

## End of Tour

*The time of my departure has come... (2 Timothy 4:6)*

As I near the end of my deployment in Afghanistan, I look back on what I have accomplished and forward to what comes next. It has not always been easy or fun, but it has been worth it.

Looking back I consider the challenges I have faced. There was the anxiety over being separated from the ones I love at home...family, church, and fast food restaurants. The adjustment to being among strangers from different nations, to working 12-15 hour days 7-days-per-week, to eating meals prepared differently, and to learning new processes and policies, has forced me to be patient, flexible, and resilient. Along the way I have made new friends, improved my physical fitness, broadened my professional skill set, and even picked up a couple of awards. Most importantly, I did not get killed or wounded. It has been a good tour.

Looking forward, I realize I have a lot left to do between now and the day I actually arrive at home. While continuing to maintain my mission role, I must prepare to turn over my responsibilities to the one who will replace me. When he arrives, I will rapidly train him so I can leave. Then I will catch a plane that will take me home. When I leave here, I will not miss this place, but I will miss the people.

Home...just thinking about being there puts a smile on my face. There is no other place I would rather be than surrounded by loved ones in a place that is safe and stable, where I can lie down in peace, raise my kids, and enjoy the comforts afforded by my earnings. In my mind now I can imagine that happy day when I step off the plane on American soil, and greet my wife and children with tears of joy: I have reached the end of my tour, and I am home.

As the Apostle Paul neared the end of his tour of duty as a soldier of Christ, he expressed these same sentiments in his second epistle to Timothy (chapter 4). He began the chapter by preparing Timothy to assume the responsibilities of spreading the Gospel, charging him to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

Paul knew his time on earth was nearly done. He looked back over his life and confidently stated that he had done his part and fulfilled his role in the mission. He fought the good fight: he did his duty. He finished the course: he did not give up. He kept the faith: he did not divert from the path.

While on his deployment on earth, Paul made many friends (and many enemies!), and he longed to see Timothy one last time before he departed, telling him “Make every effort to come to me soon.” Paul was going to miss Timothy, but he certainly would not miss the battlefield. He had a few things left to do before the day of his departure. So he asked Timothy to bring Mark and some items. He recounted that though he had been persecuted, God had brought him through it all and would ultimately bring him home to heaven. No doubt Paul too smiled when he thought forward to the day he would go to heaven to receive his reward, the crown of righteousness.

Soldier of Christ, the time of your departure will come some day. It could be soon or it could be later...we do not know when. Have you looked back over your life and evaluated your service? Can you say with confidence that you have fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith? If not, it is not too late for you to fulfill your duties in His service.

*The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. (2 Timothy 4:18)*