

# Never Give Up

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A Sermon Delivered to  
Trinity Presbyterian Church  
08 July 2001



It was a typical hot, humid day in Southeast Asia when a young Marine First Lieutenant was called before his commanding officer and told of a mission he needed to carry out. He had been asked to take his platoon and capture a hill. This young Lieutenant expressed his deep concern over this mission to his superior. He explained that the area was hot. The territory was occupied by the enemy and assaulting it would certainly result in casualties.

The next day, at 0600 this First Lieutenant and his platoon loaded up in several helicopters and left to perform a relatively simple mission beginning with a helicopter assault. As the helicopters flew in, the Lieutenant saw a dried up river bed which offered him and his men cover and concealment, a Marine's best friends. He radioed for the other helicopters to land near the riverbed and for the platoon to debark and take cover. For some reason, one of the helicopters landed a ways away from the others but the Marines debarked and took cover anyway. As soon as the helicopter left though, they began taking enemy fire--mortars, machine gun fire, other small arms fire. Most of the platoon had made it to the riverbed, but this one squad had not. They were pinned down by the enemy machine gun. Every time they tried to move and join the rest of the platoon, they took fire and had to stop their movement. Within the first few seconds

of fire, two Marines had been killed and three others were seriously wounded.

The even younger Second Lieutenant leading the squad that was pinned down got on the radio to his platoon leader to explain the situation and discuss options. The platoon leader was directing his other squads how to position themselves so that they could suppress the enemy fire and save the lives of the isolated squad. It was apparent that unless something was done, and done quickly, the enemy was going to kill the entire platoon one Marine at a time.

As the orders were issued to the squads, the First Lieutenant's radio operator tugged on his sleeve and pointed to the middle of the rice paddy where there stood a young, Black Lance Corporal by the name of Grable. This Corporal, this Marine, had his M-14 held at as hip John Wayne style and was running towards the machine gunner while firing his own weapon, ducking and weaving like a running back. The machine gunner saw this target of opportunity, turned his gun to the Corporal and began to fire. Dirt and grass flew into the air as the bullets marched along a path to the running Corporal. Several rounds hit Lance Corporal Grable, throwing him back several feet while knocking him to the ground. The distraction was enough for the squad to move a few yards toward the platoon but they still had a greater distance to go.

A few seconds later, all eyes were drawn back to the Grable. He had regained his footing, but this time placed his weapon firmly in his shoulder, got a good sight picture, and began firing as he marched directly down the line of fire from the machine gun. All the while the isolated squad was moving towards the rest of the platoon ever so slightly.

Some four minutes later, the firing had been suppressed and the platoon arrived at the now silenced machine gun position. There they found nine dead enemy soldiers, and literally draped over the end of the barrel of the machine gun was Lance Corporal Grable. As they pulled him off and laid him on the ground, they opened his flack jacket to find he had been hit five times by the machine gun. He never gave up.

The First Lieutenant had the privilege of traveling back to Washington DC some seven months later and attend a ceremony in which the widow of Lance Corporal Grable was presented with this nation's second highest award for valor, the Navy Cross. In her arms was a baby boy, Lance Corporal Grable's son, the son he had only seen in a Polaroid picture a short time before he was killed.

Lance Corporal Grable never gave up. When he was knocked down, he got up and charged again. After the first time he could have simply remained on the ground, waited for a medic to patch him up and he would have lived. He would have been decorated for his heroism and sent home to his mother, father, his wife, and the son he had never held. But he didn't. He didn't lie there. He got up and he charged again until his mission was complete. He saved dozens of lives that

day with his sacrifice, lives that would later play significant roles in the history of this country.

The squad leader that was forced out of his helicopter too far from the platoon was a young Second Lieutenant by the name of Oliver North. The platoon leader, the one who was concerned about casualties on the mission, was a young First Lieutenant by the name of Charles C. Krulak who would later play a key role in the Gulf War and retire just a year or so ago as the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the highest ranking Marine in the nation.

Remember who this was and when this was. Lance Corporal Grable was a young Black Marine from Tennessee and he died in the year 1966. At the time he sacrificed his life for the others in his platoon, both Black and White, he was not even able to buy a hamburger at his local McDonald's because of his color.

But why do I tell this story today and what does it have to do with Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia? I tell this story today because we have just celebrated this country's 225<sup>th</sup> year of Independence. We are able to worship in this building today without fear of reprisal or arrest. We are all able to leave after the service and go to our houses or a local restaurant and eat most anything we want. Tonight we will read books, watch TV, and drive in cars that much of the world will never have or be able to enjoy. We are able to do this because we as a country have been blessed with freedom, but this freedom is not without cost. The cost of our freedom and our ability to worship as we choose has been paid, paid by Lance Corporal Gable and others like him. As we sit here today,

there are soldiers away from their families and Sailors on board ships, soldiers and Sailors like Lance Corporal Grable, ensuring that we will have the freedom to gather again next week and worship once more. And like Lance Corporal Grable, the will never give up.

We don't always understand why people like Grable do what they do. They and their actions seem distant from our everyday lives when oftentimes the most important decision we have to make is what to have for lunch. In the naval services of today we would tell the story Lance Corporal Grable to illustrate our core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. He certainly demonstrated honor by taking appropriate action to help benefit his fellow Marines. Walking down the line of fire of a machine gun certainly demonstrates knowing that death was imminent certainly is an exhibition of courage. And getting up after being shot down once and completing his task shows that he was committed. In his case, the mission certainly came first and nothing was going to stop him from doing what needed to be done.

We Christians also have a task, a mission that needs to be completed. God has commanded us to share His Word. In verse six of the Epistle reading today, we are told "Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher." This verse has been interpreted in many different ways and, to a certain degree; all of them have some merit.

We can certainly use this scripture as justification for paying our minister and giving our money to the church. Many have left it at that. But I think the true meaning is even deeper. This is a call to help our minister share the word of God,

to help teach others. We have several choices in how we do this. There are the evangelicals who want proselytize, others who want to leave religion as a private matter, and those who want to simply give their money. We can all help teach the word simply by how we live.

Not everyone is called to be a minister. While I'm willing to do a sermon every now and then, I realize that this is not my full-time calling. Not everyone is called to sing in the choir, be an elder, or even teach a Sunday school class. We can all be good people though. Simply living our lives in a way that pleases God is one of the best ways to share the word, to outwardly demonstrate that God has made a difference in our lives.

But living a good life requires that we truly believe what we live. Going through the actions is not enough. We can give away our money, and we can do great things when there are people watching, but as Paul warns in the scripture, God is not mocked. He sees and knows what is in us; He knows what we are really like.

Outward appearances are just that; they are no measure of the person. It is not too hard to act depending on the given situation. Under controlled circumstances we all have the ability to be whoever we need to be. We can be friendly and outgoing when needed, and we can help the needy when someone is watching and we think we can impress him or her or use it to our advantage.

Over the last several years we have witnessed a general decline in the moral climate of our nation, exhibited most noticeably in the lives of our political leaders. Their escapades and shenani-

gans have been both disturbing and embarrassing. I don't expect perfection from them and Lord knows, no one can stand up to the scrutiny given by the news media of today. No, what really disturbs me, what really strikes fear into my heart, is the reaction of the public, of us, to these incidents.

It is popular to say that everyone is entitled to his or her private life. Certainly that is true and certainly our leaders are entitled to make a mistake every now and then. What bothers me is this idea, this new style of thinking, that we can have a private life and a public life and that the two can be separate. In the good times we act the part. Our public lives can be impeccable and we can always do the right thing; but what about the bad times? What about the times when the chips are down, the times when we have no time to think about what we need to do, when we only have time to act? It is those times that our private lives do matter for we will behave as we truly are, not as we want to be.

I never knew Lance Corporal Grable and I have no idea what kind of life he lived or what church, if any, he went to. I do know that he was a good man. When the chips were down he acted to help others. He knew he was going to die and would never reap the rewards of his heroic act, but he acted anyway. He acted because deep down, he cared for his fellow man; he willingly gave up his life so that many others would not needlessly die. His private life was in order and when he had to act, he acted out of selflessness. He never gave up.

Paul also instructs the churches in Galatia to bear one another's burdens and to help each other. Some commentators,

reading alternate translations of this passage, say that Paul meant that the churches in Galatia should help bear the burdens of all people, not just those in the church, and not just those who were believers. By bearing the burdens of others we fulfill the law of Christ, as Paul said.

Do we bear the burdens of others in our lives? How about our church, our community, our nation? Are we doing what we need to do to bear the burdens of all, believers and non-believers alike? Are we quick to aid those who are ill and in need within our membership yet slow to help those who do not go to church? Well I happen to think that Trinity is doing a pretty good job of helping those outside our church but we could always do better. But again, we must be careful. We must not boast of our achievements and our works. We must not deceive ourselves. We must be careful with what we do, for the act alone is not enough. We must always ensure that what we do, we are doing for the Glory of God and not for the Glory of self. We must be careful not to think we are something when we are nothing.

We are also accountable for our own actions, as well as for our inactions. While Paul tells us that we should bear our neighbor's burdens, he quickly cautions that we should also bear our own burdens; we must carry our own loads. In the end we are going to be held accountable for what we did and for the lives that we lived. Yes, there are times when we can't carry our own loads; times when the pressures of life get to us; times when we have suffered great personal loss and need help. We can expect others to be there to help us through those times and to share the burden with

us, that is one thing I think this church does remarkably well. But then the time comes when we must take back that burden and move on.

And once is not enough. We must never give up. For as soon as we get rid of one burden we will certainly be able to find another, find someone else who needs some help with his burdens.

When we help others we are sowing the seeds of God's love and goodwill. When we demonstrate care and concern for our fellow man, God is working through us to bring others to Him. As more come to God, we find there are more people out there to help bear the burdens and carry on the work. There are more people to demonstrate God's love and we are able to more easily accomplish our task of teaching the Word as Paul instructs us.

It can get tiring. Particularly as Presbyterians with our form of church government we can often find ourselves in situations where we are putting process ahead of progress. While doing things in a good and orderly fashion, we may sometimes miss doing what is really needed. But we cannot quit. Paul says that we should not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time if we never give up.

Sometimes it seems like doing good is getting nowhere. We have all seen fellow students cheat on their exams and make better grades than we did. Many of us supported changing our state flag because it was the right thing to do only to find that we failed. Should we quit and give up? Will the best always finish last? Paul tells us that we should continue to do what is right; we should continue to fight the good fight and that we should

work for the good of all whenever we have the opportunity. We should never give up.

We are fortunate people. We are fortunate to have people among us like Lance Corporal Grable. We are fortunate to have the freedoms we have in this country. We are fortunate to have been chosen by God to do His work and we are fortunate to be able to do His work in a congregation such as this. It is a privilege to serve and we should be proud to do the right thing even when doing the right thing seems to get us nowhere.

Some time ago I received some email from a friend that applies to this lesson. It goes like this:

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered.

*Love them anyway.*

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

*Do good anyway.*

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

*Succeed anyway.*

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

*Be honest and frank anyway.*

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

*Do good anyway.*

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest pride.

*Think big anyway.*

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

*Fight for some underdogs anyway.*

What you spent years building  
may be destroyed overnight.

*Build anyway.*

Give the world the best you have  
and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

*Give the world the best you've  
got anyway!*

We should never give up; we should  
never become weary, and we should  
never lose the faith. We *will* reap what  
we sow.

When we are asked to help a friend in  
need for the tenth time in a week; when  
we are asked to help with a small job at  
the church; or when we are asked to be a  
friend to the most unfriendly person yet  
to walk the earth, let us all say yes and  
let us never give up. When we are tired,  
weak, and weary and don't think we can  
do another thing, remember Lance Cor-  
poral Grable who got up and marched on  
to a certain death so that he could help  
others.

