



## You Are Needed — a Modern Day Parable

(based on Matthew 28:16-20 & John 17:1-11)

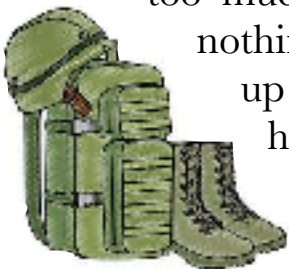
Stan arose early, just before sunrise, to pray. He had learned long ago that if he checked in with the Lord before he checked in with the News or Social Media, his day just naturally went a little better.

He walked in bare feet and a robe to the kitchen for his first cup of coffee. One of his few indulgences was setting the coffee pot to automatically brew in the morning. No waiting for fresh, hot coffee! Though he owned several mugs, the old blue one was his favorite. It had an American flag on one side and sergeant stripes on the other. It just fit well in his hand and it seemed to keep the coffee warmer longer. Stan filled the blue mug and made his way to the back porch with his Bible and coffee. This was such a peaceful start to the day. Stan's favorite time.

He sat down, closed his eyes and prayed, "Lord, I give You this day. It's gonna be a challenge I know. But, You and me can handle anything that comes our way. Speak Your word into my heart. Let me be Your hands and feet today. Remind me of all you have commanded. May I never forget You are with me always, until the end of time."

This day was going to be a doozy, for sure! Stan is a social worker and today he was going to visit a man who had been sleeping behind a dumpster for quite some time. That man's name is Charlie. Charlie is an Army veteran who has lived on the streets for many years. He's seen and done things no human should ever have to endure. As a boy, Charlie loved to play "soldier" and he had always wanted to serve in the military. Charlie's dream had come true. But, when he went to war that dream turned into a nightmare. Charlie nearly died on the front lines. He lost some great friends in battle. Those brave men gave their lives fighting for our freedom. Charlie loves this country and he would do it all again. He doesn't blame anyone for his current situation.

He never married because he felt he had so much emotional baggage, and it was too much to ask of a family. He had tried to work in various jobs, but nothing seemed to fit like those combat boots and helmet. So, he wound up calling the alley way and dumpster home. For several months, Stan had visited Charlie. He wanted Charlie to feel noticed and valued before suggesting any lifestyle changes. The two men got along really well, and they had become friends. Stan cared for Charlie and spoke to him with love, not pity or disgust as many others did. Charlie trusted Stan.



But, this day beckoned. Stan was going to discuss making a change. He wanted Charlie to have a better life. This was the work he was called to do. Stan showed up with hot coffee and muffins to share. He found Charlie in his usual spot. The two men sat on the curb and talked about the weather and the approaching hot summer temperatures. After a while, Stan placed his hand on Charlie's shoulder and said, "You are made for something better than this, my friend. It is time for a change." Charlie looked down at his old worn boots and his dirty clothes doubting his readiness to move on. Stan continued, "I spoke to the owner of the tire store around the corner. It turns out that he is the one who has been leaving you little care packages each week with the food, and clean socks, and blankets.

"Now you know everything he has already given you. You accepted them, even though you never understood where they came from. The shop owner says he has prayed for you, just as I have, Charlie. You have grown to trust me. I ask you to believe the same about that good man. He is also your friend, like me." Charlie slowly shook his head, still doubting what was coming next.

Stan stood up and as if reading Charlie's mind said, "I know you have many doubts. But, he actually needs your help. You are needed, now Charlie." Charlie sat up a little straighter. "You can start working part-time, until you are ready for more hours. He also has a small apartment in the back of the store where you can shower and sleep, until you find a place of your own."

Charlie stood up and reached out his hand. The two friends shook on it, standing as equals. For the first time ever, Stan saw a glimmer of hope shining in Charlie's deep, dark brown eyes. Stan said, "You are ready for this. Go! You are needed, Charlie!" Charlie's somber face eased into a gentle smile. How could he refuse such an offer? Maybe this time it *will* work. Charlie thanked Stan, turned toward the street, and took his first step into his renewed life.

