

## Walking into the Fire: Living on the Front Lines

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While traveling in the Midwest, I was looking forward to meeting an old friend of mine. Years ago we had worked together on a Gospel team. I remember how I was challenged by his zeal for the Lord, his burden for the lost and his example as a servant.

The more we talked, the more I realized he was no longer interested in reaching those who have never heard the Gospel. His whole life now revolved around his career and providing a more affluent lifestyle for his family. He had no more tears or passion for the lost. His reaction to everything I said about the mission field was cold and without enthusiasm. I returned to my hotel room that night, sadly wondering what had happened to my friend.

Thinking about my friend, I realized that the most difficult part of maintaining a radical walk with the Lord is not practicing a new lifestyle. It's not just mastering the basic teachings of the Bible or sharing our faith with others. It's not even praying effectively in faith for those in need or fighting the devil over public schools and politics.

The toughest challenge for believers today is to stay close to our Lord on the front lines, practically engaged in reaching the lost. When we first come to know the Lord or enlist in His army, we are so full of zeal and enthusiasm we can't wait to do combat.

However, as time goes by and we move from one battle to the next, we get weary. We wonder when the struggles will end. We discover that constant alertness and attack are exhausting.

We suddenly long for peace, relaxation and early retirement. Most of us have no plans to quit the army altogether. We still want to serve, but no longer on the front lines where we are under constant attack.

Quitting the battle is not an overnight decision. It's a slow erosion of heart that often started long before. The shift is so subtle and gradual that we don't see it coming. When we discover our compromise, we try to defend and justify our position. But in reality we have already lost much of the love and commitment we once had for the Lord and His kingdom.

How did it all start? What was the root cause? How did we backslide, get sidetracked, quit the battle and miss God's perfect will? What was the powerful temptation that overran our post?

Let me answer these questions with a quote I read recently that went something like this: None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends who care more for our comfort than for our character.

Whenever you decide to live radically committed to Christ and His call to win the lost, watch out! Immediately you will find well-meaning people rallying around you to help you stay "balanced." They're not your enemies—but your friends, your family members and your brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.

These people are truly concerned about your welfare. They give you heartfelt council: "Don't overdo it. Think about your future. What about your family? You have rights too. You will burn out. This can't be God's will for you. God never wants you to go overboard with this commitment. Think about your wife and children. You will regret it later."

The hardest decision you will ever have to make is to firmly tell those who love you, "I have decided to follow Jesus. Today I have put my hand to the plow and cannot look back. I have determined to give my life for the more than 2 billion people who are unreached by the Gospel and are dying without Christ. Don't hold me back or feel sorry for me. My heart is fixed. Don't hold me back from pursuing the cross."

Unless you make a firm stand to choose Christ over comfort, you will sooner or later end up on the sidelines. The temptation to give in is powerful because of the relationship and love that bind you to these well-meaning people. Jesus knew this very well. That's why He told His disciples, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

Why do so many of our Christian brothers and sisters try to persuade us to seek our own comfort instead of laying down our lives? I believe the reason stems from a basic misunderstanding—they don't recognize that following Christ means to embrace the cross and, with it, death to our own self.

A careful study of Hebrews 11 reveals that everyone in the "hall of faith" paid a tremendously high price to be mentioned as our examples. Some left their countries, others high positions and riches. Many were persecuted, faced loneliness and rejection. A great number were beaten, killed, sawn apart, imprisoned or burned alive. Yes, God rescued some of them to demonstrate His power, but many of them died at the front lines in the battle. The Bible says the world was not worthy of them.

When we look at the disciples and many of the Christians down through the centuries, we see thousands who died as martyrs while others suffered severe persecution for their faith. Paul's proof of his apostleship was not his "successes," but the price he paid for preaching the Gospel. His account in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 lists scourging, imprisonments, beatings, a stoning, shipwrecks and being betrayed by his own countrymen and false Christians. He could boldly say, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

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If we want to be serious about taking the Gospel to the more than 2 billion unreached people of our generation and the 80,000 who die every day without Christ, then we must come back to this kind of Christianity. We must be determined at all cost to stay on the front lines until Jesus comes back. We must encourage one another daily to reject the temptation of choosing comfort over Christ. We must walk into the fire of battle with everything we have, paying the price as Jesus did.

If we are determined to stay in the battle, we need to constantly examine everything we do in the light of eternity. Think about the lifestyle you have, the vacations you take and the money you spend on yourself. What value do these things have in eternity? Do they help you maintain a broken heart for the lost world? If not, you need to make some changes. Consider one or more of the following:

• Set aside one day of the week for fasting and prayer for the unreached countries of the world. Read the book *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone to help you know how to pray for specific nations.

• Be a bold witness to your coworkers at your job, the checkout lady at the supermarket, the man who sells you gasoline and other people wherever you go.

• If you don't currently support a native missionary, decide to support one today.

Think about what extra "stuff" you could cut out of your budget to free up just \$1 per day. Do something that counts!

• For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? (Mark 8:36).