

# IGNITE

FIRST RESPONDERS LIFE GUIDE  
April 2023 / ISSUE NO. 16

## GOD'S PROMISE

## ESSENTIAL TRAINING: FIREFIGHTER SELF-CARE

## DEAR JOHN

UNITING FIRST RESPONDER FAMILIES

# YOU MATTER!



# IGNITE Magazine

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# IGNITE MAGAZINE

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Lorie Gurnett – Creator & Editor

## CONTENTS

EDITORS INSPIRATIONAL

GOD'S PROMISE

ADVERTISEMENT

ESSENTIAL TRAINING:  
FIREFIGHTER'S SELF-CARE

A HEROES WELCOME POEM

DEAR JOHN

HONOUR OF THE FALLEN HEROES



*“The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.*

*Do not be afraid;  
do not be discouraged.”*

*~ Deut. 31:8*





Heather Congo

Heather Wagner was born and Raised in a Farm in rural Alberta, Canada. With 2 brothers, 1 sister and many foster siblings, she grew up surrounded by laughter and crazy experiences. Her parents gave her the gift of a Faith, compassion and a drive to serve.

Heather is a mother to 4 boys and 2 girls and was the wife of recently passed Veteran/ Firefighter Tyrone McDonald. She has also been a firefighter and currently works in Protective Services.



Michael Blackmer

Michael works with East Central 911 as a full-time Emergency Communications Officer. He is a 20 plus year veteran of the fire service having served in 4 departments. He is a Chaplain/Firefighter with Edgerton Emergency Services. Presently attending Briercrest Seminary working on life coaching certification and the marriage and family therapy program. He hopes to specialize in working with emergency services personnel. He has been married for 37 years with three adult children.



Sarah Craddock Etsell

Sarah Craddock Etsell is a surgical nurse, mother, wife, and sister to an amazing brother who had Down Syndrome and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) who passed away in 2021. She writes about grief through the experience of losing her brother, John, whom she misses with her entire heart and soul. Sarah lives in Oklahoma with her family and has learned to find the joy and meaning in life, despite the tragic loss of her brother.



# Learn to Stand

## Editor's Inspirational

Life is full of many ups and downs. Sadly, one strong theme that keeps bombarding me lately is be warned! Be warned that when life appears to be going good, there is someone waiting to pull the rug out from under you, and then kick you while you are down. Let me ask you, how does one navigate through life when people with family ties never encourage you and make you feel like you are a mistake? Am I the only one who feels this way?

I have experienced my fair share of disappointments, discouragements, and losses, but I have always experienced success, laughter, hope, and faith. One way I keep learning to stand, and how to put one foot in front of the other, despite being crushed by others, is to remember that I am not alone. My heavenly father never makes mistakes and the truth is He made you and I. We need to trust that He has a perfect plan for each of us, He has made us, and He has a plan for our lives.

Our worth is not in what other people think or say about us, but in who God made us to be. We are not a mistake, we have a purpose, and God is with us every step of the way.

For years, I could not even look at myself in the mirror. I only was trash, a mistake, and a burden. But now that I have shifted my view, I can say, I see a confident and beautiful lady. My strengths are creativity, encouragement, and I choose to stand firm, take each new step with confidence and hope. So I encourage you to focus on your own talents and gifts. What do you do well? Never loss heart, and never alone someone else the power to crush you.



*"I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever, but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'"*

*~ 1 Sam. 2:30 ~*

Reachout is you have any questions, if you are interested in writing an article , or if you just want to talk.



Lorie Gurnett

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# God's Promise

Article by: Heather Congo

God's promise is absolute! He is perfect. He cannot lie for lies are sin, and it goes against God's deity. He is perfect. He cannot go back on any of His promises.

One of His promises is: He will "never leave us or forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5-6) and we will "seek Him and find Him when we seek Him with our whole heart." Our whole heart! Not half a heart or a partial heart, not a 1/8<sup>th</sup> of a heart. Not sometimes heart! Not a hot and cold heart, but our whole heart!

So, let us look at that. What does it look like when God says He will never leave us or forsake us?

Well, when we are facing struggles that we think are insurmountable, and we can't do on our own, God says He's going to give us the strength. "I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength" That is what He says. So many times Christians say that God will never give you more than you can handle. That is a lie! That is absolutely 100% a lie. The truth is, He will allow things to come into our lives that will force us to seek Him, find Him and to know Him. He will allow hardships to come into our lives, and overcome us to where we are broken and desolate. He will guide us in that moment because He is already there (Deut. 31:6). He will hold us, and He will guide us and give us the strength that we need (Isaiah 41:13). When we say "God! I can't do this on my own. I am broken without you, and I cannot see my way through. I am blinded by the problem. I am blinded by my pain. I am blinded by my anger, bitterness, and frustration!" He says, "you can bare all things though Me".

Photo credit to: Silvia Pecota Studio







much more does our Heavenly Father want for us? He knows us! He sees us! He knows when we are hurt.

He knows what you desire, and the funny thing is, God says he will give you the desires of your heart. The caveat to that is the closer we get to God, the more our desires actually match His! Funny how that works! The closer we get to God, the closer to His heart we become. We can see struggles as trials that bring us strength in the end. The closer we get to God, the more we can emulate the heart of God.

Recently we lost two police officers out of Edmonton and then shortly there after another lost her life. This tragedy will bring so many to ask why God? Why did you allow this? Why weren't you there? Why didn't you stop this?

I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength!

He will give us more than we can bear so that we come to Him and find Him.

The wonderful, beautiful gift of God's promise is throughout all Scriptures.

- Ephesians 6:11, I will stand by you!
- Isaiah 41:13. I will help you through!
- Revelation 21:4 I will dry your tears
- Exodus 14:14. I will fight for you (sometimes God will even fight US for our own sake!)
- Deuteronomy 31:6 I will go ahead of you and I will not abandon you!

These verses continue to show how God, throughout the Bible, teaches us that He is our portion, that He is strong enough to handle all that He allows us to go through.

As a parent, you don't want your children to face hardships, but you understand that they will! We see our children struggle and want to remove burdens from their lives. Sometimes their stubbornness makes it so they have to go through those struggles. Sometimes it's other peoples disobedience that make them go through those hard times, but go through them they must! As parents, it is hard to sit there and watch, waiting for them to ask for help. We do everything that we can to help them! If we, as broken parents, want good for our children how

*“Be strong and courageous.  
Do not fear or be in dread of  
them, for it is the Lord your  
God who goes with you. He will  
not leave you or forsake you.”  
~ Deut. 31:6 ~*

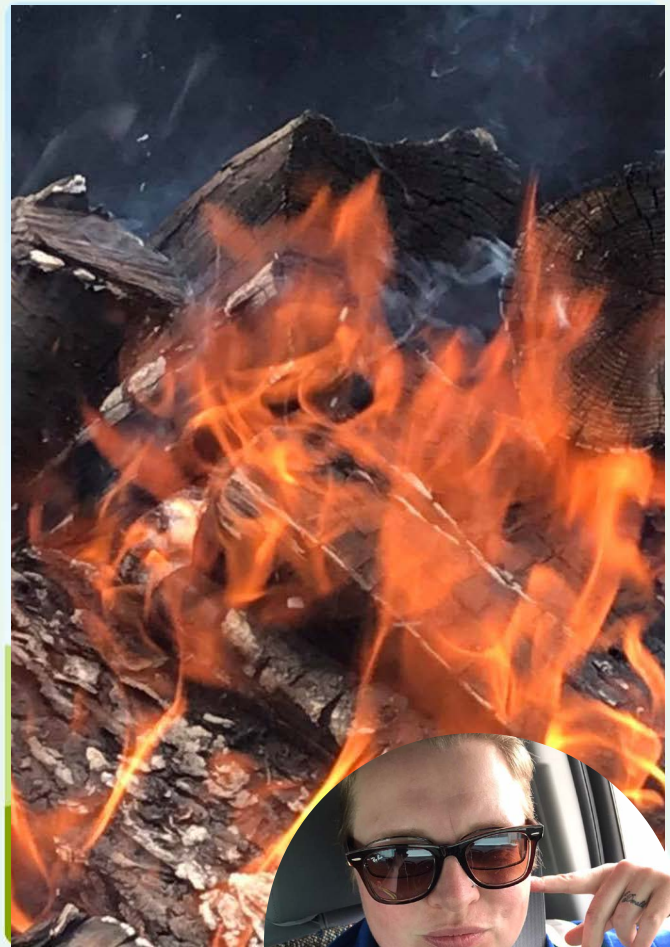
The truth is God doesn't force any of us into obedience, He gives us free will, which is no comfort at all when you look at it through the eyes of man! When you look at it through the eyes of a Holy and Righteous God, you see that His heart is for good for us only, but that our sin nature chases away the righteousness of God, and we become selfish, vile, angry, and bitter where all matter of evil comes out of us because we are not good in our own selves.

I have no answers as to why this tragedy happened. I have no answers as to why God allowed it at this specific time and why we lost three of our own. All I can say is He went before us! Go back to Deuteronomy 31:6, He went

before us. He was already there in that moment making a way through it for us! All of us for the families, the service members who called them partners, for the friends in the communities. He went before, He went and stood in that place and allowed for grief and anger because He knew what we would face! He planned a way through. We just have to seek Him, to find Him and know Him. To learn what it means to go through! "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord! ... Plans to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

Sometimes the hope seems pretty bleak when we are looking through our own eyes, but when we're looking through Christ eyes, we don't have to know how it all turns out. We don't have to know the way out. We can sit and trust, as hard that is for us, that he has a plan. Revelation 21:4 "I will dry your tears" We're gonna be crying quite a bit in these next few days. "Though the sorrow may last for a night, His Joy comes with the morning" Psalms 30:5. He is there and He will give us the comfort. The Holy Spirit will be there to walk with us and give us the comfort Isaiah 41:13 "I will help you through"

Father God.  
We don't know how you're going to help us through





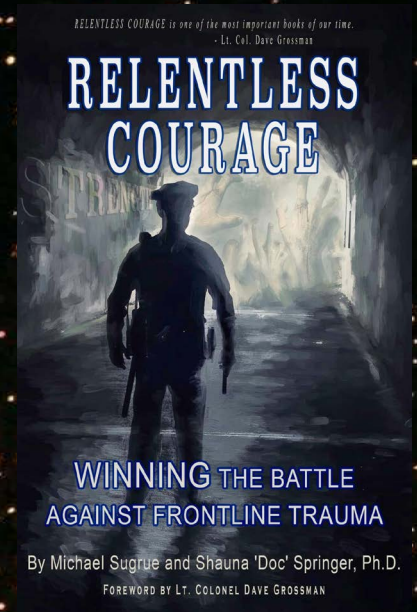
# BOOK REVIEW

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## RELENTLESS COURAGE

“This book!!! It will drive you to tears, push you to frustration and anger, even empty you of hope at times. It is written honestly with the failures and successes pointed out. The severe honesty from both Michael and Doc Springer will educate the reader of the complex pain LEOs live with. I shared the hard pieces of it with LEO and FD friends who confirmed this is the reality they live with. If it's in your heart to better understand what a First Responders life is like, consider experiencing this book. Thank you Michael Sugrue and Shauna Doc Springer.”

LINKEDIN REVIEW



## 372 REVIEWS

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Winning The Battle Against  
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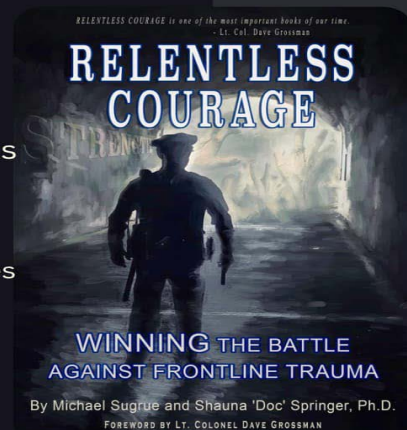
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# ESSENTIAL TRAINING: FIREFIGHTER SELF-CARE

Article by: Michael Blackmer

You are puttering around the yard perhaps weeding the garden on your day off. Or perhaps you are trying to get an oil change done on your vehicle or reading a good book. The tones go off. The train has sparked another fire. It's a windy today and the fire is moving fast into bush in the community pasture. You switch status to responding on your phone app so the team and your spouse, know you are responding to the hall. You fight fire till dark. By then your chief has called in two other departments, there is a cat on scene and a constant water shuttle. This is going to be a long fire. Not only is there brush involved but there are cabins to protect.

The next day you are scheduled to work. You do your shift and instead of going straight home you talk to your spouse on the phone while driving to the hall. You gear up and either drive back out to the fire in your vehicle or hitch a ride with



a tender or other truck in for water or supplies. The rest of the evening is spent fighting fire again. Finally, you get it knocked down but still take your turn over the next few days helping to chase down stubborn hot spots.

You are just about out the door on a day that you are planning to spend with spouse and children doing something fun. It might be a holiday or just a day you planned for family. The tones go off. You know that the department is short-handed today. With a quick apology you take off for the hall but not before you get a glimpse of the disappointed, angry look on your spouse's face.

These are very possible scenarios for firefighters. Each one causes stress on the firefighter and the firefighter's family. Paid-on-call firefighters typically have full-time jobs responding to emergency call-outs either from work or home.



## Reminder

You are under no obligation to forgive your abuser—and if you do, that doesn't mean that what they did to you was okay . . .

*but please forgive yourself!*



Not only can this be stressful because of family commitments and responsibilities at home but it can also cause stress between the firefighter and their boss. A busy fire season can mean a lot of time spent on calls and this can stress the employee-employer relationship. Unique stress-ors affect every firefighter whether career or paid-on-call.

Trauma and critical incident stress are very real workplace hazards for emergency services personal and they can create mental, emotional, and spiritual fatigue, and even illness. Firefighter's train hard for the physical aspects of the job and, while there are resources for mental, emotional and spiritual struggles, they do not seem to garner the same level of awareness. In this article I hope to give you just a few tools to get you started on a good self-care routine.

Self-care involves anything that helps you to be strong and healthy at all levels and can include

everything from oral hygiene to taking a walk; from working out to finding a spot for quiet meditation. In firefighting we often do not talk about self-care until someone begins to show signs of struggle. We do not wait for a Motor Vehicle Collision to learn how to extricate. We do not wait for a brush fire to learn about extinguishing. We do not go on medical calls and then try to figure out how to treat a patient. Why would we wait for exposure to trauma to build a habit of self-care?

Take the time now to figure out what helps you to de-stress. Build a routine of good sleep habits, physical self-care, time with spouse and children, time for your hobbies and time for recreation. If we take the time to build these routines now, we will be better positioned to deal with that inevitable bad call and the nagging thoughts it can create later. Invite speakers once or twice a year to speak about Critical Incident Stress, trauma, PTSD, and other resilience topics. Learn how to support fellow firefighters. Host the Resilient Minds for Firefighters Course (ask me). Give up three or four practice nights a year to host a social night for your firefighters.

Talk about good self-care regularly. Make it safe for firefighters to talk about emotional, mental and spiritual struggles. If we normalize these discussions, allow people to ask questions, and



respond positively when someone struggles, we are less likely to watch a sister or brother firefighter implode as a result of experiencing trauma.

Training our people to do positive self-care is as important as training someone how to drive an apparatus, run a pump, maintain tools or work with extrication tools.

In closing, here are a few ideas for things that may help us process and de-stress: after a bad call structure your time and stay busy, reach out to friends and family (talk to them and spend time with others), do not numb pain with substances, keep a normal schedule, help your fellow firefighters, give yourself permission to feel rotten and share those feelings (allow others to do this with you), keep a journal when you can't sleep, spend time writing, do things that feel good to you; no big life changes, get plenty of rest, eat well-balanced and regular meals (whether you feel like it or not); stay hydrated; do something totally different (jigsaw puzzle, board game with the family, a new activity); take time for your hobbies or find a hobby. These are



a few things that are suggested to help us deal with that ugly call and build healthy self-care into our routines before that ugly call. Stay safe!

Rev. Michael Blackmer, Chaplain  
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780-842-0396





## A HEROES WELCOME

Time to come home dear brother  
your tour of duty through  
you've given as much as anyone  
could be expected to do.

Just a few steps further  
the smoke will start to clear  
others here will guide you  
you have no need to fear.

You have not failed your brothers  
you clearly gave it all  
and through your selfless actions  
others will hear the call.

So take your place of honour  
among those who have gone before  
and know you will be remembered  
for now and evermore.

~ Jen Jones ~



# Dear John

By Sarah Craddock Etsell

This year should have been different.

I celebrated your thirty-eighth birthday in silence while everyone around me smiled. As I retreated into myself, I heard you urging me to go on, begging me to smile with them. I could almost see your face . . . hear your voice that sounds so far away now. In these moments, you are everywhere yet nowhere at all.

Yesterday, I picked up the phone to call you. It wasn't until I saw the picture next to your name that I realized you can't hear your phone ring where you are.

*“You never know the true value of a moment until it becomes a memory.”*

It's one of my favorite pictures of you, one of my favorite memories I'm grateful you got to experience. I'll never forget how much your face lit up to see all the firefighters and other first responders pour



John Craddock, who had Down Syndrome, nearing the end of his battle with ALS, surrounded by first responders in Oklahoma.

into your room, spreading joy and love to someone who did the same for everyone around him.

When they found out how important they were to you, they knew they had to

Firefighters and recruits from class 19-1 paid John a visit and presented him with a bunker coat signed by all 48 recruits.



meet you. Some people see that photo and gush about how much they made your day. But, when I look at that photo, I see how much you changed their lives with your unconditional love, support, and admiration for everything they did throughout their lives. If I know one thing about life with you, it's that it would have never been the same without you. Those





I went numb for so long the day you left and stayed there because the thought of feeling your departure terrified me. Staying grounded to my grief, I thought if I stayed close to it, I'd never have to feel the pain of losing you again. The happiness in those memories took me too far away from it because, even if only briefly, it made me forget you were no longer here. Then I'd have to experience losing you all over again. For a long time, I was not okay, but I've learned to let those happy memories shine with your light.

*“The world is full of love, understanding, support, and compassion.”*

**You come to me when my need for you is the greatest.**

first responders knew that, too, and they'll never forget you.

*Here are some other things I've learned since you've been gone:*

**You never know the true value of a moment until it becomes a memory.**

We often take precious life for granted because we're so busy enjoying it that we forget to stop and appreciate each moment for what it means in our lives. Ever since your death, I've spent many hours remembering all the good times and the bad we shared as children, teenagers, and well into our adult years. Yes, I even think about the times we drove each other crazy. But those moments taught me something, too – we still had each other's backs at the end of the day. You were always the best friend I've ever had, and there will never be a day that passes in my life when I don't thank you for that. Gratitude doesn't even begin to describe that feeling.

**Sometimes, the happiest memories hurt the most.**



I don't know how you do it, but every time I need you the most, there you are with your smile reminding me that you're still around. Though my heart yearns for you and my arms ache to wrap themselves around you, my soul knows you're at peace on the other side of heaven. Even in your absence, you shower me with the love I need. You show me that life is worth living, even if I have to do it without my best friend. Having

you as a brother changed me in all the best ways, and I'd do it all over again if I could.

**The world is full of love, understanding, support, and compassion.**

Though I struggled in my grief, our friends and family knew the assignment. They took the torch from you and showered me with their unconditional love. They helped me see that I have so much more life left to live, that I deserve as much love from myself as I received from you. You see, they were changed by your heart too. The entire world transformed the day you were born, and I don't know what any of us would have done without your light. You showed us that the world is full of compassion and joy, of a light that never goes out.

*“Sometimes, the happiest memories hurt the most.”*

They say that grief gets easier with time, but I've learned it gets harder. It has not been easy adjusting to my life without you, but I have learned to accept and grow because of the love our family and friends have carried on in your name.

This year should have been different. Instead, I learned how to be different—I learned how to live because of the gift of the best brother I could possibly have. I'm holding down this side of heaven the best I possibly can, all because your love showed me how.

Article by: Sarah Craddock Etsell  
[sarah@cmsok.net](mailto:sarah@cmsok.net)



## Key Points

- The ones we love are always with us when we need them the most.
- Grief often gets harder as time passes, but it also gives you path to healing.
- Lean on your family and friends as you process your grief. They will love, support, and encourage you as you continue to heal.





# IN HONOUR OF OUR FALLEN HEROES

Edmonton Police Officers:

CST. Travis Jordan

CST. Brett Ryan

CST. Corinne Kline

Fallen Veterans:

Staff Sgt. Carl Enis

Airforce Airman 1st Kcey E. Ruiz

Navy Boatswain Mate Seaman Yeshabel Villot-Carrasco

Army Sgt. Maj Wardell Turner

Army Captain Jennifer M. Moreno

Army Staff Sgt. Rex L. Schad

## HEROES

“I think a hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people.”

~ Maya Angelou ~