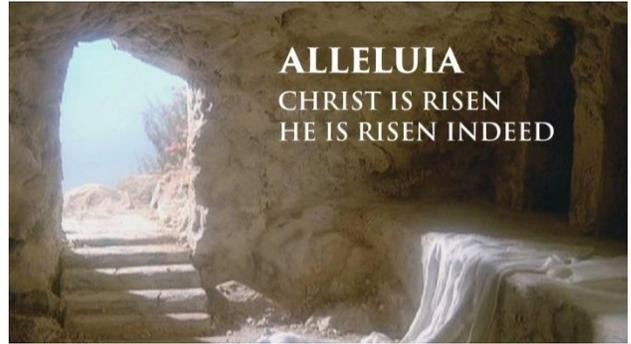


## Grace Notes in Miniature

For Tuesday May 5, 2020

Dear friends:

Today I am being a little lazy and turning to someone else's work. That someone is very dear to me, one of my daughters, Marsali. She is the mother of two beautiful sons, Declan aged eight and Lennox, six, she holds down a full time, very responsible job, she is an Army Reservist, and she is the Chair of the Toronto Military Family Resource Centre which provides support to military members and their families, including child care services, many types of counselling, educational and recreational opportunities and many other services. At the moment, Marsali is continuing to do all this at home on her own as her husband, a high school teacher with TCDSB is an Army Reservist and has been deployed to assist as required; it is likely that she may have no contact with him other than on-line or by 'phone until August 31. So I was very proud to read her newsletter to the military community and wanted to share it - with her permission. With our focus on self-care, today seemed appropriate. Thank you, Marsali!



Welcome to May.

This month is about endurance. You have already made it through 6 weeks of the coronavirus isolation period. We now have at least another six weeks ahead of us to get through. This could seem immense or impossible.

In the Army, when they want to test endurance, they often embark on a ruck march, called a "forced march" because there is little choice in completing it. This is a long stretch of walking with a heavy, full rucksack strapped to the soldiers' backs to test their fortitude. It feels a little bit like that is what is being imposed on us right now.

For us, a lot of the march discipline concepts that are used during ruck marches can be used when we consider how we will get through the next stretch of time, and to help find that endurance that we need to make it through.

The first concept of march discipline is setting your maps. It's about knowing where you're going, and how to get there. In a forced march, just like this isolation period, we don't have a set destination in mind - we have a time. We know that we have a place at the end of the tunnel that we need to get to. For us, setting maps is about knowing the method we are going to use to best get to that point in time. For some, it may be about completely rigid structures and schedules; for others it may be about freedom and loose structures. For another group, it may be a combination of both. Whatever the system you'll use to get to the end, is the right way to set your map for you. What you are doing is finding the best route to getting through the endurance test.

With any good map set, you also find contingency routes. What are the alternate routes you can take to still get where you need to go? So, if you chose the rigid scheduled route, it may be that you find a second route that's not quite as rigidly scheduled, but can still help you get where you need to go. It's about knowing you have options to get where you need to go in the end, given you may come up against unexpected obstacles. The idea of options is often a common, helpful, useful idea for most people. Knowing that you have more than one option brings a sense of relief. Knowing that if you have to change your mind or route, that is a valid choice, and you've considered it already.

Once you set your map, you have to check your kit. This is about loading up your metaphorical rucksack to get you where you need to go. Consider, what are the skills, energies, emotions, and mindsets that you need to put in that

rucksack to get you where you need to go? And once you've put all of those things in the rucksack, you need to adjust their weight properly. Make sure there's nothing that is loading you down too heavily, or causing too many points of friction, or bearing too much weight at a certain point. You need to be realistic about what you can carry at any point in time, and recognize that this is an endurance test -- you need to be able to carry the load for a long period of time, not just a short stretch. What are the mindsets, needs, emotions, resources, and abilities that you need to have close at hand? Where can you put them, so they are the most accessible to you when you need them? Patience will likely be one!

Third, you need to check your footwear. Do you have the right socks and supportive boots on to make it through this endurance test? In our metaphor, this is making sure you have the right support under your feet and within your grasp to get you where you need to go. Tie those boots on tightly; they will be what gets you where you need to go. As with your rucksack, are there any points of friction you can already feel in those supports, areas that are going to cause you angst further down the road? If your boots are already too tight, you have a problem before you even left the gate. Try to loosen your boots somehow, or find an entirely different pair of boots that can support you through your journey. Wear your warmest, fuzziest, most comforting socks that will bolster you and make you feel secure and comfortable throughout the entire trip.



Make sure you've packed water. It sounds silly, but as we're worrying about taking care of everyone else on this trip, we have to make sure we're taking care of ourselves. Keep yourself watered and properly fed throughout the journey. Make sure that you are fulfilling your own needs, even as you're fulfilling the needs of those around you.

Finally, we set out on our journey. But that doesn't mean all the checks are over, it means they've just begun. Within march discipline, the ruck march stops only a kilometre in to re-check rucksacks, drink some water, and recheck feet. You're only done a little bit of your journey, but those friction points, heavy loads, and thirst are going to identify themselves early on and you need to make sure you take care of them now or they will become bigger problems down the road.

Once you've dealt with these areas, tightened your boots, readjusted your load, and drunk some water, you can then continue on your journey in the freshest, healthiest, most prepared state of mind. You'll do these checks regularly and adjust, and readjust, as necessary.

As you progress, you'll want to keep coming back to your maps as well. The route you planned in the beginning may not be the route that still make sense for you at this time, now that you have set out and walked a bit of your journey. Use your compass, and make sure that you are comfortable you are still heading in the right direction to where you need to go. Realign or find that contingency route that you planned at the beginning. Good intentions, and all that. When we are in the midst of the walk it is easy to get off course. We need to keep coming back to our plans, our maps, to make sure we are always heading in the direction we intended.

On any good march, the Army uses the buddy system. This is going to be the most important part for you. At no time in the military experience do we expect our soldiers to go it alone. We always partner them with someone to make sure they have a support, and someone who has their back. Who are your buddies? Who are the people you can call on in times of crisis, frustration, sadness, and even in times of happiness? Who are the people who understand your journey, and will share both your joys and sadness, your ups and downs? Find them; gather them around you. It may not be physically possible to have them around you, but make sure your support network and ability to reach out is set and there. If your rucksack is getting too heavy, are there people who can share the load? Can you offload some of the weight into their rucksack? Even as your buddies are checking on you, make sure you're checking on your own buddies.

Continue to drink your water throughout the whole journey, making sure you're taking care of yourself. Again, you can't take care of others if you yourself are suffering. Feeling dehydrated, unfed, or not topped up to the best of your ability,

your means to take care of others and finish who the journey will be limited and diminished. Sing some marching songs to keep up morale. Find your chant or mantra that will keep you going.

If you can, enjoy the journey. Don't just stare at your boots and slog through the dust. Keep your head up as best you can and enjoy the sights and sounds as you pass them. Find the birds, the trees, the laughing, the successes, the joys, the new or changed experiences, the additional time with you march companions, the freedom, and the small moments that normally would pass you by. Breathe in the fresh air as best you can. On a long endurance march you may find yourself getting tired - this is obviously very common. Learn to breathe deeply and steadily. Take your breath in deeply into your lungs, and expel it equally as slowly. Take rests as you need them. And take it one step at a time, one boot in front of the other.

Finally, hopefully, we will find ourselves getting closer and closer to our destination. We will recognize that what we set up in the beginning enabled our success, and provided us with that endurance to get through this difficult period of time. We will be able to celebrate that we made it to our destination, in the best of health, having enjoyed ourselves, and congratulate ourselves for our endurance as we emerge into the sunshine filled clearing on the other side of this journey.

I wish you all the very best on your marches.

I also take this time to recognize all the incredible, wonderful military mothers in our community. This month brings a day to celebrate the mothers, and their fortitude and endurance. Not only during this specific stretch of time of difficulty, but the endurance and fortitude it takes to be the mother of a military member or the wife and mother of children of a military member. We salute you, and we recognize your immense dedication, support, and incredible resilience. #ConfidentCapableResilient

*Whether or not you are a supporter of Military life, there is some good advice in here. As one who has done these ruck marches in the past, I can tell you that it is all sound. I will also share that I got through many of these by reciting or chanting psalms or familiar hymns to myself to set a cadence. One favourite was "Shepherd me, O God" (hear Marty Haugen sing this <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFgZGIZ5t80> ) albeit a little faster to keep up, and I also sang the L'Arche Hymn on occasion – in both languages: Lord Jesus, of you I will sing as I journey – Jésus, je voudrais te chanter sur ma route. The English is a bit different in this lovely rendition by a Christian music camp: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDs1V7lj0XA> and I've included a link to a recording in the original French, as written by Les Petites Soeurs de Jésus. And I got very adept at using a thumb rosary ring! One more:*



Emmanuel Jesus Illustration -Pinterest

**Psalm 121:1-2:** I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. (Listen to John Michael Talbot at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yCe99ynd64> ) And remember that *"It is not the mountains ahead that wear you out – it's the grain of sand in your shoe!"* All points which I am sure Jesus' friends on the Emmaus road knew!

Gillian