

Over the course of our lives, sometimes it can be easy to get lost, or to lose sight of God. Sometimes we can give up on the world and get cynical; sometimes fear can take over; sometimes we can think maybe God isn't there at all. But the truth of it is, God is there; He seeks us out, and invites us to see the world, ourselves and one another through His eyes, and to live accordingly. How this happens is a process.

A few years ago, the film "Hacksaw Ridge" was released, telling the story of the heroic actions of the veteran Desmond Doss. And while what he did in the Second World War was incredible, really it was just part of a man who had a deep connection with God, who had let God in, and had been transformed by that love and wisdom of God to change the world for the better.

From a young age, Desmond Doss (born February 7, 1919) radiated the kind of empathy that he'd display as a soldier later in life. When he was a child, for example, he once walked six miles to donate blood to an accident victim — a complete stranger — after hearing about the need for blood on a local radio station. A few days later, Desmond traveled down the same long stretch of road to give more.

Also at a young age, Doss developed a hatred of weapons that would persist throughout his life, even during his time in combat.

Doss' hatred of weapons stemmed from watching his drunken father pull a gun on his uncle during an argument, and from his religious beliefs as a Seventh-day Adventist.

His mother managed to confiscate the .45 pistol from her husband and told young Doss to run and hide it. He was so shaken, he vowed that was the last time he would ever hold a weapon.

Instead, Doss spent his childhood doing things like flattening pennies on the railway near his Lynchburg, Virginia home and wrestling with his younger brother, Harold. He said that Desmond wasn't much fun to wrestle with because you could never win — not because Desmond was particularly skilled, but because he'd never surrender and didn't know how to give up.

Years later, this physical resilience is what helped enable him to earn the Medal of Honor.

On April 1, 1942, Desmond Doss joined the United States Army. Little did he realize that three and a half years later, he would be standing on the White House lawn, receiving the nation's highest award for his bravery and courage under fire.

Of the 16 million men in uniform during World War II, only 431 received the Congressional Medal of Honor. One of these was placed around the neck of a young Seventh-day Adventist, who during combat had not killed a single enemy soldier. In fact, he refused to carry a gun. His only weapons were his Bible and his faith in God.

President Harry S. Truman warmly shook the hand of Corporal Desmond Thomas Doss, and then held it the entire time his citation was read aloud to those gathered outside the White House on October 12, 1945. "I'm proud of you," Truman said. "You really deserve this. I consider this a greater honor than being president."

The journey that had brought young Desmond to that day had been a challenging one.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was working at the Newport News Naval shipyard and could have requested a deferment—but he wanted to do more for his country. He was willing to risk his life on the front lines in order to preserve freedom.

When he joined the Army, Desmond assumed that his classification as a conscientious objector would not require him to carry a weapon. He wanted to be an Army combat medic. As luck would have it, he was assigned to an infantry rifle company. His refusal to carry a gun caused a lot of trouble among his fellow soldiers. They viewed him with disdain and called him a misfit. One man in the barracks warned him, "Doss, as soon as we get into combat, I'll make sure you won't come back alive." They teased him mercilessly to "man up" and carry a rifle. They launched their boots at him while he prayed by his bunk at night. They hated him for getting a pass on the Sabbath because to work on the holy day was against his religion — never mind that the officers gave Doss all the worst work to complete by himself on Sundays. Nobody wanted to be friends. Friends had each other's backs. Without a defense weapon, the others insisted, Doss was useless to them.

Yet, over and over, Doss not only dismissed their cruel behavior, he rose above it. He resolutely believed that his purpose was to serve both God and country. All he wanted was to prove those two tasks weren't mutually exclusive.

His commanding officers also wanted to get rid of the skinny Virginian who spoke with a gentle southern drawl. They saw him as a liability. Nobody believed a soldier without a weapon was worthwhile. They tried to intimidate him, scold him, assign him extra tough duties, and declared him mentally unfit for the Army. Then they attempted to court martial him for refusing a direct order—to carry a gun. But they failed to find a way to toss him out, and he refused to leave. He believed his duty was to obey God and serve his country. But it had to be in that order. His unwavering convictions were most important. Doss continued to not let any of this cloud his vision; rather as a medic, he simply served with a care and concern for the other soldiers.

Things began turning around when the men discovered that this quiet unassuming medic had a way to heal the blisters on their march-weary feet. And if someone fainted from heat stroke, this medic was at his side, offering his own canteen. Desmond never held a grudge. With kindness and gentle courtesy, he treated those who had mistreated him. He lived the golden rule, "...do to others what you would have them do to you...".

Desmond served in combat on the islands of Guam, Leyte, and Okinawa. In each military operation he exhibited extraordinary dedication to his fellow men. While others

were taking life, he was busy saving life. When the cry, "medic" rang out on the battlefield, he never considered his own safety. He repeatedly ran into the heat of battle to treat a fallen comrade and carry him back to safety. All this, while enemy bullets whizzed past and mortar shells exploded around him. Several times, while treating a wounded soldier, Desmond was so close to enemy lines, he could hear the whispering of Japanese voices.

In May, 1945, as German troops were surrendering on the other side of the world, Japanese troops were fiercely defending, to their last man, the only remaining barrier (Okinawa and the Maeda Escarpment) to an allied invasion of their homeland. The men in Desmond's division were repeatedly trying to capture the Maeda Escarpment, an imposing rock face the soldiers called Hacksaw Ridge. After the company had secured the top of the cliff, the Americans were stunned when suddenly enemy forces rushed them in a vicious counterattack. Officers ordered an immediate retreat. Soldiers rushed to climb back down the steep cliff. All the soldiers except one.

The fearless medic held his ground at the plateau. Amidst never-ending gunfire and mortar shells, Doss treated the wounded American soldiers that others may have left for dead. Hour after hour, as explosions rang constantly in his ears, he tied tourniquets. Covered from head to toe in blood not his own, he crawled and dragged each hurt member of his company to the edge of the ridge and carefully lowered them down. For more than 12 hours, Doss labored under fire and saved an incredible amount of human lives.

Knowing that some Japanese soldiers sometimes tortured wounded U.S. soldiers, Doss refused to leave a single man on top of the ridge.

His iron determination and unflagging courage resulted in at least 75 lives saved that day, May 5, 1945, his Sabbath.

Eventually, the Americans took Hacksaw Ridge. Okinawa was captured inch by bloody inch. Several days later, during an unsuccessful night raid, Desmond was severely wounded. Hiding in a shell hole with two riflemen, a Japanese grenade landed at his feet. The explosion sent him flying. The shrapnel tore into his leg and up to his hip. He treated his own wounds as best he could. While attempting to reach safety, he was hit by a sniper's bullet that shattered his arm. (Mel Gibson actually left that out of the movie, believing that audiences might not think it actually happened it was so heroic). His brave actions as a combat medic were done. But not before insisting that his litter-bearers take another man first before rescuing him. Wounded, in pain, and losing blood, he still put others ahead of his own safety. He would choose to die so another could live. He was following the example of Jesus.

In addition to his Medal of Honor, Desmond Doss received a Bronze Star for valor with one Oak Leaf cluster (signifying he received 2 Bronze Stars); a Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf clusters (signifying he received 3 Purple Hearts); the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three Bronze Stars, and beachhead arrowhead (signifying he served in 4

combat campaigns including an amphibious landing under combat conditions); the Good Conduct Medal; the American Defense Campaign; and the not so common, Presidential Unit Citation for securing the Maeda Escarpment.

The Medal of Honor was established during the Civil War under President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. At the one hundredth anniversary in 1962, the other recipients of that award selected Desmond Doss to represent them at a White House ceremony. He had a pleasant chat with President John F. Kennedy.

Before being discharged from the Army in 1946, Desmond developed tuberculosis. He would spend most of the next six years in hospitals. Cold, wet, sleepless nights, shivering in a muddy foxhole on the islands of the Pacific, had taken their toll. As the illness progressed his left lung had to be surgically removed along with five ribs. For the rest of his life, he survived on a single lung, until it too failed. He'd also suffer deafness for 10 years later in his life. At the age of 87, Corporal Desmond Thomas Doss died on March 23, 2006, after being hospitalized with difficulty breathing. He is buried in the National Cemetery, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

What he did in the battle of Okinawa is what he is perhaps best known for, but how he lived his life goes to show you what wisdom is all about. He let God into his life; and once that happened, he treated others as God would treat them, with love and mercy.

It all begins with remembering how God is the one who makes the move to us first. Remember what Jesus says; it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you. We hear this in the first reading from the book of Wisdom; we are told that "Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate...she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude." We are looking for God as people, but God hastens to make Himself known before we even start that search. Think of God as the one knocking at the door, or as put in contemporary terms God like a helicopter trying to land. We have to clear the land; and once that happens, we can then start living and acting differently.

For Doss, he did that at an early age by wanting to root out any violence in his heart. In the film, there's a scene where a fight with his brother causes his brother to get hurt, and he's depicted as threatening his dad as a young man when his father, intoxicated, strikes his mother. He then puts down the gun. He knew that anger in his heart could lead to a bad moral choice, so he gets rid of it. So for you and me, it's worth asking ourselves what maybe needs to be cleared so we too can grow in wisdom and let God in more deeply. Is it a love of money or ego or ambition? Is it an addiction to media, or worse, using the Internet inappropriately? Is it shortness of temper, or a reliance on alcohol too much? Is it being too busy for others and God? Is it tendency to be a gossip? Maybe it's anxiety or worry about the future and things out of our control. Perhaps it's shame or a lack of self worth thinking we have to hide something from God as if He does not know it already, or that we aren't lovable because of how we've been hurt by others. Whatever it might be, clear it out of the way, and let God in. That's how

like the wise five virgins who have oil, we make sure we are prepared for when we meet God.

We then grow in wisdom by having a dynamic relationship with God. Pope Francis says that wisdom “comes from intimacy with God...from the relationship children have with their heavenly father.” The second reading reminds us of the certain hope that gives direction to our relationship with God on earth - namely that God desires to be in relationship with us for all eternity. So find time for God and take concrete steps to grow in that wisdom. Some simple things include every day, just taking a few minutes to be with God. Maybe it's in the morning, on a break, in the evening or at work. As Bishop Robert Barron suggests, talk to God from your heart and remember He seeks you out, and say “alright Lord, I believe you are looking for me, so come into my heart” and know that He will. And as we pray, we can also grow in wisdom by being introspective. Again, sometimes things need to go, and we can get too focused on money, success, fame, power, and the stuff getting in the way of God. We can also be grateful. We have a lot of stress now; an election still getting sorted out; Covid still going on; so much anxiety with things we can't control. Life is hard. But there still is so much to be thankful for. Maybe each day we can grow in wisdom too by seeing the good things that God has put into our lives. Making a list of some good things that happen each day can help us to see the effects of God in our lives.

Lastly, like Doss, wisdom brings about a change in our lives. The five wise women send a clear message about what it means to be wise as the kingdom of God unfolds in our midst. They don't just say they want change; they prepare for it; they work for it; and when the Lord, the Bridegroom comes, they embrace a new future having been prepared. For Doss, that wisdom is what caused him to be a peacemaker; it's what caused him not to retaliate when he was being mistreated by other soldiers; it's what caused him to go back and rescue all those men. When we examine our lives, we should also look at how we are living and relating to others and see if, as we profess, we know God and have grown in that relationship, it is bearing fruit in how we live.

Life is much like a battle, and sometimes, whether it's sins we commit or others' sins that impact us, the unknown of what tomorrow brings, pain we carry on the inside, or whatever it might be, it can be hard to have hope. God however, much like Corporal Doss on that field in Okinawa, is always seeking us out. On our part, let's make sure we are prepared to meet Him by preparing for that day to clear whatever stands in the way of the door being opened, and use the wisdom and love He gives us to transform ourselves and one another.