

“This is Not a Drill” (1 Peter 3:8–22)(10.25.20)

1 Peter 3:8–22 (NIV84) *Suffering for Doing Good*

⁸ Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

“Whoever would love life

and see good days

must keep his tongue from evil

and his lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good;

he must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also— not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“This is Not a Drill”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

In the mid-eighties, I was stationed at Coast Guard Air Station Miami. It is a very busy unit and does work all over Florida and the Caribbean. When I was first there, they had Falcon Jets and H-52 helicopters. There were always one or two helicopters from Miami deployed upon Coast Guard Cutters patrolling the open ocean and various islands. I became qualified to fly on both aircraft.

One of my deployments was on Coast Guard Cutter Courageous, a 210’ ship. That really is not very big, especially when you consider the size of the ocean and the height of rough seas. Our helicopter barely fit on the flight deck, and we chained and tied it down in several places.

We normally had two major missions that we focused upon. The first was the interdiction of drugs, mostly cocaine and marijuana. The second mission was Illegal Immigration Interdiction. While on the surface this sounds like keeping people out of the United States, it really was a humanitarian mission. The refugees were very desperate and would pay everything they had for a place on unseaworthy and dangerous vessels.

It was tragic how many of these vessels sank and how many people drowned. Any kind of bad weather would sink them and sometimes just the overcrowding itself would cause the boat to easily capsize. When we would find such a vessel, it was dangerous to even try to help them. There had been incidents where panic or sudden shifting of the passenger would result in disaster. Sometimes, even the rescuers died.

If you have seen old movies about the Navy, or been on a cruise ship, you know that they conduct drills. While on a cruise ship, the drills are pretty perfunctory for the passengers, on Navy or Coast Guard vessels, it is deadly serious for the crew. What may be threatening or fairly serious on land, can be a matter of life or death at sea. You conduct drills, so that you can practice a professional response when reality hits home.

You have probably heard of General Quarters where everyone assumes battle stations. There are man-overboard drills to recover a person who has fallen off the ship into the water. There are Fire Drills of various types. And there is even an Abandon Ship drill.

During these drills, every single person has a specific duty. You don your respective safety gear and you report to an exact location as quickly as possible. You practice these drills to ensure the ship's crew can respond in a timely manner. Lives depend on it. Your life depends on it. Others are depending on you to do your part.

It was thirty five years ago, but it is not something you forget. You are asleep in your three-high bunk; the kind where you have to get out of bed to turn over. At 2 AM, the Public Announcement System starts blaring a fire alarm. A slightly animated voice comes over the system, "This is not a drill. This is not a drill. There is a fire in the Engine Room. All hands man your stations. Repeat, this is NOT A DRILL. Talk about an adrenaline rush. The energy level is palpable. Men are up and dressed in seconds. To an outsider it might look like chaos, but everyone knows what they are doing and where they are going. They have been trained for a time such as this.

The flight crew reports to the helicopter on the flight deck. The senior pilot is on the bridge with the Commanding Officer of the ship. We ready the aircraft for the remote chance of a launch. Where is the closest land? Is there another ship we could fly to? Do we have enough fuel to get there? Who goes? Who stays? Will the aircraft get pushed overboard?

After about five minutes from the initial alarm, the same voice comes over the PA System. The Engine Room fire has been extinguished. Stand down from your stations. Secure the decks.

Whoa! What a rush...and in the middle of the night. It took quite a while before the heart rate returned to normal; even after you were back in bed.

It was a humbling and eye-opening experience. When you are in the open ocean, a couple hundred miles from any land or any other living beings, you feel quite alone. You are vulnerable. Life and death hang in the balance and decisions can be thrust upon you with no notification.

It was humbling for another reason. As part of Coast Guard Aviation, there is a certain level of elitism. The qualifications to get into aviation are higher than the surface fleet. We get highly specialized training. There is a general feeling of superiority over those on ships.

That night was a wake-up call. The professionalism of that ship's crew contained the Engine Room fire in short order. Their expert response resulted in everyone being kept safe. Not only did they know what to do, they knew how to do it well. Why? Because they trained. It was not just head knowledge. They drilled so that when the time of trial came, they were properly prepared.

BODY:

How about us? We too have a life and death responsibility. This responsibility has eternal life and eternal death implications. Head knowledge is important. Knowing what you believe and why you believe is important. Being able to articulate that to a lost soul could be their wake-up call. We need to train. We need to drill. Sharing the Good News of Jesus is a life-saving mission.

Peter tells us to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, to give the reason of the hope that you have. Yes, verse 15 is my central message today. Of course, this assumes that you have the hope of Christ as Lord in your hearts. Many of you have told me about loved ones and friends who don't know Jesus and your hearts ache for them. This sermon series addresses the crucial work of communicating the Good News of Jesus.

But will the lost, those that do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, hear you when you speak? They will if you are modeling a life-giving gospel. Peter outlines that for us here. Live in harmony with one another. Be sympathetic. Love as brothers and sisters. Be compassionate. Be humble.

These are not deep theological terms that I need to define and explain to you. They do require practice; and the more you practice them, the more natural they become. Think of it like muscle memory.

In a physical activity, like throwing a ball or swinging a tennis racket, by repetitive practice you get to the point where you can do it without thinking. It can be applied to dance. It can be applied to playing a musical instrument. Your fingers automatically go to the right place when at first it was a several step process.

Has anyone ever done you wrong? Insulted you? Betrayed you? Cheated you? Hurt you? Peter tells us that we are to respond to that treatment with blessing. He's got to be kidding, right? Remember that Peter is writing to Christians that are being persecuted for their faith. Suffering for their faith was a reality. In that context, Peter commands, seek peace and pursue it.

In the midst of mistreatment, remember that Jesus called you to this life. In our Gospel readings this week, we read Jesus' command to take up our cross and follow Him. Do not be surprised when you are persecuted for your faith, for those that hate the Jesus of the Bible will hate you too.

Be ready to give an answer for your hope. The Greek word here for answer is "apologia," also meaning defense. That is where the word apologetics comes from – often used for defending the truth of the Christian faith.

The manner in which we answer or defend our hope in Jesus is critically important. We must be gentle. We must be respectful. Our conscience should be clear; meaning that our conduct and motivation should be pure. The hearer may take offense at the message and you may suffer for it; but, make sure that the reason for their offense is within them, not you.

Peter goes on to give us a Christian context for our faith and confidence; the reason that we should not fear. Christ died for everyone's sins, including yours and the person with whom you are talking. Jesus, who was without sin, died to bring us all to God. As there was judgment in the Great Flood, there will be judgment in the future. Jesus' resurrection provides for our salvation. Now, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and all things are in submission to Jesus.

J. Warner Wallace argues in *Forensic Faith*: "A recent Barna Group poll revealed that only 9 percent of American adults possess a biblical worldview, acknowledging the existence of objective moral truth, asserting the accuracy of the Bible, believing in the existence of Satan, understanding the relationship between grace and "works," affirming the sinless life of Jesus, and comprehending the classic attributes of God."

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon admonishes, "Train up a child in the way he should go – but be sure you go that way yourself." Spurgeon is quoting Proverbs 22:6.

Notice the word "train" is used and not "teach." Here is a dictionary definition of the word train: teach (a person or animal) a particular **skill** or type of **behavior** through **practice** and **instruction** over a **period of time**. So, it is teaching put into action. It involves becoming skilled. Behavior is transformed. It is knowledge applied and activated.

J. Warner Wallace was a Youth Pastor that had a great awakening when nearly every one of his graduating seniors went off to college and fell away from their faith. He shares that experience in this statement: "As a new youth pastor, I exercised [my gifting as an artist and musician] and created weekly "experiences" for my students. Music, imagery, and environment were important to me as I walked through the Scripture with my group. The ministry grew quickly, and it seemed successful, at least by the metrics we often use to measure success. But once I realized our graduating seniors were no longer Christians, I knew I had to shift gears. Something had to change, and I knew precisely what it was. We needed to *stop teaching*."

“Training involves putting instruction into *practice*.” We must learn to defend our faith and we must train our children to defend their faith - Not only our biological children but our spiritual children. The Church, each and every local church, needs to be a training outpost, sending workers into the fields to reap a harvest.

It is not enough to know what you believe. You need to know why you believe it. Do you know the most common objections to Christianity? Do you know the best answers to those objections? If the answer is no, do not despair. WE can learn and practice our responses. We can go to atheist websites. We can do role plays, to build our muscle memory, so that we can become confident and comfortable with our responses. We can intentionally engage those with different viewpoints.

Let us begin with those that are near and dear to us. They know us. If we are true in our faith walk, we have some credibility with them. They know we care about them. Find out and take seriously what their objections are about being a follower of Jesus. Then prepare and equip yourself to lovingly answer those objections.

Several of you have expressed to me your frustrations with this exact issue. Wallace addresses this with a real-life story: “One Sunday after writing *Cold-Case Christianity*, I was speaking at a church in Southern California. At the book table following one of the services, a woman approached me and asked to buy a copy of my book. She asked me to sign it for her twenty-six-year-old son. She told me her son became an atheist in college and she was hoping my book would persuade him to reconsider. I felt bad for this woman, but I knew I needed to be honest with her.

“I’ll be happy to sign a copy of my book for your son, but I bet he won’t read it.” The woman seemed surprised by my statement. “If he’s already told you he’s now an atheist, odds are good he won’t even open my book. But let me ask you a question: Years ago, when he first came home from college on winter, spring, or summer break, did he give you some reason to believe he was starting to doubt Christianity?”

“Yes, he asked a few questions. I couldn’t really answer them. I knew he was being challenged by some of his professors, but I wasn’t sure what to tell him,” she replied reluctantly.

I handed her a copy of my book and challenged her to accept her duty as a Christian case maker. I encouraged her to *begin training*, “I’ll **give** you a copy of *Cold-Case Christianity*, but you have to promise me something. I don’t want you to give this book to your son until *you’ve* first read it. Master the evidence I’ve described, then begin to talk to others about what you’ve learned. In fact, I want you to start to actively share your faith and plan interactions with nonbelievers. I know this sounds like a lot to ask, but if you do this, the next time you get a chance to talk to your son, you’ll be ready to answer him in a loving way, given what you know about him as your son. Is your son worth this kind of effort? You know he is.”

About one year ago, my son Joshua, who lives outside of Houston, was at a birthday party. Most of the people there were not Christians and certainly not living a Christian lifestyle. One of them was a young man named Byron, a nephew of my son’s ex-wife. Byron asked Joshua questions about God and faith. They spoke for a while, but my son didn’t give it much thought afterwards.

A few weeks ago, Byron called Joshua. Since that birthday party conversation, Byron has done an investigation. He went on YouTube and watched Christian preachers and teachers. He called Joshua to share that he was now a Christian and they talked about finding a faithful Bible church for Byron where he could get involved.

CONCLUSION:

Wallace has developed an acronym for TRAIN. “T” is for Test: Challenge each other to expose our weaknesses. “R” is for Require: Expect more from each other than we sometimes think we can handle. “A” is for Arm: Learn the truth and how to articulate it. “I” is for Involve: Deploy into the battlefield of ideas. “N” is for Nurture: Tend to our wounds and model the nature of Jesus.

In the Coast Guard, there were bench marks you had to achieve before you could even compete for promotion. You had to take a correspondence course. This was based on building your knowledge for the next level of responsibility. There were self-quizzes in the course material that Carol used to drill me. When you were ready you had to pass an End of Course Test.

You also had to complete a substantial list of Practical Factors. For instance, as an Aviation Electronics Technician, we worked on all sorts of communication and navigational equipment. There were several steps in the Practical Factor sign-off process. I watched someone else do an alignment on a radio. Then I would do the alignment following the manual. Then I would show someone else how to do the alignment. It was a process. It took time to become qualified. You had to be trained.

My friends, this life we are given is NOT a Drill. How we live it out determines our eternal life and our rewards. Not ours alone, but all those on the journey with us. On the Coast Guard Cutter Courageous the night of the fire, there were 85 souls. The fires of Hell threaten all of humanity. We have been given the lifesaving hope of Jesus Christ. Are you ready to defend the faith?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.