

Biblical Principles for Christian Military Service (3.23.2026)

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Introduction

The following five inductive Bible studies are written to help members of the military and police to faithfully serve as disciples of Jesus in government service. Each one of these Bible studies can be conducted in single sessions, or they can be split into multiple sessions. These Bible studies are designed to:

1. Help us discern our moral responsibilities and ethical actions from what God requires from us in our military service.
2. Help us apply key Biblical texts about military service through group discussions with fellow Christians to our military service.

Our lives serve a dual purpose. As Christians, we live as stewards of God's creation and redemption in the ways we conduct ourselves in this world. As members of the military, we also live as stewards of our nations' military power in the ways that we conduct ourselves in the performance of our duties. Thus, our character, our competence, and our convictions combine in the ways we interpret our faith and form the values we use to identity ourselves as Christians serving in the military.

The same dual purpose was true for biblical leaders who also served as soldiers, and several passages in the Old and New Testaments tells the story of how their faith and relationships with God informed their values and convictions in the ways they served. Thus, their spiritual character mattered just as much as their military competence – and they can serve as exemplars for us. They help us visualize correct behavior if supposed to be.

An exemplar is a model for imitation. However, it is important to distinguish between exemplars and the virtues themselves. In military and law enforcement cultures, virtue-based character, not exemplars, drive performance. The philosopher Aristotle defined virtues as the practical motivations, standards, and behaviors that allow human beings to live well. We display virtuous behavior by desiring what is honorable and rejecting what is shameful in the life situations we encounter.

Aristotle suggested that there are four main virtues that guide our actions –1) prudence (wisdom), 2) justice, 3) fortitude (courage), and 4) temperance (self-discipline). These virtues cannot be coerced by authority, fear or punishment. Instead, they need to develop within us through encouragement (mentorship/discipleship) prayer, service, and reflection. Such virtues define our duty and they serve as the foundation of military character and service.

For Christians, these virtues are summarized by the prophet Micah, “What does the God require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Jesus’ teachings about the two greatest commandments, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind: and you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:36-40, Mk: 28-34, and LK 10:25-37).” These virtues are also produced as fruits guided by the Holy Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Obedience to these teachings is essential for all Christians.

There are many exemplars of military virtues displayed by Old Testament leaders, but Christians’ primary exemplar is Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-3), who embodied the standard for our behavior: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one.” (John 13:34-35). Jesus’s teaching invites us to define our practice of traditional virtues as fruits of the Holy Spirit in obedience to God’s command for us to love one another.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul encountered Roman Soldiers during the performance of their duties, and God used these soldiers as exemplars to shape how the Gospel was delivered to all humanity from the earliest Christians to us, who serve today.

Thus, the formation of our moral principles and ethical practices as soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and law enforcement personnel needs to begin with the Gospel accounts of our Lord’s life and the ministry of the apostles instead of Old Testament exemplars. The following five inductive Bible Studies will help us explore God’s invitation for faithful service to our nations and our neighbors.

Each of the following Bible studies uses an inductive methodology that: 1) observes what is written in the text, in order to 2) interpret and correlate meanings from the text, and finally 3) apply meanings derived from the text to personal and group contexts.

Each study begins with a prayer and then focuses on a primary text from Luke and Acts, and answer groups of questions designed to help the group focus upon and share what the Lord is saying to them.

Each Bible study also includes additional Biblical texts for further reflection and to help the leader prepare the session. These additional texts and questions can be used for deeper study of the primary text to discern God’s direction for our service.

Finally, each study ends with prayer using an appropriate Psalm for guidance. May these studies bless you and strengthen you in faithful service to our Lord.

What Does God Require of Us?
Biblical Principle #1 Fidelity – the Virtue of Temperance
Key Values: Integrity, Discipline, and Resilience
John the Baptist and the Roman Soldiers— (Luke 3:1-14)

Opening prayer

Introduction

As Christians we belong to Jesus Christ, and through Him we have been brought into the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:3-5). Thus, every aspect of our lives is under His authority and through Jesus we become living stewards in God's kingdom in this world.

Stewardship includes our service as members of our nation's military. Our nations expect us to perform our duties, and our services require values such as integrity, discipline, and resilience to control uses of lethal force, especially under stress. These values can be summarized as the virtue of temperance – the capacity to discern and control correct actions.

Luke 3:14 is the key verse that links the moral values of our faith with our ethical practices because it raises questions about our stewardship of power and violence. Early Christian leaders permitted believers to serve in the military because of this passage, and they argued for government service on the basis of just uses of lethal force in defense of neighbors.

In Luke 3, different groups of people are drawn to listen to John the Baptist preach about repentance to prepare for the coming kingdom of God. Roman soldiers are watching the crowd, similar to the security missions that modern soldiers and police participate in today. While there, they ask John the Baptizer a question, "What does God require of us?" Note: This is the ONLY place in scripture where soldiers ask a messenger of God about God's requirements for them in such a generalized way.

John the Baptist answers the Roman soldiers' question. by using three specific Greek words to convey the following meanings. 1) The first word literally means, "violence or terrify to rob" as opposed to stealing by stealth. 2) The second word literally means to accuse falsely, and this word is linked to the commandment not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). 3) The third word means to "have unfailing strength," and this can be connected with God's command for Joshua to be strong and courageous in the face of fear, danger, and uncertainty (Joshua 1:19).

John's words echo the strength and resiliency displayed by the apostle Paul in his missionary journey. St. Paul writes, "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 all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:12-13)."

An unjust, fearful, stressed, and discontented soldier or policeman is a danger to themselves, their comrades, and their neighbors. Thus, John the Baptist's answer to the Roman soldiers invites us to consider our justness, honesty, integrity, and levels of "unfailing strength" in our targeting, and while we are under stress.

Early Christians were forbidden from joining the Roman military, although there are many witnesses that Roman soldiers became believers. Early Christian Fathers used Luke 3:14 in their reasoning that Christians could serve in the military. They noted that John the Baptist did not require the Roman Soldiers to leave the military – instead he asked them to perform their duties for the defense of others instead of self-service. St. Augustine used Luke 3:14 to begin formulating Just War theology, and from these roots grew modern Just War Theory, the Law of Armed Conflict, and International Humanitarian Law – all form moral and ethical boundaries for military service. The following study explores what the Living God requires from us in our service.

Primary Inductive Study

Read Luke 3:1-17 and answer the following questions:

- What is happening at the river? What different professions are asking questions to John? What are their questions? What do the soldiers ask?
- Why do you think answers to these kinds of questions are important for faithfully serving God? How does John's answer these questions? How do his answers apply to each individual or group? Why do you think John answers this way?

Interpretation and Correlation Deeper focus on the Luke 3 verses.

- Do you think the Roman soldiers ask John a different kind of question than the other groups? What is different or similar in their questions?
- What three things does John specifically tell the soldiers?
- Do you think John is only talking about ethical and spiritual practices involving money, greed and corruption? What else can he mean?
- What do you think the Roman soldiers were expecting John to say?
- Why didn't John require the soldiers to leave the military?
- What modern military activities apply to John's answer?
- How do we practice proper uses of authority and power?
- How do we maintain ourselves in times of hardship and fear?
- How does John's answer apply to individuals or to your units? Why?
- What are the virtues and values that God requires of those in military service?

Application: Read Luke 13:1-5 about Pilate killing people during worship, and people dying accidental deaths. Probably Pilate used soldiers or people under orders associated with his authority to do these acts. The falling building was probably a government building project.

- Did Pilates' soldiers or the builders act wrongly? Were the deaths of the victims their own fault (Did they deserve what happened) or were they the victims of unjust circumstances?

- Did these circumstances violate John the Baptist's guidance to the Roman Soldiers or government workers? Why or why not?
- How do Jesus' and John's words guide our behavior in the events we operate?
- The four basic principles for targeting in the Law of Armed Conflict are 1) distinction, 2) military necessity, 3) proportionality, and 4) the prevention of unnecessary suffering, How does John the Baptist's answer to the Roman soldiers applies to these principles?
- How do the Luke 3 and Luke 13 passages connect with modern practices of military distinction, necessity, proportionality and the unnecessary suffering of others?
- Do John's final words to the crowd offer any grace to the crowd and to the soldiers? What is this grace?
- How do the fruits of the Holy Spirit help you understand and apply John's answer to the Roman soldiers (Gal 5:22-23)?
- What standards do you think God will use for judging our actions as soldiers and policemen? How will the above verses inform your values and practices?

For further study:

- Read Psalm 62 – as a soldier, King David struggled with similar issues. How does his prayer help you answer these questions? Notice:
 - Verse 3 – situations of improper attacks
 - verses 5-8 – situations of trust under fire
 - verse 10 – situations of extortion, corruption, and misuse of power
- Read 1 Samuel 24 – David spares Saul's life:
 - What are David's reasons for not killing Saul? (moral values)
 - What are David's orders to his soldiers? (ethical practices)
 - How does this passage relate with John's answer to the Roman soldiers?
- Read Joshua 2:
 - David killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:31-58) and showed the same courage as Joshua (Joshua 1:9).
 - How did the soldiers treat Rahab differently than the rest of their enemies at Jericho?
- Read Deuteronomy 20 . What does God require from Moses and the tribal soldiers in warfare? Why do you think these things are required?

Closing prayer – pray together Psalm 62.

The Commander Who Amazed Jesus
Biblical Principle #2 Responsibility – the Virtue of Justice
Key Values: Duty, Care, Authority, Loyalty and Humility
Jesus and the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1-10)

In this text a Roman commander (Centurion) voluntarily seeks the help of Jesus on behalf of his sick servant. The Centurion was both: 1) an outsider to Judaism, and 2) a foreign invader in charge of martial law. We do not know the details about the servant's sickness - we only know that:

- 1) This Roman Centurion was so motivated by his concern for a subordinate that he reached out to a foreign, religious leader for help.
- 2) We also know that the Centurion was respected by the people he ruled, because Jewish elders describe this Roman as "worthy."
- 3) The Roman Centurion felt subordinate to Jesus, because he said so.
- 4) Jesus was amazed by the faith of the Centurion.

The key question is why? In the Roman Army, the rank of centurion is given to a commander of 100 soldiers. This makes him the equivalent of a modern company commander. At this time in history, a citizen of Rome enlisted in the legions (Army) and was assigned to a century consisting of 100 soldiers. The commander for each century was selected from the most proven soldiers in its membership. Thus, this Roman Centurion was probably chosen because he was the most proven leader in his company. In modern militaries this is probably different.

Some believe that, the modern word for the rank of "sergeant" comes from the French word meaning "a servant, valet or court official." The French word derives from the Latin word "serviens," which also means "servant" The Roman army promoted senior and trusted members of the century to duties that included soldier care. These early "serviens" became the definition of the duties for modern army sergeants.

Some historians have commented that the sick servant may actually have been one of this Centurion's sergeants. This would help explain the concern of the centurion for his servant because of his association with the unit. However, the important feature in this biblical text is how Jesus' healing is responsive to a situation that seems to follow the order and discipline of a military chain of command: A commander is concerned about the welfare of a member of his unit, and he makes a request of Jesus that seems to follow the three of primary rules in chain of command discipline.

- 1) you never make your superior come to you,

- 2) requests move up the chain of command and authority moves down the chain of command.
- 3) A superior can delegate authority but never responsibility.

All of these rules are at work in Luke's texts. Roman soldiers consider John the Baptizer and Jesus as superiors, and in turn John and Jesus do not send any of these soldiers away empty handed, they respond to their requests. So, what do these texts have to say for us?

The Centurion demonstrates a duty of care for subordinates and vulnerable people, a respect for the authority of others, and a responsibility for his own, and a sense of loyalty and humility that goes beyond rank.

A couple of things are special about this text: 1) the townspeople think this foreigner commander is treating them justly, and 2) Jesus proclaims that this Roman officer's faith amazes him. Why? The answer might be the Roman Centurion's ethics embody a sense of justice, -- as a commander, his behavior towards the Jewish community and his compassion for his subordinate, and his humility before God.

Opening Prayer

Primary Inductive Study.

Read Luke 7: 1-10 and answer the following questions:

- Why do you think the centurion sent local elders to Jesus instead of going himself?
- Why do think these local leaders went to Jesus? What was their relationship? Was their behavior motivated by compulsion, public manners, reputation, petitioning for a favor, or something more?
- How do you think the Centurion treated his servant as a member of his command?
- Why do you think the centurion cared for his servant?
- Why do you think he decided to ask Jesus for healing? Did the Centurion have other options?

Interpretation and Correlation

- Why do you think the Centurion believed that he was not worthy to have Jesus come into his home?
- Why do you think the centurion insisted that Jesus only had to say the word for his servant to be healed? Do you ever feel this way? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus was "amazed" by the centurion's behavior?

Application:

- In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because

anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.” (Romans 14:8)

- How do the centurion’s actions demonstrate Paul’s instructions for Christian behavior? He thinks he is unworthy, but Jesus commends his faith – do you think Jesus judged him more worthy than he judged himself? Why?
- How do you evaluate the centurion as a leader? Do you think he followed his superiors as well as he expected others to follow his orders?
- What do you think this text says about the virtues of fidelity, responsibility, and accountability in a commander? What do they say about the authority and humility of a leader?
- Although the centurion wasn’t a Christ-follower, did he display attributes that are associated with fruits of the Holy Spirit? Could he have become one?
- What fruits did he display? Do you think they guided his actions as a commander? As members of the military, how can the fruits of the Spirit be a guide for our character?
- Would you want to serve under this centurion? Why or why not?

For Further Study:

- Read Matthew 8:5-13
 - What are the similarities and differences between Matthew’s and Luke’s account of this event?
 - How do these similarities and differences help you to understand this text?
- Read 2 Samuel 23 about David and his mighty men:
 - This chapter focuses upon the initiative, bravery, and deeds of David’s mighty men. What were they doing? Are they acting like heroes or caring for their commander?
 - Focus on verses 13 – 17. What did they do for David? How did David respond? What reason does David give for his actions?
 - What does this text say about David’s virtue as a godly leader?
 - How are David’s actions similar to those of the centurion in Luke 7? How is he acting differently? What do these passages mean for our leadership?
- Read Psalm 15:
 - How do you think this Psalm of David applies to the centurion?
 - How do you think this Psalm applies to our military service?

Closing prayer – pray together the words of Psalm 15.

The Commander at the Cross
Biblical Principle # 3 Accountability – the Virtue of Courage
Key Values of Truth, Candor, and Self-Awareness
Jesus and the Centurion at the Cross (Luke 23:44-49)

The Centurion at that cross was in command of the detail that executed Jesus. Thus, he was accountable to Rome for killing Jesus in a way that led to his tortuous death. It wasn't personal. It wasn't political. He was under orders, and Jesus was judged to be an enemy of the State. So, the Centurion did his duty by leading his soldiers to torture and kill a condemned prisoner. Perhaps some of the soldiers who met with John the Baptist served in the same unit, and maybe they were also a part in Jesus' death. Or maybe they shared stories about their experiences with their fellow soldiers – but this is speculation.

Moral injuries happen to warfighters when their actions violate their personal and professional values, and the consequences of their actions create conflicting emotions and spiritual struggles. Soldiers experience these struggles because they have a conscience. As Christians, we can experience these same struggles because of our faith, and our struggles require some type of reconciliation between our moral values and life practices – Especially when we admit that we are wrong and have caused harm.

Some warfighters report a feeling of relief and joy at the conclusion of a battle against an identified enemy. Moses and the Israelites celebrated after their enemies' deaths in the Red Sea (Exodus 15). David celebrated after killing Goliath by taking his weapons and his head (1 Samuel 17). There is a legitimate cause to celebrate the death of a perceived evil, and our own survival. But at the same time, there might be a cause to mourn the death or injury of innocent victims or fellow soldiers. There also might be a need to repent and cleanse ourselves from the consequences of our own actions, if we have crossed moral boundaries in the performance of our military duties (Numbers 31: 1-24).

Some say the Centurion at the cross was the first Christian because he recognized Jesus as the Son of God at the cross (Matthew 27:54 and Mark 13:39). Luke records the Centurion's words differently. The Romans soldiers in the execution detail: 1) pounded a crown of thorns into Jesus' head to mock him, 2) they nailed him to the cross, 3) they nailed charges against Jesus over his head, 4) they insulted him, 5) gambled for his clothes, and 6) watched him die. They were even prepared to stab him in the side, or break his legs to hasten his death.

After watching how Jesus endured his death, their commander spoke with the candor of a war veteran, "Truly this man, was righteous." In a sense, the centurion said, "Jesus was right, while Roman and Jewish authority was wrong."

We don't know if this Centurion became a Christian in this moment. Like everybody else, the Centurion reached the wrong conclusion at the cross, because he spoke about Jesus in the past tense. He didn't know that Jesus would be resurrected. However, he spoke with the candor of a veteran who didn't rejoice over the death of a supposed enemy. Like the Centurion

with the sick servant (Luke 7), he may have had compassion. Or, like the soldiers talking with John the Baptist, he may have been considering the justice of his own actions and his need for repentance and change (Luke 3). For whatever reason, the Centurion had a reaction to Jesus, that sets an example for all of us who serve in intersections where we may face moral conflicts between our values, and the consequences of our actions.

Opening Prayer

Primary Text

Read Luke 23: 44-49 and discuss the following questions:

- What do you think the Centurion saw and did at Jesus' execution?
- What was his conclusion for what he did and saw?
- What virtues does this Centurion exhibit?
- Do you see any of the fruits of the spirit in the behavior of this Centurion? What are they?
- Is the centurion's confession and example of integrity? Or was it a reaction to a bad conscience? Was he possibly displaying faith?
- How does this centurion follow or fail to follow John the Baptist's instruction to soldiers (Luke 3)? How is this Centurion similar or different from the Centurion in Luke 7?

Interpretation and Correlation

- Do you think the Centurion was at peace after carrying out his orders?
- The Centurion concluded that Jesus was right. Do you think this meant that he judged his own actions or the decisions of his leaders as wrong?
- Do you think the Centurions actions were foolish, or were they an act of moral integrity?

Application

- What role do you think the Centurion's candor can have for us? What lessons do you take from this centurion?
- Where do we draw the line between our military duty and our faithful stewardship?
- How do the fruits of the Spirit guide you during these times?
- Have you ever been similar positions to those of the centurion at the cross? or King David before Nathan? What did you do?

Closing prayer -- pray together Psalm 51.

For Further Study:

- Read Luke 20:20-26. This passage tells the story of leaders trying to trap Jesus with a question of conflicting obedience to sources of authority.
 - How does Jesus answer these leaders?

- Do you think the Centurion's position and his statement at the cross places him in a conflict between Caesar and God? Why or why not?
- How is the Centurion displaying integrity in an intersection between political and religious authority and the kingdom of God?
- How do you think the Centurion's statement is helpful for you in the performance of your duties?
- Read Romans 13:1-6. This is the Apostle Paul's primary teaching of government and Gospel authority. It will not answer all issues, and it should be read with consideration of Jesus's teaching about the things belonging to Caesar and to God.
 - What is Paul saying about our relationship with governing authorities? How do you think this applies to your service?
 - How do you interpret these verses in relation to the Centurion's comments in Luke 23 and Jesus' teaching in Luke 20. What is helpful to you? What causes you concern?
- Read the story of David, Uriah, and Nathan in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.
 - In our first two Bible studies, David is a good exemplar of godly virtues in a soldier
 - How is David different as a king (senior leader)?
 - What happens in these texts?
 - Do the same virtues that he displayed against Goliath, and with his mighty men, now served to condemn him as a king? How does David fail as a leader? What restores him?
 - Does David display the same kind of self-assessment as the centurion at the cross?
 - David is morally injured by his actions. What does David do when he becomes convicted of his deeds?
 - Have you ever been in similar positions to those of King David before Nathan? What did you do?
- Read Numbers 19:
 - What does God command Moses and Aaron to do with soldiers returning from battle?
 - Why do you think God requires soldiers to do this?
 - Do you think similar practices can be a spiritual and psychological cleansing for you and your unit after traumatic events?
- Read Psalm 51. This is David's confession for killing an innocent man.
 - What issues is David talking about?
 - How is David changing? What verses describe these changes?
 - Could this psalm be helpful to the Centurion at the cross?
 - How can these verses be helpful to you, as you deal with the consequences of traumatic events?

Closing prayer -- pray together Psalm 51.

A Change of Mission
Biblical Principle #4 Maturity/Mission – the Virtue of Prudence (Wisdom)
Key Values of Family, Community, and Commitment
Peter, Cornelius and the Gospel (Acts 10:1-48)

This study is different from the other bible studies because it involves God using the faithful practices of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, his family, and his community to change the Apostle's Peter's bias about who can, and should, belong to the body of Christ. Think about these two conflicting positions.

- 1) The Roman Centurion Cornelius was an outsider (Gentile). He wasn't Jewish and he didn't know about Jesus. But he was praying, we aren't sure about his form and what he knew about God. However, God spoke to him and at God's command he was willing to invite Peter, and gather his family, friends, and his community (which probably including some of his unit's members) so they could learn about God from Peter.
- 2) Peter, was chosen by Jesus to be the leading apostle. He was on his mission to teach people from his own religious culture about Jesus. However, he was reluctant to proclaim the Gospel outside of the Jewish community. But, at God's command and insistence he went to a people he didn't know, and he witnessed a new direction for Jesus' saving work. Later, Peter would testify to the Church in Jerusalem from personal experience about the power in this new relationship between Jesus and Gentiles. This would change forever how the Good News of Jesus is proclaimed and practiced throughout the world and throughout history.

In this lesson, we will be studying what Cornelius and Peter's relationship means for us in our faith, our relationships, and our mission.

Opening prayer.

Primary Text

Read Acts 10:1-48:

- What happens in verses 1-8?
- What do you think Cornelius is praying about? He is a Roman - who might he have been praying to?
- How does God respond to Cornelius' prayers? What is Cornelius' reaction?
- What does the angel tell Cornelius? What does he do?
- Who does Cornelius trust with the mission? What makes this soldier devout or diligent in his duties?
- What happens in verses 9-19:
- What do you think Peter was praying about?
- God's answer presented Peter with a problem. What was the problem? How did Peter respond to God?

- How did God answer Peter's objection? What three things did God tell Peter to do?
- What happens in verses 19-25. Notice the devout soldiers brought two "battle buddies" with them. How do the soldiers describe their commander? How does Peter respond?
- What happens in verses 25-33. How did Cornelius react when Peter showed up at his house? How did Peter respond?
- Notice verse 27 – why was there a large crowd at Cornelius' house? Who was in the crowd?
- What does Peter tell Cornelius? Why was Peter hesitant to go to Cornelius' house? Why did Peter think Cornelius was unacceptable to God? How does Cornelius respond to Peter? What does Cornelius want Peter to do?
- What happens in verses 33-48? How does Peter respond to Cornelius' request? What does Peter proclaim to the crowd gathered at Cornelius' home? What happened after Peter spoke? How did the crowd respond?
- What did Peter do and say when he witnessed God's actions and the peoples' response?

Interpretation and Correlation

- How do our families, communities, and units link with our government service? How does our faith link with them?
- How do we practice our spiritual relationship with God while serving in the military? How do you connect your military discipline with your spiritual disciplines?
- What lessons do we take from these verses? Do you think that Peter and Cornelius are displaying the virtues of a soldier in these texts? What are they? How are they displaying the fruits of the Holy Spirit?

Application

- Read Acts 15:1-22. The Jerusalem Conference. Here the early Church decided how the Gospel was to be proclaimed and what would be required of new converts to Christianity.
- What was God was doing with Paul and Barnabas. How was this confirmed by what God did with Peter and Cornelius?
- What did Peter tell the James the elder?
- How did the church in Jerusalem react?
- What did this mean for the future of Christ's church? How is this still happening today in our ministry? Where do you witness this happening?

For Further Study

- 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. In these verses, foreign invaders are a threat to the people of God.
 - What happens? Who delivers the people of God from the threat? How do the people react as a community?
 - What lessons we take from this scripture?
- Read Acts 11: 1-18 and Acts 15:1-38. These verses describe Peter's Witness to what happened between Peter and Cornelius, and what happened with Paul's ministry at Antioch.

- What do you think is the early church's spiritual bias?
 - How did the early church react to Peter's ministry with Cornelius and Paul's ministry?
 - What does Peter tell them? What do they do with Peter's explanation? What did the Church learn?
 - How do you think God used Gentiles to influence the apostles teaching of the Gospel?
- Read Psalm 128
 - How do you think this psalm could be the prayer of Cornelius, Peter, Paul, and the church?
 - What is the blessing of God and the peace of Christ that applies to the church?
 - How are these blessings and peace happening in your community/church today?

Closing prayer – pray together Psalm 128

“Everyone reached land safely.”

**Biblical Principle #5 Empowerment – the Cumulative Virtue of Character
Key Values of Loyalty, Undauntedness, and Purpose
Paul and Julius on the Road to Rome (Acts 27: 1-44)**

In the previous studies we examined Roman soldiers who interacted with John the Baptizer, Jesus, and Peter on spiritual levels. They asked a strange religious preacher (John) a question about what God required of them (Luke 3). In Luke 7 They requested healing for a unit member from a traveling rabbi (Jesus). They noticed the righteousness in a condemned enemy of the state (Jesus), and they invited a stranger into their home and community to hear about God (Peter). All of these texts included stories soldiers’ professional character and their reactions after coming into contact with the Kingdom of God.

Whether they realized the full importance of these meetings or not – they were actors in the Gospel In each of these events. They displayed the virtue and values for military service, and they assumed some type of risk as well as a spiritual challenge as God entered their lives. Maybe these risks were not a dangerous, physical risk like a soldier or police man accepts in the line of duty, but it was a risk to their identity and character in the way they performed their duties. In this study we will explore the physical risks a centurion took in the performance of his mission to deliver his prisoner Paul to Rome.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) How did the soldiers accept risk in talking with John the Baptizer, and by changing how they performed their duties?
- 2) How did the centurion accept risk when he cared enough for a community and for his servant to depend upon Jesus (a foreign healer)?
- 3) How did the centurion at the cross accept risk when he declared Jesus righteous against the government’s charges against him?
- 4) How did Cornelius accept risk when he became a Christian, and invited others to be baptized with him?
- 5) How did Peter accept risk by ministering to a Roman soldier?
- 6) How did God accept risk when John, Jesus, and Peter interacted with Roman soldiers on a spiritual level?

Each of them accepted some type of risk, and their acceptance led to mission success for the Gospel because God used their government service to fulfill His purpose in Christ. So, what does mean for us?

In 2 Timothy 2:3, the Apostle Paul encourages a young Christian named Timothy to “endure hardships as a good soldier for Christ,” for the sake of the mission to share Jesus with the world. In this study we will examine the actions of Centurions and other Roman leaders who accepted various risks for the purpose of delivering the apostle Paul to Rome. God would use Paul’s journey to bring the Gospel to the Roman world and into our world today. The

Centurion Julius in this lesson is an exemplar of empowerment which can be defined by the virtue of character – which is really the accumulation of all the virtues. Julius displayed character through leadership, undaunted by risk, and unchanging in purpose. In the additional texts, we will examine the biblical principle of empowerment, the virtue of character, and the value of leadership, undauntedness and purpose displayed by Paul, Stephen, Onesimus, and Philemon, and we will close by examining Paul's use of Roman armor to explain the protection that God provides us in our mission as disciples of Christ in military and police service.

Opening prayer

Primary Text

- Read Acts 23:12-35. These verses tell the story of a plot to kill Paul.
- What happens in this passage? What do you think about the actions of the commander? Was it a risk for him to protect Paul? Was it careerism for him to take credit for uncovering the plot to kill Paul?
- How can unrighteous motives lead to righteous acts?
- What do you think about using 200 soldiers (2 companies) for a single protection detail? What level of risk did Felix, the brigade commander, and the two centurions (company commanders) accept?
- Have you ever experienced anything similar?
- Read Acts 27. Paul went through two trials in front of Festus and Felix, and he was sent to Rome because of his appeal to Caesar. That was Paul's right as a Roman citizen.
- What was the Centurion named Julius ordered to do with Paul?
- Look at verse 3. What do you think about Julius' kindness? How did he accept risk by allowing Paul to stay with friends? Do you think that he was a weak soldier? Why or why not?
- Focus on verses 23-41. Their journey to Rome was difficult, and they encountered a storm in which their ship and their survival was threatened. How did they react?
- What did Paul advise Julius to do? Why is Paul doing this? What does Paul know that Julius doesn't? Why is Julius listening to Paul?
- Read verses 42-44 again.
- What did the soldiers want to do to the prisoners? Why did they want to do it?
- What did Julius (the commander) do? Why do you think he did this?
- How do you think Julius was acting like the Centurion at the cross, Cornelius, and the Centurion in Luke 7?
- How do you think Julius acted in accordance with John the Baptist's instructions to the soldiers in Luke 3?
- Did Julius complete his mission?
- What did God accomplish through Julius' actions?

Interpretation and Correlation

- How are each of these Centurions dealing with risk and mission accomplishment?

- What do you think of Julius as a soldier? How was he similar to or different from the other centurions described in Acts 23?
- How did Julius display the virtues described by Aristotle: 1) prudence or self-discipline, 2) justice, 3) fortitude (courage), and 4) temperance (moderation in action)?

Application

- How did Julius display actions which are associated with the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)? How will you use Julius' example in your military service?
- What lessons do you apply to your service and your faith?

For further Study

- Read Acts 7 and Acts 8:1 –
 - What happened to Stephen? Why did Paul approve?
 - Read Galatian 1:11-14 – later in his life, Paul reflects about what he did. What did Jesus teach him? What did he learn?
 - How did the Roman leaders in Acts 23-26 and Julius act with more mercy than Paul did?
- Read Philemon.
 - Why is Paul sending Onesimus back to Philemon?
 - What risks are Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul taking?
 - What are they accomplishing?
 - How is this similar or different from the risks that Peter and Cornelius took in Acts 15?
 - The first recorded bishop of the church in Ephesus is Onesimus. What do you think happened after Paul's letter was read in the church?
- Read Ephesians 6:10-18.
 - How do these verses apply to Julius, Paul, Stephen, Philemon, and Onesimus?
 - How do they apply to Christians at risk?
 - How do they apply in your service?
- Read Psalm 144.
 - Do you think this could be the prayer of Julius, Paul, Stephen, Philemon, and Onesimus? How can it be your prayer?

Closing prayer -- pray together Psalm 144.

Conclusion

As a Christian serving in the military or police -- we hope that you have benefitted from these studies. The philosopher Aristotle believed that having good character required good will, excellent virtue, and practical wisdom that combined our thoughts with our actions. Aristotle, proposed four essential virtues: 1) prudence (self-discipline), 2) justice, 3) fortitude (courage), and 4) temperance (moderation in action) to connect duty with our personal identity. Each one of these virtues need to be balanced between excessive behaviors and insufficient actions. Thus, an excess of courage can result in reckless behavior and a lack of courage can result in cowardice.

For Christians, we do not have the option of separating our personal faith from the work we do. Separations caused by excesses and a lack of character are considered as sin (Romans 14:3). However, we have a relationship with God that is based upon the grace of our Lord Jesus, and not our personal accomplishments (Ephesians 2:8-10), but we also cannot separate the content of our faith from the duties we perform (James 2:17). Thus, our moral orientations to God must be motivated by our faith and guide our ethical service rendered to our neighbors through our governments (Romans 12, Luke 17). Thus, any military virtue we profess and any military duty we perform must be in service to:

- 1) God's desire that we "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)."
- 2) Our Lord's new commandment to, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35)."
- 3) Our Lord's teaching that, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind: and you shall love you neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:36-40, Mk: 28-34, and LK 10:25-37)."
- 4) The guidance of the Holy Spirit who empowers our confession of faith (1 Corinthians 12:3), and produces the fruits of the spirit that guide our life practices, "'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5: 22-23).

The previous Bible Studies only begin to cover the many issues facing Christian soldiers and police. You have read many Bible texts from the Old and New Testaments where soldiers experienced a relationship with God during the performance of their duties. Very few of these soldiers had a perfect relationship with the Living God, yet God used them and because of this – they are exemplars for us. We will leave it to you to determine whether any of these soldiers became faithful followers of our Lord that you should imitate.

However, you should remember that the temptations and trials of these ancient soldiers are not totally different from the struggles we face today. We pray that you may never face

trials that place your faith in conflict with your service. However, we know there will be those times when you are tempted and distressed, and your character as members of the military seems contrary to your character and faith as Christians. In these times it may even seem impossible to act with integrity that bring the two together. Yet, “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).” Let the contacts these Roman soldiers experienced with Jesus, John, Peter, and Paul be guides for you, as God continues to draw close to you in your military service as you serve with grace and honor.

May the Peace of Christ go with you.