

## **Bible and the Headlines: For Want of a Nail**

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There was a poem in Ben Franklin's Good Richard's Almanac called, "For Want of a Nail." If you are not familiar with it- (spoiler alert) a small missing item leads to the absence of another article of war, which in turn, causes a hole in the ranks, which brings military defeat. Recent articles are seeking the 'nail' that is causing a hole in the ranks of the U.S. military.

The AP carried on March 5th, "Marines and Soldiers Discharged for Refusing the COVID-19 Vaccine Show Limited Interest in Rejoining." According to the Defense Department, the various branches of the military discharged about 8,200 troops who refused the COVID shot. The AP notes, "The military services sent out notices to all troops discharged for refusing the vaccine, advising them they could return to the military. Just 113 reenlisted." For the 8000 who did not rejoin the ranks, military officials assume the ". . . troops have moved on with their lives."

Military.com on March 7 featured, "The Army Is Losing Nearly One-Quarter of Soldiers in the First 2 Years of Enlistment." The current surge in enlistments has not offset previous years' deficits in recruiting. Added to these low numbers, "The Army is grappling with a staggering attrition rate among newly enlisted troops . . . Nearly one-quarter of soldiers recruited since 2022 have failed to complete their initial contracts." This figure parallels the number of recruits who needed exceptions to policy in order to enter the military.

On March 9th, military content provider SOFREP published, "The Army's Attrition Crisis: Why So Many Soldiers Are Dropping Out Early." This piece examined a RAND Corporation study that contained a higher attrition rate than the Pentagon's own study. Translating the RAND report the article asserted, "This means that for every 100 individuals who join, over 30 will leave before fulfilling their initial commitment." The suggested solution will require the Army to screen applicants better and transform the aspects of military culture that cause many soldiers to break down.

Long before the RAND study, the Bible contained a screening process for the army of God's people. God had Moses tell military leaders to send home any troops who had recently become engaged, or built a house, or planted a vineyard (Deu 20:5-7). On the psychological front, God commanded, "The officers shall also ask, 'Is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too'" (Deu 20:8). The Israelites had firsthand experience of the ill effects caused by fearful soldiers in the ranks (Deu 1:28). After all these categories of disqualified troops left the ranks, the remaining army would organize itself for battle (Deu 20:8).

Jesus was not building a military organization, but he was raising a force that would advance His kingdom. Jesus filtered out those who worried about where they would sleep (Luk 9:58), had funerals to attend (Luk 9:60), or had not said farewell to their family (Luk 9:61). Jesus told His disciples His screening criteria, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luk 9:62).

While the military looks for the 'nails' that are making holes in their ranks, the Church is reminded that Christ's army has different recruiting standards. His standards will always have a high attrition rate. Jesus tells us, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luk 13:24).