with combat residues?

No!

But the incident does remind us of some things. We dare not even infer that we understand what such a person has gone through. In addition, we are not trained psychologists. We are physicians of souls. The souls of combat veterans are not essentially different from the souls of car mechanics or schoolteachers. Nor do we use different tools to treat these souls.

Experiences, emotions, and mindsets can get in the way of our treatment of the soul. But the sword of the Spirit can cut through these defensive perimeters.

We acknowledge that mental stress and emotional disturbances are in place. But that is not what we are aiming at. We want to touch the soul with Law and Gospel. We want to enable the Holy Spirit to do his work.

Sin, guilt, fear, faith and forgiveness: these are the factors we address.

Where there are mental problems, let mental professionals address them. But even then, there is a need for our work, for our expertise. Unless the soul is challenged, renewed, and refreshed, any other improvement is only external.

The reality is that you and I do carry a combat patch. It is not attached with Velcro; it is etched into our hearts. Sometimes, we represent this patch by means of a cross. The cross may show up in the form of a logo on our business card, or engraved upon the cover of our Bible, or many another format.

That cross, sometimes in the color of gold, is a reminder of the ultimate combat experience carried out by Forces far greater than we can even visualize. Like the gold star appearing in a window, it signals that someone we love has died in this conflict. His name was Jesus, the Son of God.

We come to minister to souls, not in our own name or on the basis of our experiences. We come to bring Jesus to wounded souls. It's his patch that we point to. He knows. He understands. He has the power to heal. He won not just a battle. He won *The War*.

But that does not mean that we have been spared conflict and combat. The Enemy has sought us out. We have walked into his ambushes. Sometimes we came away unscathed. Other times, we were wounded. We survived only because the Lord God "had our back."

We are veterans of spiritual warfare. We are survivors—by the grace of God. And, just like the souls we come to tend, we are still in the midst of battle.

We are spiritual medics. We seek out the wounded. We bring healing and life.

We see and understand the real battle the wounded soul is facing.

We live in the midst of a battlefield.

We have seen combat.

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