

VETERANS - WE'VE GOT YOUR SIX



The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 13:7, *“Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”* Veterans are owed both respect and honor. In recent years, our Nation has become more acutely aware of our veterans’ needs with the Wounded Warrior Project, treatment of PTSD and the catch phrase, “Got your six.” In the military, “got your six” means “I’ve got your back.” The saying originated with World War I fighter pilots referencing the rear of an airplane as the six o’clock position. If you picture yourself at the center of a clock face,

the area directly in front of you is twelve o’clock. Six o’clock is what lies behind you. On a battlefield, your “six” is the “most vulnerable.” So, when someone tells you that they’ve “got your six,” it means they’re watching your back. (Taken from www.wehaveyoursix.org) By extension, that person expects you to have their back as well.

In this month of November, there may be no greater respect and honor given to our veterans than for our entire Nation to have our veterans’ backs along with each other’s back. Veterans need our love and care. Thanks be to God we can reveal to them - and our Nation - the One who always has our backs with His unfailing care and everlasting providence. The gift of the Gospel is the greatest assurance that one’s back is covered now and for eternity. **Read more** as this article explores the ways we can have veterans’ and each other’s backs by sharing the Gospel truth about God, our Rock, Refuge and Mighty Fortress.

Remembering and honoring veterans is an EVERYDAY commitment.

Synonymous with the month of November is remembrance and thanksgiving. On All Saints’ Day, we remember family members who have passed away. We remember with thanksgiving and victory our grandmas and grandpas, our mothers and fathers, our sons and daughters, our aunts and uncles, our friends and neighbors, and all our loved ones in the faith who have preceded us in death and now partake of the feast of victory in heaven for all eternity. On November 11, our Nation remembers with thanksgiving those who have served in the military along with those currently serving. We remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives on the altar of freedom - the very freedom we currently enjoy. We thank EVERY veteran - those we know and those whom we will never meet but are eternally grateful for nonetheless - not just for one day in November, but with the honor they deserve for their self-sacrifice to ensure our protection, rights and freedom.

Can we thank and honor our veterans enough for having our backs 24/7? Their service helps make our world a safer place by thwarting evil and terror all across the globe. On May 13, 1938, the 11th of November of each year became a legal holiday - a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be hereafter celebrated and known as "Armistice Day." Armistice Day was primarily a day set aside to honor veterans of World War I, but in 1954, after World War II had required the greatest mobilization of soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen and women in the Nation's history; after American forces had fought aggression in Korea, the 83rd service organizations, amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word "Armistice" and inserting the word "Veterans." With the approval of this legislation on June 1, 1954, November 11th became a day to honor American veterans of all wars. And we rejoice to honor all our armed service veterans. They deserve both recognition and honor - not just one day of 365 - but with an everyday commitment. God bless all our veterans!

Every November 11 (like yesterday) is a heart-wrenching day. **Our hearts are broken as we remember those who have given their lives to give each one of us a future.** I am not a veteran so I can hardly pretend to even partially grasp the complexity of the life of even one of our veterans. I can't imagine what it means to have been drafted or to have freely signed enlistment papers knowing they may not return alive. I can't fathom stepping on a plane or ship not knowing if they will ever step back on our Nation's shores alive. What would it be like to sleep in a squeaky bunk bed where soldiers who have gone before them never returned home? With every emotional reunion of families with their veteran spouse, father, or relative captured on television or social media, I can't help reflect on the daily pain of separation that is felt by our veterans as they balance these feelings as they carry out their dangerous tasks and duties. I shed a tear for the veterans who pan through the names on monuments of fallen soldiers and ask, "Why them and not me?" But veterans know. And far too often they keep these thoughts and emotions to themselves. But I have been blessed to listen to their stories and memories – good and bad. My remembrance pales in comparison to a veteran who has his or her memories firmly entrenched in every fiber of their heart, mind and soul. I have shed tears with veterans who have returned home only to find themselves homeless. I have shared anger with veterans who gave their all to ensure the rights and freedoms of every individual in America only to face their own discrimination, prejudice and injustice in their very own communities.

A veteran goes through intense training, practice and fulfills their service with a daily commitment to give every American a future. What can we possibly return to them for such bravery, valor and commitment? **We can have their six.** And we can offer no greater gift to the veteran than to commit **to lift them up in daily prayer** to the only One who truly has their backs. Here is the prayer I lift up for veterans in general (but you can personalize it for those specific veterans you have in mind).

God of love, peace and justice, it is Your will for the world that we may live together in peace. You have promised through the prophet Isaiah that one day the swords will be beaten into ploughshares. Yet we live in a broken world, and there are times that war seems inevitable. Lord, help us recognize with humility and sadness the tragic loss of life

that comes in war. Even so, as we gather throughout the week, free from persecution and free to serve and worship You, may we give thanks to You for those who have served with courage and honor. We praise You for those who have served in the military. We thank You for those who put the welfare of others ahead of their own safety. Let us all be inspired by their self-sacrifice in service to those who needed protection. We praise You, O God, for granting us the freedoms we enjoy every day.

Lord, help us honor those who have served by working for peace. Equip us to never forget those who have served by honoring them every day of the year, and let us never let go of Your promise of peace. God, we praise You for those who are willing to serve right now. Let all Army, Marine, Navy, Air Force, National Guard and Coast Guard personnel serve with honor, pride, and compassion and with our prayer-full support and daily encouragement. Do not let their hearts be hardened by the actions they must take. Strengthen and protect their families. Keep them surrounded in Your love and peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Remembering and honoring veterans comes with some pain but also God's blessedness.

Remembering, when it involves those whom we love, honor, and revere, it is not without its pain. We live in a broken world. The brokenness involves horrific events that cause the tragedy of life-changing injuries and disabilities, PTSD and other painful effects of war, violence and terrorism. I have found the tools of *Every One His Witness*, especially L.A.S.S.I.E, to be very helpful as we listen to our veterans. We are quick to **Listen** knowing veterans have a story to share when they are ready. With this listening, pay attention to whether they are sharing knowledge (Head), feelings (Heart) or practical desires and activities (Hands). **Ask** questions that give the veteran even more time to share and clarify what they are facing. **Seek** out the Holy Spirit as you also seek out a connection point to share the Living Word (Jesus) with them. **Share** Jesus' story knowing all that He is, does and gives will serve as a blessing to them. Sharing the Law and Gospel will prepare their head, heart and hands to engage in a relationship with Jesus Christ. **Invite** them to see all the blessedness God has in mind for them. The Scriptures talk of soldiers, but it also speaks of peace, healing, love, and His eternal care. **Encourage** the veteran with God's promises, a relationship with the Body of Christ, the Church, and **the truth that God, along with His people, will always have their six.**

As we remember and honor veterans, it's a true blessing to seek the help of Scripture - especially Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes). Jesus mentions those who mourn, those who are poor in spirit who feel as though they had the wind knocked out of them; the meek who find themselves dealing with circumstances beyond their control; those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who are asking questions and looking for answers which elude them, questions like "Why?" and "What's next?". But if remembering puts us in the Beatitudes, then it also places us in the center of God's blessedness - comforted in grieving, consoled, and

encouraged with God's mercy, goodness, kindness, hopefulness, care and compassion. Sharing the Good News of the Gospel isn't always purely to win over a soul. God's Word is a healing salve for both body and soul. God is our Healer, our Rock, our Fortress and our Ever-Present Help. These are gifts that every veteran needs.

Veterans want to know about their future. Who doesn't?

How much would you give to know the future? Many people would give **whatever it costs**. Some people pay \$.75 for a horoscope in the newspaper; some pay \$9.99 for 3 minutes on the psychic hotline; and some will spend \$50 for a palm reader to tell their future according to the lines in their hands. These things meet our curiosity about the unknown. A service man or woman certainly has their eye on the future with the hope of certainty. But the disclaimer concerning all of these "sign givers" is - "for entertainment only." The question, "What does the future hold?" is anything but entertainment.

For most of us, the answer to what the future holds is life-determining. We have decisions that we must make that will shape our future. How can we be sure what the right decisions will be? What do we do about gainful employment, housing, education, careers, health care, long-term care, investments, relationships? If we just had an inkling about the future, we would be one step ahead. So where do we turn? To the experts! That's where God's Word comes in.

If we are truly concerned about the future enough to seek out the experts then explain this: since there is only One authority who knows the future and that is God Himself, why is the study of God's Word at an all-time low? Here's the answer I get: people read the message like Sunday's Gospel, Mark 13:1-13 and proclaim, "These signs aren't specific enough to speak to my life. I'm looking for someone to speak specifically to my concerns. I want to hear from people who are invested in me." **That begs the question, "How much did Christ give to provide you with a future?"** Christ gave His all, His life, to provide us with a future. When Jesus speaks in our Gospel, He is not simply hoping to whet our curiosity with signs and prophecies - He wants to provide us with security, comfort, and certainty.

His purpose is to calm our hearts and to assure us that in Him we are forever safe in His loving hands, regardless of what we have seen and experienced or what we will see or experience. Jesus reveals to us some of the catastrophic and troubling things that will happen - deceivers, wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, earthquakes and famines, persecution for the faith - so that when they do occur, we won't be shocked or think that God has lost control. I hear so often that things are "so out of control" that Christ must be coming soon! Actually, things are exactly like Christ told us they would be. Jesus Himself said in John 16:33, "*I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" Our future is already secure in His grace and peace.

Knowing the ultimate certainty of this future gives us the strength and confidence to live in the midst of uncertainties. The number one question asked of me is, "What do you think I should do?" As a veterans' time of service ends, they often ask that very question - of friends, families, and fellow veterans. The reason people ask this question is because of all the uncertainties that threaten their future - things like homelessness, career choices, PTSD, cancer, family struggles, problems with children of all ages, unfaithfulness, and finances. None of us can look into our crystal ball for answers but instead we can rely upon the message of the Bible - **Christ gave His everything to secure our future.** He gave everything to assure us that He sheds the first tear at death (which certainly includes veterans who have given their lives and those who passed away in the midst of battle), and the news of PTSD challenges, cancer and other burdens in the broken world; His heart is torn over family struggles; He never sleeps so as to protect our children and those serving our country; Jesus died for all sin; and He provides for all our financial needs. **Yes, God alone is the only One who can truly have our six.**

The words to the hymn go like this: "I don't know about tomorrow, I just live from day to day; I don't borrow from its sunshine, for its skies may turn to gray. I don't worry over the future, for I know what Jesus said; And today I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead. Many things about tomorrow - I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand." It's Jesus, only Jesus!

What sign can you give to assure the veteran or neighbor, "I've got your six"?

The Scripture lessons for Sunday, Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-25; and Mark 13:1-13 alert us **to be concerned about the signs we read and the signs we give about the future.** Signs can and do deceive. "Bargain basement upstairs." "Repair Shop - please knock, doorbell is broken." "The farmer allows walkers to cross the field for free, but the bull charges." Some signs cause you to reflect, "Acting perfect in church is like dressing up for an X-ray." "We can't control everything. That's why God put hair on our heads." (I certainly can't control the little I have left.)

Signs are meant to point to a clear answer, to signal a warning. Jesus tells His disciples who are looking for a sign that will tell them the exact time when the end will come – **Be prepared for the end as if it's coming today.** That's a sign worth sharing with the veteran and with your neighbor. The sign we are to give about the future is that it's as secure as the truth we know today: **we wisely rest in the saving hands of our Lord and serve as His shining stars.**

Many of the signs that Jesus mentions have taken place since the time of His ascension. Of all the signs we read, **the most dangerous is the loss of the Gospel.** Do we see signs of this today? It's as clear as apathy, lack of Bible study and daily devotions, an unwillingness to stand up and be firm in the one truth of Christ. The Word directs us to a life of repentance and humility before God as He lavishes upon us the truth of eternal riches in our future with Him. In this saving truth, He gives us a passion to be concerned about the signs we give to bring others

into the certainty of their eternal future. We have to ask ourselves whether we are more focused on our own needs or on the needs of others?

Does your sphere of influence (your mission field) know who has your six?

How would people read your preparation for the future? Every one of us has failed to give the sign to the world that we wouldn't make one decision without time spent in prayer; that we wouldn't begin our day without time spent in the Word; that we couldn't go one week without worship! We all sin. Does the world know we run to Word and Sacrament for forgiveness and the assurance of our future? Does your sphere of influence know who has your six?

What does the future hold? We may not know all the details of the days, months, or years ahead, but we do know how the story ends. Do you want to give a sign that will make a difference in the lives of those around you? Tell them that you know you will be in heaven, not because of anything you have done, but simply because you believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus makes you a child of God for eternity and an heir to the riches of heaven. Show them the sign of the Cross upon your forehead and heart placed upon you at your Baptism so you would not be deceived by your circumstances but strengthened in your faith through them. Boldly speak knowing that it's the Holy Spirit speaking not only for your defense but for the encouragement and saving of others. Let your life be a clear and bold sign: **God has my six - and He has yours as well.** Every veteran is in dire need of this truth. But so is your neighbor, co-worker, friend and even your family member.

Thanks be to God, your future is secure, your name is written in the Book of Life all because of the One who once stretched His arms out in death and who now stretches them around you for life. Having such a certain and bright future with our God gives us the confidence to know that He will work out all the uncertainties for our good even in these troubling times. God has our six. How about this for a sign to share with the world around you: "My unknown future is in the hands of an all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present God." One of the greatest signs people can read in our lives is the message of the psalmist as he confessed in Psalm 31:15, "*My future is in Your hands. Deliver me from the hands of my enemies and those who persecute me.*" The hands that could hold nails for our salvation are the hands that embrace us for the future. Our question is not, "Is the end near? But rather, "Is God near?" Christ's answer for you and me is an emphatic, personal, powerful and life-determining: "YES!" That's a future that we can all face with confidence.

I wish I had all the answers to help every veteran. But I do know the One who does have them: Jesus. **And YOU know Him too!** Boldly share Him. Share Jesus intentionally with a veteran. It's great to have the motto: I have your six. But what about the times when we cannot or when we fail? If we're going to truly have anyone's six, it will be because we have placed them in the hands of our LORD. Remember veterans. Pray for them. Listen, Ask, Seek, Share, Invoke and

Encourage them. Take a bold stand to always and certainly have their six - place them in God's hands as we remember, thank, and honor them for bravely having our six.

Your District Evangelization Team is praying for you. We are entrusting every member of every English District church family to the gracious and powerful hands of God. In that way, we have your six as well. Let us know if we can help empower, encourage or equip you for a life of service and mission for our Lord. God has blessed our District and Synod with numerous resources to enable you. Contact us at the email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We are so blessed to serve together in a hurting, broken world knowing that God has our backs now and for eternity.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20