

Rejoicing in Grace

*Reflections on God's Faithful Presence in
His Children's Lives*

By S. N. Waite

heldbygrace2day.blogspot.com

REJOICING IN GRACE

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O Precious Christ, All Glory And Praise Belongs
To You Alone!

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Another day to live in the beautiful shadow of the cross. I walk by faith by the light of Christ as I tread through this dark world...I am alone yet never alone! Christ is with me! Heaven's coming...soon I'll be HOME! May I live today in such a way that when others look at me, all they would be able to see is Jesus and how great and mighty He is. I am homeward bound, held by grace, in His hands, and always under His wings---in Him my soul is safe.



-A Note From The Author-

The Beauty of the Cross

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

--

Romans 15:13

God has freely given us His amazing grace; but even though it costs us nothing, it did cost Christ everything. He paid the ultimate price as He died upon the cross and bore God’s wrath. He was punished for our sin so that we could have peace with God. The cross is horrifying because it was where our precious Lord and Savior suffered and died. We will never ever experience the torment His soul endured and the darkness He felt. We will never be led to Golgotha and experience how horrifying the cross of Calvary was for Christ, but we are led to the cross where mercy flows. We do not experience the horror of Calvary but the beauty of the cross---the beauty of mercy and grace poured out upon sinners because of Christ.

Over the past year and a half God has truly impressed

upon my soul that I am held by grace. I do not have peace with God because of any merit of my own, but because Jesus made the way for me to come to the Father. I have been saved by grace; not by works. The more I think and mediate upon this awesome truth---that I am held by grace ---the more my heart rejoices in Christ that He would give me the ultimate gift and pay the price for my sin.

Several months have passed now since I wrote *Held By Grace*; but the lessons that God taught me and burdened me to share still remain true and fresh in my heart. Not a day goes by where I am not held by God's grace and reminded of His great faithfulness to me. The past several months have held lots of changes for me, but God has been my constant strength and joy through it all. He continues to unfold the story of my life one day at a time and gives me challenges and situations that teach me to depend and cling to Him like never before. I see the beauty of the cross and know I am held by grace. Darkness surrounds me, enemies assault me, sin overwhelms me; but Christ is with me---the Holy Spirit is in me---and the Father is protecting me. I am not alone and never will I be alone!

God has taught me a lot the past few months, and once again I would like to share what He has been teaching me. The lessons He imparts are not easy, and I have found Him to be a hard teacher; but at the same time, I know that He is a good teacher. Nothing He brings into my life is by accident and everything has its own reason and purpose. As I continue to journey heavenward, I am confident that I

am held by His grace, and I rejoice that He is faithful to hold me through all of life.

So my story continues as I rejoice in the Lord's grace. May the lessons I have learned and continue to learn encourage, challenge, convict, and inspire you to run hard after the Lord. Do not settle for comfort and ease, but do hard things for God---go into the fire for that is where Christ is. He is in the midst of the fire---in the midst of trials and hardships. Go to Him and though pain and heartache leave their mark on you know that God is using all things to make you more like Jesus. Come along with me down Calvary's road and take up your cross---it is not an easy way nor is it smooth, but it is the only road that leads HOME!

-S. N. Waite

Seattle, Washington

December 31, 2009

-Putting the Four “R’s” Into Practice- Boot Camp Here I Come!

(Lessons from the Fall of 2009)

My dad had prepared me well for Coast Guard boot camp, but still there is nothing quite like going through such an experience for yourself. It certainly was not as hard as it was back when my dad went through boot camp ---back when it was the “Old Guard”---but still it was a challenge that I will never forget. God definitely had a reason for me to go through the challenges I had at BBC the previous fall, and one of those reasons I was soon to find out the day I got off the bus after arriving in Cape May, New Jersey about to begin Coast Guard boot camp.

They were everywhere---all around us, screaming out orders, and we were clueless. I remember as we drove up in front of Sexton Hall, seeing what seemed to be a countless mob of Company Commanders---wearing their Smokey the Bear covers [hats]---awaiting our arrival. As soon as our bus came to a stop, the fun began. Let’s just say we were out of the bus in a wink. We found out real

fast that once easy tasks (like standing straight, finding our bags, walking in a line, writing our names, talking, etc) now almost seemed impossible. Somehow we made it through that first night---ALIVE! But the relief of having a day come to a close was short lived as a new one dawned to the sound of our company commanders screaming for us to wake up and get out of our racks.

Here is the first hand account I wrote for our company blog for those two extremely long months:

18 Aug 09- 23 Aug 09

Week 01

Forming week for Foxtrot Company 182 began with the long bus ride from Philadelphia to Cape May, New Jersey. Eighty individuals from all different backgrounds, walks of life, and geographical locations came together to begin Coast Guard boot camp. We all came prepared as best we could, but found out quickly that boot camp is an experience you have to live through and persevere in to completely understand.

Our first couple days here at Cape May were spent filling out forms and going through medical processing. Our first weekend as Foxtrot 182 was filled with many beneficial challenges, presented to us from our company commanders. We know that the time objectives, incentive training, drills, and other various challenges that our company commanders give us will mold us into the team we need to become. As we found out the first weekend, we

have a long ways to go to begin working effectively as a team in order to accomplish the tasks given to us, and we have much to learn; but, that is exactly why we are here in Coast Guard boot camp---to learn, be stretched, and become better people. Our muscles may feel sore, but we are excited to see the finished product of our training.

24 Aug 09-30 Aug 09

Week 02

Beginning Week 02, many of us have begun coming down with the Cape May crud; but spirits are still up as we learn new things each day. We are beginning to look like we are in the Coast Guard as we proudly wear our new uniforms, but we are only just beginning to come together as a team---we have a long ways to go.

We are learning how to make our racks [beds], prepare for our day, and clean our squad bays within the time objectives our company commanders give us. The classes we have taken so far are beginning to teach us more and more about Coast Guard customs and the core values. We are learning Coast Guard history and about the proud heritage we have as Coast Guard members.

Week 02 we began working out in the gym; strengthening our bodies and building endurance. We have also been working on learning how to move faster and sound off. Things seem impossible now, but we are encouraged as we see our shipmates in other companies graduating. We know our day will come as we press on with good at-

titudes, learning to work as a team, and becoming an effective unit, instead of just individuals looking out for ourselves. We must come together if we are going to succeed.

31 Aug 09

Week 03

Foxtrot 182 began Week 03 with an early morning run. We ran one mile around the track, preparing for our physical fitness test next week. We also spent time at the gym, working on core strengthening exercises.

Our day was filled with Incentive Training [an inspiring term for pushups, sit-ups, flutter kicks, squats, up downs, and other such things] and other team building activities. Our muscles are being tested and stretched, but really our inner resolve and determination is being measured and displayed for all to see. Daily we are learning about discipline and prioritizing as a team.

Today classes went well and we learned a lot; but are constantly reminded of how far we have to go. Those of us who are truly committed will press on no matter what, until we learn to work together as a team.

04 Sep 09

Week 03

The past couple days have been a whirlwind of activity for Foxtrot 182. We began Seamanship Classes yesterday,

beginning with the basics---learning nautical terms. Today we went over Coast Guard cutters, small boats, aircrafts, etc. and how to identify them. We also learned about different kinds of lines [rope] and how to use them.

This morning was Foxtrot 182's first time to march in a graduation ceremony for one of the other companies. We all enjoyed the event and eagerly look forward to the day that it is our turn.

07SEP09

Week 04

Foxtrot 182 has made it to week 04! We finished up week 03 yesterday with divine hours in the morning. Most of us got out racks squared away, cleaned up our uniforms, wrote letters to loved ones, and some of us attended chapel services. The few short hours were a welcome break and an enjoyable down time. In the evening, Foxtrot marched with the other companies here at Cape May in the last Sunset Parade of the season.

This morning started off with a refreshing run. We cleaned our squad bays thoroughly, hoping to pass our inspection with high marks. Half of us in Foxtrot 182 shot at the range today, and the other half will shoot tomorrow. We are enjoying the training we are receiving in marksmanship, even if it is just a little taste.

Week 04 is shaping up to be an especially busy week, full of test, midterms and physical fitness tests. We are

also having our class in Rates (Coast Guard Jobs) and learning about filling out our "Dream Sheets" (where we hope to be stationed after graduation).

As for Foxtrot's progress in teamwork- well, it's coming along slowly. Learning to put others before ourselves and work with people with different ideas is not easy, but truly necessary. We're not Going to quit. On a lighter note - to close the night off with- we are literally being eaten alive by the bugs here! The bug spray we have works to a degree; but at night when we hit the rack, we realize just how hard those little things work.

09SEP09

Week 04

The days are long here at Cape May, but the weeks do fly by as our protestant chaplain told us at the beginning of boot camp. We are already half way through week 04. Slowly we'll make it to our goal- graduation. We are still lacking in teamwork, not meeting time objectives and not sounding off. We need to come together. Hopefully this reality is sinking into everybody's minds so we can get down to business. We have frustrating moments but everything we go through each day is for a reason. So with that in mind we push on through week 04. Let us not be quitters Foxtrot 182!

11SEP09

Week 04

Foxtrot 182 had a busy day consisting of our midterm exams, blood drive and cleaning details. We also remember that today is the eight year anniversary of the terrorist attack on our country when United States planes were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon. We are training here at Cape May to fight for our country's freedom and to protect her citizens from such attacks.

This morning the weather was blustery and how the rain poured! Laundry detail nearly got swept away as they pushed the carts of dirty clothes over to the laundry building. It is really hard to believe Foxtrot is coming to the close of week 04. Only four to go! However, many of us would have hoped the we would have come together as a fully functioning team. We are not giving up though, we will become a team. One thing from yesterday, that has us all excited, nervous, worried, eager, and feeling a whole lot of other things, is that we filled in our "Dream Sheets". Hopefully next week we'll find out where we will be stationed.

16 Sep 09

Week 05

Another day down for Foxtrot 182! Yesterday in Seamanship, We completed our radio communications practical. All of us Recruits partnered up--- one acting as the small boat station and the other as the small boat out res-

cuing a vessel in distress. We had a script to go off of, but it gave us a little practice in what it will be like when we are operating radios at our new duty stations. In the evening we did uniform maintenance, shined our Boon Dockers, and cleaned our squad bays. All of us in Foxtrot 182 eagerly anticipate the day we will earn the privilege to march with our Colors like the other senior companies here at Cape May. But it is something we must earn and work towards.

After diner we came back to our squad bays and found it in complete disarray: shoes everywhere along with our dirty laundry ditty bags and everything else. You would think we would learn the lesson of leaving our squad bays clean when we go out in the morning, but we are still not getting it---hence why we needed a wakeup call like we received when we walked into our squad bays after chow!

Tomorrow, hopefully we will work together more as a team, continue to learn and be challenged as we face a new day.

18 Sep 09

Week 05

Yesterday and today were exciting days for Foxtrot 182. We found out our orders---where we will be stationed after boot camp. True enough not everyone got stationed where they would have liked, but most of us are excited and anticipating the new adventures and challenges we will be faced with soon. Now the next 03 weeks we

spend here at Cape May, we will be finishing up training, but also preparing, gathering information, and making arrangements for when we arrive at our new duty stations. Several recruits are looking forward to attending guaranteed A school after graduation.

Today we marched in Charlie 182's graduation. How exciting it was to think our day is only three weeks away! So we're pressing onward through Week 05, looking forward to Week 06, and eagerly anticipating THE DAY WE BECOME Guardians.

21 Sep 09

Week 06

Yesterday was a momentous day for Foxtrot 182---We received our Colors! Our lead company commander presented us with our Colors after our second off-base run. All of us held our breathe, amazed that the day had finally come. Since yesterday, we have marched proudly around the Cape May Training Center with our Colors leading the way. It took dedication, discipline, and hard work to earn our Colors---we cannot stop now though. We must keep up the hard work with complete dedication.

This week in Seamanship, we are learning the basics of firefighting. We will have our practical's on Wednesday and Thursday. Many of us are nervous, but we know that we will do fine if we pay close attention to our instructors. Firefighting skills are important, especially when we get out to the fleet.

Only three weeks left for Foxtrot 182. We cannot believe how fast time has flown by. We now must finish the remainder of our time here at boot camp with all the vigor and strength we have. We must finish well---which is what we aim to do.

25 Sep 09

Week 06

The highlight of our day yesterday was pugil sticks. All us recruits in Foxtrot 182 put up a good fight against one another. It was a good stress reliever both for those in the ring fighting and the rest of us on the side lines cheering.

Today foxtrot set up, acted as greeters, and cleaned up for Delta 182's graduation. Another company has graduated and only one more till it is Foxtrot 182's turn!

Week 06 has gone by quickly, and all of us are amazing that Week 07 is just around the corner. Tomorrow should be a fun day if all of us stay on track and do not mess up. We are scheduled to have our on base liberty in the afternoon! We have been looking forward to this for a long time. Hopefully all goes well until then.

Foxtrot 182 is certainly pressing on through training. Many of us were encouraged by company prayer time tonight. We are definitely going to leave boot camp with triumph, but we will all miss the friends we have made here when we leave.

28 SEP 09

WEEK 07

Today we had classes in first aid and CPR. We practiced responding and treating various injuries, and performing CPR. When we are out in the fleet, we will be faced with emergency situations and what we are learning now is preparing us for then. We spent this evening getting ready for our uniform inspection in our tropical blue uniforms. We have been working hard on them but there always seems to be more threads to snip, wrinkles to iron out, and lint to tape off.

Right now Foxtrot 182 is quickly approaching graduation day- the end of boot camp is in sight! We have learned so much in the six weeks we have been at here- an experience that is truly life transforming. We have learned the importance and value of discipline and hard work; we have gained pride and devotion to our country we did not have before; and we are constantly realizing how the Coast Guard core values are a part of everything we do- honor, respect and devotion to duty.

All of us in Foxtrot want to thank loved ones back home for all the letters you have sent! Your support is invaluable and keeps us going strong.

02 OCT 09

WEEK 07

We completed our finals this morning and were excited

as well as relieved to find out that our company average was high enough that we got the orange pennant to add to our colors. After taking our final test, we marched in Echo 182's graduation. It is amazing to think that our graduation is just around the corner-one week to go! Now Foxtrot 182 is the senior company on the regiment- an exciting achievement but also a serious responsibility. One glorious, triumphant event took place today- we turned in our pieces, but all in all we were ready to say goodbye.

After chow and turning in our pieces, we went through the Confidence course- an awesome obstacle course. Nothing was timed today, but we were practicing for when it will be next week. However, four recruits from our company went through it for time, seeing who would win. It was a close match, one of those recruits competing probably set a new record for the females on the confidence course. She sped through the course and made it up to the climbing rope in two minutes approximately. We are learning a lot here in Cape May. We definitely won't leave here the same people as we were when we first arrived.

The Invisible Battle

What my blog articles will not tell you is the raging battle within my heart to press on each new day, making much of Christ by giving my all and not quitting. There were days when I did not think I could do one more pushup, go through one more fire drill, persevere through one more day of "incentive training"; but by God's grace I made it. He gave me the strength I needed when I needed it. He

filled my heart with joy amidst stressful, long days of training.

As I look back, I remember how God used the lessons I had learned back at BBC to get me through boot camp. In the mornings as we would be marching to chow, I would go over the four R's in my mind: Rest in God's will, Rejoice in God's plan, Remember the Cross, and Reach out to others. In the moments of great weariness as I cried out to God for strength and help, He did not leave me alone. He sustained me, comforted me, and stretched me. However I had to fight for joy in Christ. I had to remind myself of the "four R's" when I woke up to "reveille, reveille, reveille!!!" I had to go over it again as we marched to class after breakfast; I had to hang on to it as I did push ups, lean & rest, crunches, flutter kicks, and a host of the other incentive techniques used by my company commanders; I had to think about it at lunch, on the way back from dinner, as I got ready for bed, while cleaning the head (the bathroom); and I had to remind myself of it as I laid in my rack at night wishing boot camp was over. In other words, it was not a one time deal where I went through my "four R's", downed my ibuprofen, and felt great about life for the rest of the eight weeks---that would be the farthest thing from the truth. No, it was a moment by moment battle of fixing my eyes on the cross while clinging to Christ. God does not give us easy fixes in order to deliver us from the challenges and struggles we go through in life, in fact He is the One who has bestowed us with difficulties to try, test, and solidify our faith.

Preaching the “four R’s” to myself was not like some magical potion that cured me of my struggles, but a way to fix my eyes on Christ and persevere to my goal through my struggles. At times I longed to be anywhere but Cape May, New Jersey and reminding myself that Cape May, New Jersey was exactly where God wanted me to be helped me stop complaining and rather rejoice that God had put me where I was. I had to constantly remember the cross where Christ paid the ultimate price for my sin so I could know Him, so that I would not give in to my weariness, and God gave me a whole squad bay filled with other girls who were struggling and feeling very out of place whom I could reach out and minister to in order to take my eyes off me and focus on the needs of others.

Boot camp was a good place for me to put the “four R’s” into practice and begin a good mental discipline of fixing my thoughts on Christ as I go through difficult situations. In the book of James Believers are commanded to “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds”, but I know that I do not always feel joyful while going through trials. We must remember that we do not have to be happy to be joyful. Just like Biblical love is an action and not a feeling so joy also is an action we must take.

My challenge for all who have read my first book and now are reading this one would be to begin the discipline of resting in God’s will, rejoicing in His plan, reminding yourself of the Cross, and reaching out to others in whatever and every situation you may face in life. Your heart

will overflow with joy that is not based off circumstances but springs from Christ. I warn you though that it will be a fierce battle to fix your eyes on Christ so do not face it without prayer and the help of fellow Believers.

-New Horizons-

**Journey to the USCGC
Midgett**

A New Mission Field

Boot camp had finally come to an end. I was completely thrilled that my parents and grandfather could be there to watch me graduate---now I was a Guardian! God gave me a wonderful five days with my family, but then it was time to get back to work and on to my new unit. I had received orders to the Coast Guard Cutter Midgett, which was located in Seattle, Washington. I was excited but definitely nervous as well. I had no idea what to expect---not only was I leaving home again to go to a new unit with new people, but I was going to be living in the heart of downtown Seattle! This would be the first time I have ever lived in a city before and I was a little scared.

Here are some thoughts I wrote down as I looked back

over my time at boot camp before I flew up to Seattle. October 11, 2009: “Excited and scared [about going to Seattle]---most of all confident that I am held by grace. God’s grace and strength certainly sustained me every day in boot camp. It was not easy, but nothing worth doing is going to be easy. How glad I am for Christ’s friendship, which helped me through loneliness; His love which supported me through discouragement; and His faithfulness which pushed me on. He never left me---He never will leave me---all because of Christ.” October 12, 2009: “Fears are creeping into my heart about the next step in my life, but I am greatly encouraged by reading in Daniel.” October 13, 2009: “Asking God to continually prepare me to get back into the fight.”

I flew up to Seattle and found myself in a world completely different from the one I was used to. I was glad that my mom had made the journey with me to help me get settled in and explore my new surroundings. We had an awesome weekend together---one I will always look back upon and treasure. I had to continually remind myself that I was not in Seattle by chance, but that the Lord had sent me there on a mission---to make much of Him and be a light in the darkness.

I spent three weeks working at the Coast Guard base in Seattle because the Midgett was underway at the time. Here are some of the highlights of those weeks leading up to the day I arrived at my new unit. October 19, 2009: “Alone but not alone for my Savior is always with me by my side in sorrow and joy---my rock, my fortress in Him I

will hide.” October 20, 2009: “Feeling down this morning ---mornings are tough. God you are my strength---I look to you.” October 21, 2009: “The end of another day here in Seattle. How good God is. Yes I am lonely, but He has blessed me so much, I do not deserve any of it...God has certainly put a joyful song into my heart for at times I feel so heavy and weary, but Christ makes each moment better and each day worth living. Christ is my treasure and my joy! I am alone---but not alone. I am hidden in Christ and held by grace.”

The day finally arrived for me to meet my boat. Three other Coasties and I would be flying down to San Diego, CA to meet the Midgett, which was on its way back up to Seattle. I was nervous to say the least. As I sat on the plane, I wrote down some of my thoughts in my journal.

November 3, 2009: As I sit in this airplane flying to San Diego, my thoughts turn to the adventure before me, my prayer and aim is to learn as much as I can, experience as much as I can (while honoring Christ), and grow closer to God through it all. He's placed me here for a reason---so I'm going to sit back and enjoy the ride (thank goodness for seat belts---or I'd probably jump out! Just kidding!) knowing God is taking me where I need to be. I plan to make the most of every moment and not waste a second of it.

I fix my eyes on Christ---sometimes clouds get in the way, but my gaze must remain fixed heavenward. I joined the Coast Guard because I wanted to do something hard,

and I was telling my dad the other day, "I am realizing more and more that doing hard things is HARD." Funny but so true. Living for Christ is hard, but worth it. You can't give up even when the going gets rough---when things get rough that is good. It means you're on the right path.

So press on with me today...whatever God may be teaching you, embrace it. If it burns---let it burn. If it hurts ---then let it hurt. Turn the suffering of the moment into rejoicing for all time, turn your pain to praise, and know that if you are focused on heaven nothing can be too difficult to bear in Christ's strength.

I write these thoughts to my own heart because I struggle staying the course that God has placed me upon. I hurt so I want to quit, the way gets hard so I want to find a new way, but God is faithful when I am faithless. I press on in His strength and help He continually fills my heart with joy beyond my wildest dreams.

We left gray, cloudy Seattle and arrived in San Diego welcomed by the heat and sunshine. After meeting up with our ride, we made our way to the Midgett. I threw on my sea bag, grabbed my backpack, and juggled a couple other items and clumsily walked up the brow leading onto my new boat. I nervously stepped onto the Midgett, and found myself feeling very lost and out of place.

Here's what I wrote in my journal that night. November 3, 2009: "I am in my rack [bed], feeling completely

overwhelmed and wondering what in the world I did [by joining the Coast Guard]. This is where God wants me, but fear and dread fill my heart. After we arrived at the Midgett, I filled out paper work, went on a tour of the boat with my sponsor, ate chow, and went to the Navy exchange to buy a pillow. Scared about tomorrow...going to close the day with prayer and reading of the Word.”

An agonizing fear gripped my heart and everything within me felt overwhelmed. My faith in God and my life circumstances seemed to collide, and I was not sure how I was going to survive.

The next day we set out for Seattle, but had to turn back because of bad weather conditions. That night I wrote down some more of my thoughts. November 4, 2009: “Very, very overwhelmed---how am I going to survive this? Oh, God help me! I’ve got to get qualified, but am swimming in information. We are heading back to San Diego because of 30’ swells.” So here I was on a 378’ cutter for the first time. I could not find my way around the boat without getting lost, I was swamped with all the qualifications I had to work on the next several months , and I had no idea where to start or what to do. I was out of place, and wishing I was as far away from the Midgett as I could be.

During this time, my heart did not feel joyful and I certainly was not a “happy sailor” by any means; but God brought to mind something that my dad had told me before I left for Seattle. Before I got on the airplane, he gave me his old, dog tag that he had back from when he was in

the military. He told me that whenever I felt sad, lonely, or discouraged to look at his dog tag and remember that just as God was with him so many years before and helped him through tough, difficult days so He also is with me and would get me through my tough, difficult days. In those first moments on the Midgett when darkness seemed to overwhelm me, I remember laying in my rack, crying, looking at my dad's dog tag, and clinging to the truth that God was with me and would get me through this chapter in my life. Yes, I will confess that I was a big wimp, but I believe God used the depth of my weakness and fear to demonstrate the height of His power and love.

Since we had to moor back up in San Diego, I did get to enjoy a day of exploring. I set out early with my backpack and cell phone, rode the train to the first starbucks I found, and bought myself a cup of coffee. I also called my family and told them all about my journey to the Midgett. Oh, how I longed to be home with them instead of being in the middle of downtown San Diego, but I was stuck. They encouraged me to keep up the good work and not worry about all the qualifications---I would get qualified in good time---and as always my dad reminded me of one of his favorite sayings, "Don't sweat the small stuff... everything is small stuff."

Through this time God impressed upon my heart that no matter what I am going through I must rejoice. I may not always feel happy at the time, but that does not mean I should not rejoice in Him. We must not wait to praise and thank God when we are feeling happy and times are going

good; praise and thank God and you will find that you can be nothing but happy.

Finally we set out for Seattle once again, and I found the five or so days we spent underway to be full and busy. November 5, 2009: “I studied for helm and lookout watch before dinner...my soul is storm tossed between pressure and stress over qualifying and missing home. The Lord is ever with me---I will not be shaken. I will trust in Him---I will rejoice.” Later that night before I turned in I concluded that “there are only two ways to deal with difficulties---become bitter (hold the hurt in and nurture it) or rejoice (turn it into reasons to praise God).”

I found that amidst this time of feeling overwhelmed by life, God’s Word became extremely precious to my heart. I was especially encouraged by Psalm 27:13-14: “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD (NKJV)!”

During one of my down times, I wrote this to post up on my blog later:

November 6, 2009: The Lord’s friendship is so dear to me and has become more precious to me than ever before. Working from dawn to past midnight with only a couple hours of rest in between and with people I don’t know has made me turn to the Lord and depend upon Him in a new way. The blessings He sends me are amazing and far out-

*weigh the difficulties (which are blessings themselves!).
He sustains me with His love and grace.*

It is so easy to get off track and begin worrying and wondering how in the world am I going to make it through my time here on the Midgett, but I must mortify such sinful, faithless thoughts. God will sustain me...I am His ambassador, His witness, and will be here as long as He sees fit. A verse in 2 Corinthians stuck out to me, "Sorrowful yet always rejoicing." That is where I am at---sorrowful, but always rejoicing because I have everything to be joyful about. I am a child of the Almighty One and I get to serve Him on the Midgett. He is my treasure, my love, my joy---and I will honor Him by working hard, doing everything with a good attitude, and reflecting the Light to the lost sinners aboard the Midgett.

Oh, God, You have placed me here for a reason. Use me as Your vessel to be spent and poured out for Your glory---to this end I live and breath and press on. You are my treasure and my greatest delight. Fill my heart with joy and may I ever sing Your praises through the darkest night

So much had happened in my heart in just those few days from when I first arrived on my boat until we made it back to Seattle. God transformed my worried, terrified heart into a joyful, happy heart. My happiness did not spring from my circumstances but from God's amazing grace. My heart was greatly comforted by God's presence-

--not that He felt near to me but that He had promised in His Word that He would always be with me. Here's what I wrote down in my journal towards the end of our journey to Seattle. November 7, 2009: "Tough moments throughout the day, but happy in my sovereign God who has placed me here on the Midgett." November 8, 2009: "It is the end of another long, full day---God's grace is amazing! He strengthens me for each moment."

I had taken the dreaded plunge---arriving at my new unit---and had found that God's grace and strength had no limits. I was held by grace, and I was rejoicing in that grace.

-The Power of Joy-

Work Hard & Trust God

The weeks that followed my first taste of sea-faring life were busy and filled with work and studying. A deckies life is a never ending cycle of sanding a bulkhead [wall], painting it, and then doing it all over again. I remember one day we had to give the boat a fresh-water wash down, and I was given the job of vacuuming up the water (so it would not collect on the decks) all the while the rain poured down---now that can seem like an impossible task! At first I dreaded the thought of being stuck on the Midgett, painting and sanding; but God put joy in my heart as I went about my tasks. If everyone else hated painting and being a deckie, well I decided I was going to love it---not because painting is all that fun, but because I was working for Jesus Christ, and He fills my heart with joy.

So it began---working hard for Christ---and others noticed and wondered why I was so happy; why was I al-

ways smiling. I would tell them it was not what I was doing that made me happy, but who I was doing it for, and I am doing it for Christ.

This was not a struggle-free time though, I still had to fight for joy in the quiet moments of my soul when loneliness and fear threatened to overwhelm me. November 13, 2009: “Feeling sad and homesick tonight---fighting for joy. Help me God to trust, to cling to You, to rejoice in You. Put gladness in my heart...fill me with joy. Keep me from finding my joy and all in anything but You.” November 16, 2009: “Blessed with another good day...in Christ I stand---every day is awesome, but I am struggling with a heavy, worried heart. I am feeling like I am falling behind in my quals. O God, help! I cry to You. Oh sustain me---fear threatens to overwhelm me, but You are my rock, You are my hiding place. You fill my heart with joy.” And He did.

During this time, I was also trying to put in for leave, so that I could go home for Christmas. The rule on the boat is that if you're not qualified you cannot take leave, but I was going to give it a shot anyway because I knew that this might be the last Christmas that my whole family would be together. The reason being because my little brother, who had joined the Army, would be going over to Afghanistan soon, and Lord willing my parents and younger siblings would be going to Cameroon, Africa as missionaries in the not too distant future. November 19, 2009: “Well, my leave chit is in---it's all in God's hands so that is where I'll leave it.” However, even though I

knew it was in God's hands, I struggled leaving it there and not allowing my heart to worry. Oh how I wanted to go home and see my family for Christmas, but now I was forced to wait and see what the Lord would do.

God continued to stretch and challenge me as I went through each new day on the Midgett. I was confronted face to face with men and women who hated God and wanted nothing to do with Him, but God reminded me that this was the very reason why He had placed me on this boat---because these people needed the Gospel. So I prayed and asked God to give me courage and boldness to share my faith and to know how and when to do it.

One day He gave me an opportunity to share that I was Christian with some of my fellow seaman. "During dinner some seaman and a BM3 (boatswains mates are senior seaman who head up maintenance and painting projects, drive the small boats, and know the ins and outs of navigation) were talking about "religion" in the context of what they were born as and what they are now. One had been born a Methodist, but now was an agnostic and so on. Then they asked me what I was (so I answered in their format). "Well, I was born a sinner and now I am saved by God's grace and am a follower of Christ." I think I shocked them a little to say the least.

I could hardly believe it when I got word that my leave chit was approved. God had worked it out for me to go home for Christmas. I shared the good news with my brothers, but had to wait to share it with the rest of my family because they were on a trip to Africa. My parents,

three younger sisters and youngest brother had gone on a month long, vision trip to Cameroon. I really missed talking to them on the phone and hearing from them regularly but I was excited that God had opened the door for them to visit the country that they wanted to spend the rest of their lives ministering in. I did receive a few updates from my parents on the e-mail. It sounded like they were having an amazing time, and I loved hearing how much fun my siblings were having playing with the kids.

-Joyful Surrender- A Chance Encounter?

However even though the Lord was filling my heart with joy as I worked, I still faced great loneliness when the work day was over. November 25, 2009: “My heart aches fiercely right now....my bravery and courage have melted away, and my resolve and determination have about vanished, and I am left with a broken hurting heart.” Yet God comforted me with assurance that when everything around me seemed out of control and when my heart ached I was still held by His grace. In the moments of my darkness, He taught me that His love is better than life. He is all I need, and though I walk through the darkest valley and the deepest pain He is always with me and so I should not fear. These lessons were hard to swallow and embrace. I fought for joy in Christ, but the battle was fierce. November 27, 2009: “Such deep sadness rests upon my soul. The battle is fierce right now---the fight for joy has never seemed harder, but God is constant and faithful as ever.

God is good...He holds me.”

My soul had returned to a place of great turmoil and though I found rest in Christ, my heart still ached. These struggles seemed to come to a peak on one rainy Saturday morning. I felt especially homesick this morning because I had a whole day off in front of me but no family or friends to spend it with. So I decided to head to the park by Pike Place Market and play my guitar. It was cold and rainy so I figured I would not be out long, but what happened that day changed my life. Here is what I wrote later that day.

November 28, 2009: Wow! I have just had an amazing, crazy morning like never before. God certainly is not a God of coincidence, but plans and purposes everything that takes place in our lives. He is strategically placing us where He wants us in order to bring Him honor and glory. So let me share with you my story, which is really just a small part of His story. May Jesus receive all of the praise and glory for He alone deserves it.

I woke up this morning and decided to spend my day off playing my guitar at the park in downtown Seattle, and then maybe go get coffee at the library or something like that; but God had something else in mind for me today. I made it to the park, got out my guitar, and started playing a little. Well, a guy with a guitar of his own came up to me and asked me what kind of guitar I had, which struck up a conversation about what kind of music I played. I showed him some of the songs I was playing---some of Mark's music that I had printed at the library a couple days ago---

and we started talking about Jesus and God's Word.

He told me he had just got off the phone with His mom who was trying to get Him to become a Christian and how he just was not buying into it. So we started talking about Jesus. I shared with him that God's Word is truth and that Jesus was the only one who could fill the empty void in his life. He started telling me his story. He had gotten into drugs and was battling addiction, he just got out of jail not too long ago, he was trying to get clean, but had just had a drug relapse and nearly died from an overdose the night before. So here I was sitting with this guy wondering what in the world am I doing---this sure is not the safest way to spend my Saturday; but God had placed me here on this bench with this lost, hurting young man who needed Jesus in his life. And so I sat there with Him, praying and pleading with God to work in his heart. This was definitely a God thing!

At first, he argued with what I was saying, but as our conversation continued on things seemed to start sinking into his heart. At one point, I just looked at Him and told Him point blank: "You need Jesus. He's the only One who will fill the emptiness in your life." And he agreed. The drugs only left Him emptier after each high. I prayed with Him and committed him to Christ. I gave him my little, New Testament to read and told him I'd be praying for him---He wanted me to tell my family so that they'd be praying for Him as well. We were about to part ways when he asked if I'd go with him to his drugs anonymous meeting, which was just up the street a ways. For a se-

cond I was thinking, "Man, what would my family and friends say if they saw me now---throwing caution to the wind!" But I also thought of Jesus, coming to earth and going to the sinners---identifying with the lost. So I prayed in my heart asking God for wisdom, discernment, and courage to be Christ to this young man. On the way, he called his mom and started telling her all about it. Then he handed me the phone and told me she wanted to talk to me.

She told me that she had prayed me up this morning, and had asked God to send someone into her son's life who would point Him to Christ. She said it sure was not a coincidence and that she thanked God for me. I was just amazed at what God was doing---completely shocked and excited about the work I was seeing Him do right in front of me.

I went to the meeting with Daniel and listened as they had their sharing time---many drug addicts shared about their struggles. Near the close, Daniel raised his hand and started sharing about how he needed help. He told them about his relapse into drugs and asked for help. Then He started talking about the coincidences of the morning, which weren't really coincidences in his mind anymore. How his mom had talked to him about Jesus and then someone in the park. I was just exploding inside at the next thing he said. He continued on saying that now he believed in Jesus. How awesome! Praise God!

I do believe Daniel's confession was genuine, but I know he has a rough road ahead of Him. Please pray for

him as He presses on. I am just blown away by what has happened today---God is truly awesome in how He brings us to Himself.

My outlook on life changed dramatically that day and the Lord filled me with a deeper joy in knowing Him. He had placed me where I was for a reason and I knew that I could not drag my feet and wallow in my loneliness and homesickness---I had to surrender to the Lord's plan for my life. He was with me, He knew what He was doing, and I had to trust Him.

I wrote down some of my thoughts in a blog post shortly after all this took place:

Today as I look back over my weekend and what God is doing in my life, I just stand in awe of His faithfulness and love. I am so weak and so faithless, but He holds me still--He is constantly at work in my life even when I don't realize it. He is with me so I will not fear. I may live in a dark place and be surrounded by people whose lives reflect the darkness, but I know the Light of the World---I know Jesus and He is with me always. The very reason God has placed me here is because it's a dark place and I am to shine the light of Christ here. May I live every moment in such a way that everyone who passes by me will stop and wonder why I can be joyful when I'm painting, happy when I am on watch, smiling when it's 8pm and we're still working, and working hard when others are

*slacking off. I want to point to Christ here on the Midgett.
I am not my own---I was bought with a price---I will glorify God.*

-This Is My Portion and My Cup-
Blessed Be the Name of the
Lord!

Never would I have imagined the Lord working it out for me to return home for Christmas when I first arrived on the Midgett, but God blessed me with such a wonderful surprise of going to see my family. I know and am confident that even if I had not been able to return home, God still would have been just as kind and gracious.

I flew out of Seattle more excited than ever, and perhaps still amazed and in disbelief that I was really on my way home. What a wonderful reunion it was at the airport that day when I met my family awaiting my arrival. December 22, 2009: "I'm home---never was or is a place so filled with love and warmth and safety; a small whisper of

what my true home will be like someday. Continually amazed by God's kindness." I had a blast with my family that week leading up to Christmas and the weekend afterward. We went sledding, played games, had concerts with our guitars, and most of all enjoyed each others company. My heart was bursting with joy and happiness, and I knew I was somewhere I belonged. But in an instant it seemed I was back at the airport saying goodbye. I did not want to leave, and my heart was breaking. The pain I felt this time saying goodbye far outweighed any other time I had said goodbye. Something gnawed at the depth of my heart, and everything in me ached.

I sat in the airport wishing I could stay behind and watch the airplane leave without me. I had to go though, my leave had come to an end and now I had to say goodbye. I hugged my family and cried as I walked away to go through security. I found my seat in the airplane and just cried and cried. In the moments of soul despair when I longed to give up the Lord was near. He comforted me in my pain, even though I could not feel His presence, His promises attended me. I was alone again, yet not alone. He was at my side leading me onward to complete the task He had given me.

The next day I wrote down some of my thoughts. December 29, 2009: "My heart was in great agony, but God is a greater comforter---He is with me so I press on to take His glory to those who hate Him. I am the light here on this boat. O God, uphold me for surely I will not stand firm apart from you."

As I sat crying on the airplane, I cried out to God and surrendered once again to His plan. I found out once again that the Christian life is not a “die to self once and for all deal”, but rather *we who love Christ must die to self daily*. I had to remind myself of the “four R’s” and go over them in my heart. It hurt, but the Lord sustained me. At the end of my trip back to Seattle my heart’s cry resounded in my soul, “Blessed be Your name, O God! You are my portion. You are my treasure, not my family.”

I was a missionary---a witness of the glory of God---one of the ones God had raised up to shine His light on the Midgett. I had a mission to complete---a task to accomplish---and God pushed me on to do His work on my boat. For such a time as this, He had placed me right where I was to be His ambassador and to proclaim His gospel to the lost.

-Hidden in Christ-

“I with you AM”

If you have ever read or studied the book of Matthew, perhaps you have noticed the similarity in the two promises God gives His people---one in the beginning and one at the end. In Matthew 2:23 we find the first promise: “‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel’--- which means, ‘God with us.’”

From the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, people have been the enemies of God (Romans 5:10). We hate Him and live in rebellion to Him. We cannot get back into a right relationship with God because of our sins (Romans 3:23). However this passage in Matthew holds the key to our redemption and reconciliation. God has made a way for sinful man to have peace with Him by sending His only Son into the world to take our punishment and bring us to the Himself. This verse is wonderful news for lost sinners: “Jesus is coming into the world to save sinners! God

will be among us...He will not be far off...He will be walking among us.”

And the promise was fulfilled, and Jesus came to earth and dwelt among us. He came as Immanuel, “God with us.” He lived a perfect life, fulfilling the law on our behalf, and then was led to Golgotha to die upon a cross. He bore God’s wrath that should have been ours to bear, and He paid the penalty for our sin. He was buried, and His disciples were left alone, overwhelmed by their fear and sorrow.

However on the third day, Jesus arose from the grave and over the course of forty days appeared to His disciples. The day finally came though, when He was going back to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father---He was going to prepare a place for His disciples and for those who would believe in Him. Can you imagine the heart ache and pain Jesus’ disciples were feeling as they thought of Him leaving them. Immanuel had come---God was with them---but now in their minds, soon all they would have was the memories of how God had been with them, but not anymore.

However Matthew does not end His Gospel here, this is where the second promise is given as Jesus is about to ascend back into heaven. He gives His disciples and all who would come to believe in Him a promise in Matthew 28:20: “...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” He has not left us alone in this world---He is still with us! What is even more amazing though, if you look at this verse in it’s original language you will see the

full force of Jesus' words. In the Greek, the way Jesus phrased this promise is rather odd (so you would think at first). You see, literally the verse says: "I with you AM..." Jesus takes His beloved disciples and all who will look to Him for salvation and places us in the middle of His name, surrounding us with Himself. This was no grammar mistake on Matthew's part, Jesus has hidden us in Himself...we no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

In this world we can be sure that we will face hardships, difficulties, persecution, and suffering; but through it all we are never alone. At times we may feel like we have been abandoned, and like God has disappeared from our lives, but remember that Jesus has promised us that He will always be with us. We are forever hidden in Christ. When we cannot feel God's presence in our lives, we must cling to His promise that He is with us always: "I with you AM."

Perhaps if I were to sum up what I have learned the past couple months I have been in the Coast Guard, I would have to say that God has comforted as well as challenged me with this promise that He is always with me. I have been challenged to live joyfully in Christ because I have everything to be joyful about because I am hidden in Him. I have been comforted in sadness as I have struggled once again with loneliness and homesickness by the promise that I am not alone.

So my challenge for all who read these reflections is that you would live your life, knowing that you are hidden

in Christ---You are held by Grace. Not until we begin living life in such a way will we be able to rejoice in the awesome grace God has bestowed upon us. God takes me through the valleys of darkness to demonstrate the depth of His love for me. He has to remove the props I rely on before I realize that it is by grace that I stand. When everything is striped away and all I have is Christ, I realize that all I could ever dream of wanting is Christ---He alone can satisfy my hearts deepest longings. I rejoice in the grace He has given me, and I rejoice that I am hidden in Christ and held by His grace.

