

BOOT CAMP

FOR THE LAST DAYS

Living All Out for Jesus in the Judgement Hour of Earth's History

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Fit for Heaven

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

—1 Peter 1:13

Jesus is coming soon! Oh, stop it! If He didn't come at the end of 2015, when will He ever come? For many, the conditions couldn't have been more right. September 2015 was an apocalyptic perfect storm. A Jesuit pope came to America and addressed the US Congress—a first for any pope. The fourth “blood moon” occurred on September 27. The Shemitah [sabbatical] year expired. The rapture was to occur during Rosh Hashanah, and the world was to end at the hands of CERN—a nuclear research facility in Switzerland experimenting with separating the so-called God particle. Some predicted Earth would be vaporized on September 23.

But the perfect apocalyptic storm passed, and doubters lifted their glasses to toast their survival at yet another end-of-the-world party. Let's get real. Most people didn't even know about all those end-time overtones. It was just another month. Jesus coming soon? Yeah, right.

There were doubters about Jesus' first coming; there were doubters about His resurrection, and there are doubters today about His second coming. Nothing new there. But if we count ourselves among those who believe that He *is* coming back, how does that belief impact our lives? This is an all-important question, meriting further study and discussion.

Why is it important to process what it means to be ready for Christ's coming and how it affects our everyday lives? Because many are losing faith at the time we need it most. This book will take us on a soul search—one that lands us in God's boot camp for the last days.

Boot Camp for the Last Days

When you hear the words *boot camp*, you probably think of discipline, rigorous training, and hard work—and you'd be right. What makes boot camps different? The difference is in focus and intensity. I own a *Biggest Loser* DVD workout program that contains three different workouts—cardiovascular, strength training, and Boot Camp. As I began researching boot camps, I decided to try out this Boot Camp workout. I immediately noticed a difference—it was faster paced, with fewer breaks and increased intensity!

Out-of-the-ordinary training takes place to produce an out-of-the-ordinary result. *Boot camp is getting serious about anything you take seriously.* There's no boot camp for couch surfing. And there's no boot camp for pew warming, either!

In the military, boot camp is also known as basic training. From many questions and comments I've heard, it is evident that we could use some basic training on what we believe and why—how to *diligently* seek Him during the days of waiting just prior to Christ's return.

I asked a member of my congregation named Brian (an Iraq War veteran) about his experience in boot camp. He confirmed the transformational aspect of boot camp by telling me that it turns you from an individual into something the army deems trainable. He said their goal is to tear down all the independent thinking, which lines up exactly with something I read online: "The training programs are scientifically and psychologically designed to tear apart the 'civilian' and build from scratch a proud, physically fit, and dedicated member of the United States Armed Forces."¹

You learn how to be a grown-up. You learn discipline. You're given a uniform and a haircut, and you haven't even met the drill sergeant yet. In fact, the haircut and the uniform may be given to you a couple of hours before you meet the drill sergeant, all to teach the discipline of waiting. They teach the basics of being a soldier—how to make your bed, how to follow directions, because if you can't follow directions in the mundane things, you won't follow directions in a firefight.

There is a heavy emphasis on team-building exercises to teach you how to rely on your fellow soldier. You are paired with a battle buddy (typically your bunkmate). You come to rely on him; you share late night talks together; and you share a bond with him. In the church of God, do we not also need battle buddies? People we bond with, people we encourage, people we pray with, people we help through the twists and turns of the Christian walk?

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After seven months, Brian found himself in a war zone. He told me that basic training prepared him, but it didn't really hit him until they were told to "lock and load" while crossing a bridge. He thought to himself, *Wow, I may have to shoot somebody, and somebody might be shooting at me.* He added, "Basic training helped me; I would have freaked out. The armed forces do a great job of making you into a soldier."

And what, Seventh-day Adventist Christian, are you and I being made into? Do we even know? Our key scripture is the Recruitment Brochure: "So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives. Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do now. As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. God said, 'I am holy; you be holy' " (1 Peter 1:13–16, *The Message*).

Fully devoted

We are being made for holiness, and that means we have a transformation to undergo too. Even as a military boot camp transforms a civilian into a soldier, we need transformation from "civilian" churchgoers into fully devoted disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Disciples who are ready for His coming; disciples who are committed to doing the will of God instead of their own will; disciples who won't freak out when the flaming arrows of the evil one start flying; disciples who are fit for heaven. *Boot camp is about being ready for the wedding and serious about the war.*

Let's begin our boot camp with a familiar story. In a way it's a bridal boot camp that proves that weddings are serious business—especially this one:

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish

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ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

"'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

"Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

"But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:1–13).

The part of the story that is bothersome occurs when the host says, "I don't know you" (verse 12). Why does he say that? It gives us a clue that fitness for heaven has to do with our relationship to God.

We know this is a parable directed to believers because it's about "the kingdom of heaven." So it's about fitness for heaven. Secondly, the protagonists in the story are "virgins." In Bible symbolism, a virgin represents the pure bride of Christ, in contrast to the harlot of Revelation 17, who is dressed in purple and scarlet and is riding on a scarlet beast. She represents an impure church with impure doctrine. These virgins, therefore, represent the bride of Christ, and they are all pure in faith. *False doctrine or error is not the issue. The issue is knowing or not knowing God.* This should give us pause because the implication is that one can possess pure doctrine and still not know God! There was nothing noticeably different about these women. They all wore lovely bridal gowns. They all carried the same lamps, were going to the same party, and had the same invitation. Unfortunately, the bridegroom was delayed, and they all got sleepy and napped. But falling asleep was not the problem.

When the bridegroom finally arrived and the drowsy attendants scrambled to their feet, there was an immediate and distinct difference between the women. That difference was oil. In the Bible, oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:1–14). The Holy Spirit's job is to lead us into all truth (see John 16:13) and to implant the teachings and principles of Jesus into our lives so that we are remade into His image. "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23, NLT).

Those with the oil possessed the character of Jesus. Those without the oil

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did not, and that is why they were not recognized by the host. Without the Holy Spirit, their characters were unchanged, and their lights couldn't shine.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105, KJV). The Word of God is the lamp, but it can be a light only if we live by its principles. The book *Christ's Object Lessons*, describes it this way, "Through the Holy Spirit, God's word is a light as it becomes a transforming power in the life of the receiver."²

Without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we remain unchanged "civilian" church members, with no light and no spiritual life. Again, *Christ's Object Lessons* says, "One may be familiar with the commands and promises of the Bible; but unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed. Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, men will not be able to distinguish truth from error, and they will fall under the masterful temptations of Satan."³ Without the principles of the Bible being implanted into our lives, it's accomplishing nothing.

This is why we need to be in God's boot camp for the last days: to have our characters transformed so that we will bring glory to God and not fall for the temptations of Satan. What is the glory of God? Remember when Moses prayed, asking God to show him His glory?⁴ God caused His goodness to pass before Moses. As He passed by Moses, He declared, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6, 7). Essentially God said, "OK, Moses, you want to see My glory? I'll tell you who I AM." The glory of God is His character, and "the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. . . . In their own life and character they [Christ's followers] are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."⁵ The last message to be carried to the world is not a time prophecy or a retreat to the Old Testament ceremonies. The last message for the world is a revelation of God's character *in your life!* Your testimony of His presence in your life—how He has changed and transformed you—is the light of the world!

The oil makes the difference. Without it, it's like a gun without bullets, a flashlight without batteries, a smartphone without cell service, and the form of godliness without the power. We're not ready for the wedding and not serious about the war.

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Dual application

The primary focus of the story is the church's preparedness at the Second Coming. But I wonder whether there was a parallel with the preparedness of Jesus' generation for His first coming. It was almost as if the present experience of the disciples was a preview of what would be happening with the disciples at the end of time.

Luke 17:20–22 describes the experience:

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it."

This is the same attitude Peter describes about scoffers in the last days: "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4, KJV). Three years had passed since John the Baptist announced that the kingdom of God was here. Now the Pharisee skeptics are asking Jesus, "Where is this kingdom You keep talking about?" Jesus tells them it's not what they're looking for. It's within them. It's among them. He was the kingdom of God in the flesh.

In Luke 17:22, Luke records Jesus' words, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it." They didn't realize what a great privilege they had in having the Living Word of God *with* them. And one day they would kick themselves for not taking greater advantage of the privilege they had. If the Written Word is a light to our path, what kind of light and illumination is the *Living* Word? The disciples had been with Him, but they had not known or appreciated Him. In this sense, we see that Jesus' entire generation "slept" at the time of His first coming. The Pharisees and the disciples were all asleep to who Jesus really was and the nature of His mission.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the awakening for the disciples. After they had received the baptism of the Spirit (the oil), they finally understood His teachings, His miracles, and the prophecies about Him. It's

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no surprise that the Spirit is often described as the sevenfold spirit of God. Isaiah 11:2 calls it

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD.

Everything they lacked before was available to them in buckets now. “They were as men awakened from a dream.”⁶

This occurrence parallels Matthew 25:7: “all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.” The disciples woke up after they received the oil. At least with the disciples, we could cut them some slack because they hadn’t received the gift yet, but what’s our excuse? We’ve had the Gift now for two thousand years. The Holy Spirit is available to us, but we neglect Him. The results of receiving Him are the same: waking up from a dream, understanding who He is and what it means to be saved—to be ready for the wedding and serious about the war.

Looking back on the opportunity that was theirs, the disciples saw “how dimly had they comprehended the prophetic scriptures! how slow they had been” to understand His mission and nature. They were ashamed that “their faith had been so feeble, that their ideas had been so wide of the mark.”⁷ “What were we thinking?” Is this not sometimes an all-too-accurate description of our spiritual condition today? Do we struggle with dim comprehension, poor understanding, feeble faith, and off-the-mark ideas about the kingdom right now?

Why is this? The disciples were filled with remorse because “they had allowed the prevailing unbelief to leaven their opinions and becloud their understanding.”⁸ What are we allowing to cloud our understanding? And what of the physical connection? If our bodies (which in 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul says are “temples of the Holy Spirit”) are sick and taxed to their limits due to fatigued organs that are stressed by trying to overcome lack of exercise, poor diets, lack of sleep, and drugs, can our minds—which are already overstimulated—grasp the great truths of Scripture? Is it a shock that we “bonk”⁹ on mysteries of the kingdom? It’s hard to develop a taste for the Bread of Life when we continually pig out on the mental and physical junk food of our day! Talk about brain freeze! We are groggy, worn out, and sleep deprived.

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Boot camp is about getting a soldier physically and mentally fit for battle. God's boot camp for the last days is about the same thing. And I cooperate by removing whatever obstructs the ability of the Holy Spirit to dwell in me.

We need to be at our clearest, our sharpest, to discern truth from error. To appreciate the truth and the work of God; to take our stand on the front lines of the battle against the principalities and powers and so on; to counteract the prevailing unbelief, dim comprehension, poor understanding, and off-the-mark ideas about the kingdom of God; and to prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom, we're going to boot camp. We're going to do it together. We're going to do what the disciples did: search the prophecies and rehearse the teachings of Christ. But we must have what they had to be successful—the baptism of the Holy Spirit—or we will not comprehend.

The disciples had been with Him but had not known or appreciated Him! Imagine going to church all those years, listening to countless sermons, and not knowing Him or appreciating Him. Years wasted being among believers and yet living in unbelief—without oil. I pray this is not the case for anyone reading this today.

Honest disclosure

I have a confession to make. I am more excited about the concept of boot camp than I am about actually going. The thought of preparing myself to encounter God more deeply is more appealing than actually preparing myself. I find myself a rabid fan of watching the Olympics on TV rather than being an Olympian. Can you relate?

I'm with you on this journey. I want to be genuine, not a pretender. I want Christ to know me when He comes, before the cry goes out, "Behold the bridegroom cometh!" (Matthew 25:6, KJV). Because by then it will be too late.

The wise virgins took extra oil. They allowed the Holy Spirit to do the hard work of changing the heart. We tend to want heaven without the hard work of changing to be fit for heaven. But God shows us in this parable that it's not about gaining heaven without the work. It's about remaking us into His new creation. Let's wake up and trim our lamps together.

BASIC TRAINING

- Pray daily for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- Read the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1–13. Journal your thoughts on this question: If there was a boot camp for these bridesmaids, what would be included in the basic training, and why? What can you learn from this?
- Cooperate with the Spirit to allow the completion of His work in your life.

1. Rod Powers, “How to Survive Military Basic Training,” Balance, last modified August 9, 2016, accessed August 16, 2016, <https://www.thebalance.com/how-to-survive-military-basic-training-3353989>.

2. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2003), 414.

3. *Ibid.*, 408, 411.

4. See Exodus 33:12–23; 34:5–7.

5. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 415, 416.

6. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 507.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 508.

9. *Bonk* is an athletic term for being exhausted and quitting.