



THE CANDLE OF PEACE

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When I need to find peace, I think back to a war. Specifically, I think back to January of 2004, when I was a young, scared, 23-year old deputy commander of a 125-man Infantry company about to cross into combat from a remote border crossing on the Kuwait/Iraq border.

The night before our assault column crossed into Iraq, our Battalion Chaplain held a worship service in a dusty, old tent just outside of all of our parked trucks. Immediately upon finishing our communion of stale MRE crackers and grape juice cups, Chaplain Franklin invited us to close our eyes and to simply breathe and be with God. He urged us to remember that in a few short hours we would be in the fight of our lives in the very gates of Hell but that, even in the worst of things, we could find peace and comfort in the fact that God was with us and all around us. And in that moment, with a literal war waiting at the doorstep, I never felt more at peace – at peace with God and through Him. In the 15 months of house-to-house and room-to-room fighting that would follow for us, I somehow made it through stickier situations than I ever deserved to have lived through. And, even while bullets were flying (actually, especially when they were), I would often find myself pausing, even just for a brief second to close my eyes, breathe deeply, and feel God's hand on my shoulder. A moment to remember I wasn't alone.

And now, 15 years later, I have never felt a year that felt more like being in combat than 2020. This year has brought us just as much uncertainty, fear, unrest, and even the same feeling of mortality for ourselves and those we love that I remember from Iraq. Making it through this year has felt like surviving a war in so many ways. But, just like then, when times become too overwhelming or I begin to feel like I'm under fire and it's too much to handle, I can still find myself walking deep into the forest preserve or driving just outside of the church building, closing my eyes, taking a few deep breaths and feeling God with me. And, just like in Iraq, I feel Him right beside me, a calm I could never explain but can always feel. It turns out you really can learn how to find peace in the middle of a war.