

# THE MOST POWERFUL VERSE

By Den Slattery

Until 1968 my life had been dominated by the all American dream of pursuing personal happiness. However, the day came when I was challenged to abandon that goal by an old friend who stopped by to tell me about his adventures in a far away land. His story sounded so interesting that I immediately began making my own arrangements for a similar trip. Two weeks later I got on a plane for San Diego, California. From the airport I was escorted to my new home away from home - - the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot (MCRD). After 13 weeks of *Boot Camp*, five weeks of *Advanced Infantry Training*, and three weeks of *Jungle-Survival Training*, I was sent to the land of adventure my friend had spoken of . . . Vietnam.

I had always enjoyed war movies, especially the ones with John Wayne. But the first time I experienced real combat, my whole view of war changed. On that fateful night I found myself pinned down behind a rice paddy dike that stood just 18 inches high. Bullets were hitting all around me and men were screaming in the dark. In that moment of time, as death seemed to be reaching out to end my life - - I saw myself as I really was; a selfish, conceited, greedy, young man dominated by lust. Thinking I had only moments to live, I allowed my mind to ponder the hard questions of life:

- Is this all there is to life?
- What is the purpose of life?
- What happens when we die?
- Is there a God?

I didn't have any answers to those questions and I wasn't sure if I ever would. But I decided that night to search for the answers, if I lived through that firefight. Almost as soon as I made that commitment, the bullets stopped and the night was again silent.

Where was I to go in my search for answers to such profound questions? I had no idea. Yet those questions kept rolling around in my mind. My friends in the Marine Corps were no help. We didn't usually talk about religion or philosophy. Most of us proudly proclaimed that we were atheists, even if we weren't. Therefore, it was difficult to find anyone in my immediate surroundings interested in deep conversations about the meaning of life. Yet those questions continued to haunt me throughout my whole 13-month tour of duty in Vietnam.

When I arrived back in the United States I discovered that my girlfriend had been unfaithful and that many of my friends were involved in protesting the war in Vietnam. Most people acted like they didn't even know there was a war going on in Vietnam, but when they discovered that I had actually been there they were only interested in how many people I had killed. I felt like a freak in a sideshow. I left Vietnam thinking I could just put it behind me once my tour was over, but instead I found that it changed the way I viewed all of life.

I tried to adapt to civilian life by getting a full time job and taking classes at the local community college. I purchased a 1968 Corvette and had a very active social life. But happiness and contentment were illusions that always seemed just out of my reach. Those unanswered questions about the purpose and meaning of life spoiled my carefree lifestyle. On top of that, I had to contend with vivid memories of the war. The sights, the sounds, and even the smells of war haunted me. Almost every night in my sleep I would return to the battlefields of Vietnam and wake up in a cold sweat. I found it difficult to trust anyone and kept watching my back. If I went camping I would always think of setting up a perimeter and the best avenues of escape if anything happened. Even in restaurants-- I usually sat by the door or in a corner so no one could sneak up on me. Vietnam was never far from me for it had become a part of who I was. No one seemed to understand what I was going through except other veterans of Vietnam. Therefore, even though I hated the military, I ran back to it knowing that there I would be understood and respected as a veteran of the Vietnam War.

Believing that variety is the spice of life, I decided to join the Army instead of doing a second tour with the Marines. The Army offered me training in avionics as applied to helicopters and then sent me right back to Vietnam in February of 1972. I did not want to go back to Vietnam because I was afraid that surely this time the Viet Cong would kill me. But I was still patriotic when it came to America, so I went.

Vietnam didn't seem much different from when I left it in 1970. However, the enemy had become very aggressive as the American troops were being phased out of the war. Those of us remaining found ourselves being attacked regularly with mortars and rockets. As the attacks began I would rush for the bunkers and those unanswered questions from my first tour would follow me into that bunker to torment me.

- Is this all there is to life?
- What is the purpose of life?
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I still had no answers to those probing questions even though I had been searching for answers in everything from Eastern religions to the occult. I was frustrated because I couldn't seem to find anything that made sense enough to believe in. I began to wonder if anyone knew the answers. But in the midst of my struggle for survival in Vietnam, I discovered something I wasn't expecting to find . . .  
TRUTH.

I discovered truth from two men in my unit who challenged me to read a book I had long ago discarded as irrelevant: The Bible

"That book doesn't have anything to say to us in the 20th century. It's filled with old fashioned ideas." I told my friends.

"The Bible has the answers to the questions you are asking. Just try it." They insisted.

"You show me one thing in that book that is relevant for today and I might reconsider."

They handed me a Bible and told me to open it anywhere. So I took the Bible and just opened it in the middle to the book of Proverbs. I thought I would read just one verse that would reveal just how out of touch that ancient book is with our modern world.

I glanced at the page in front of me and read the first verse that caught my eye and was shocked at what I discovered. For there before me was a verse that actually made sense. I found myself captivated by its simple truth and stood there dumbfounded. All of my arguments about God being out of touch with our modern world were decimated. I believed that if God existed then He would certainly have some understanding of our world. Now before me was the proof. I had discovered the most powerful verse in the Bible. I'm sure you'll agree as you read it for yourself.

***"It is better to live in the corner of an attic than in a beautiful home with a cranky and quarrelsome woman"*** (Proverbs 25:24 - Living Bible).

As I read that verse I said, "Now that's truth!" I knew enough about life to know that if I spent time around a cranky and quarrelsome woman, she would ruin my day or my whole life if I was dumb enough to marry her. I was amazed at the simple yet profound truth of that verse. So I began looking at other verses on the opposite page, and then started flipping through the Bible at random, looking for bits of wisdom and insight-- and I found them everywhere. For the next several days I read the Bible and discovered that it did have the answers to my questions.

How could I have been so blinded to the truth? I thought back to a time when I picked up a Bible and tried to read it when I was about 12 years old. I couldn't understand all the "Hithers & Thithers". So I put it down and never really considered it relevant for our generation. I had discarded it without really checking it out.

Several days later I went out to an open field and looked up at the dark sky and prayed the first prayer I ever remember praying from my heart.

"God, if you're for real I want to know you. No fooling around. I don't want to play any games. Do something to prove to me that you exist and I'll believe in you."

Lightning didn't strike and the ground didn't open up to swallow me, but somehow I knew that there was a God and that He had heard my prayer. Several days later the war ended and we received orders to pull out. Many little things happened over the next six months, which proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that God did exist and that He was listening to me.

However, I also discovered as I read the Bible that God took a dim view of my lifestyle. Many of the things I did on a regular basis, God referred to as sin. For example, the Bible said we shouldn't lie, steal, kill, have sex outside of marriage, misuse God's Name, serve any other God, or even desire to have things that other people had. The Bible indicated that God was interested in fairness, and was against all forms of perversion, cheating and evil. Those who disobeyed God would come under God's curse and have to face His wrath on Judgment day.

No one had to try to convince me that I had done some things in life that weren't right--- things that God would call sin: lying, committing adultery, cursing God's name, killing, coveting, stealing-- and those are just six of the Ten Commandments. I knew God had every right to punish me. Yet, as I read the Bible I discovered that God in His mercy wanted to forgive me instead. It was hard for me to comprehend such love. I had broken just about every command in His book and I deserved to be punished yet He wanted to just forgive me?

Why? The Bible said it in one word - - - JESUS!!!

It was Jesus who took the punishment that I deserved when He died on a cross. He substituted Himself for me. Why would He do such a thing? Love.

The Bible reveals that God is so loving that He doesn't want to have to punish us, yet He is so just and holy that He has to. That tension put God in a strange predicament. However, in Christ, He found another way. The penalty was paid by Jesus on the cross-- He took our place-- He took the punishment we deserved in order that we could have a clean slate and a new start.

Perhaps the most famous verse from the Bible can help to explain it - - -

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*** (John 3:16)

That verse reminds us that there is a God who loves us so much that He was willing to allow His own Son to suffer just to help us. The whole reason for Jesus coming to this planet, as the Son of God, was to "seek and save the lost". In Christ, God showed us that He understands our human condition.

God is not interested in robots, so He allows us the freedom to say "NO" to this wonderful offer. However, I discovered that if I rejected His offer, then the day would come when I would have to stand before Him and pay the penalty for my own sins. The choice was mine. If I said, "YES" to His offer I needed to turn away from my evil lifestyle and live for God.

It made more sense to me to allow Jesus to pay my penalty--- so I went for it. It all began with a simple prayer of commitment like the following:

**"Heavenly Father, I come to you as a sinner in need of forgiveness. I know that Jesus died for me and offers me life. Jesus please forgive me for all my sins... and come into my heart to be my Lord and Savior. Fill me with the power of Your Holy Spirit, and set me free from anything that is evil and binding, in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen."**

When I prayed that prayer my life was transformed. Yours can be too. Why not take a moment and pray that prayer right now while your thinking about it? God knows your heart and can hear you wherever you are. God says, "**Now is the time of salvation.**" Don't put it off. There is no time like the present---who knows what will happen tomorrow or even 10 minutes from now?

If you just prayed that prayer - - would you e-mail me and tell me you just asked Jesus into your life? My e-mail address is den98@juno.com

### **A FEW TIPS**

Praying that prayer is just the beginning. It is important to read the Bible for yourself and to talk to God on a daily basis. God is always just a prayer away. We don't have to be in a church to pray to God - - we can pray anywhere. However, Church is a place where Christians go to meet together for encouragement and instruction from the Bible. I would encourage you to find a Church where they exalt Jesus and teach the Bible as truth.

One other thing that might help you get off to a good start as a believer in Jesus is to find someone else who is searching for answers to life's difficult questions and tell them about Jesus. You might even want to make a copy of this article and pass it along to someone else.

In summary, **To pray - - to study the Bible - - to get involved in a good Church - - and to tell others about Christ** are considered the basic disciplines Christians need to practice. Perhaps I could offer one more tip - - I have found over the years that there are many great Christian radio and TV stations all over the world that broadcast solid teaching from the Bible and blend in great Christian music to boot. Check it out for yourself. It's helped me. Go to *Focus on the Family* on the Internet or *700 Club* for starters.

If you have any questions or doubts I would encourage you to share them with the Lord. You might even ask God to show you some verse in the Bible that will help to decimate your main questions or

objections about Christianity. The odds are pretty slim that the most powerful verse for you is the same one He used on me. But if God can use Proverbs 25:24 to turn a greedy, selfish, lusting, atheist like me into a preacher of the Gospel, then He can do anything! GOD'S WORD IS POWERFUL STUFF! It can change your life. I know because it changed mine.

God loves you and so do I!

Den Slattery

The rest of Den's story can be found in his books: *Changed By War, Transformed By Christ, From the Point to the Cross, and Life Goes On.*