

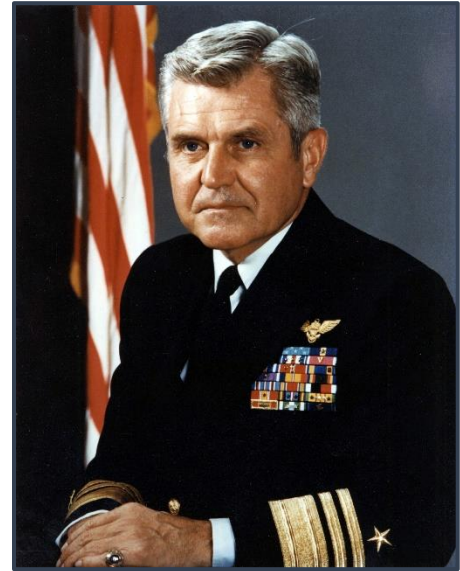
Dealing with Difficulties

During the Vietnam War, Admiral James Stockdale was the highest-ranking U.S. officer taken as a prisoner by the Vietnamese.

For eight years, Stockdale was held hostage under horrific circumstances in a POW camp, where he was tortured regularly. But he did not give in or give up. He was, in fact, a remarkable inspiration to his fellow soldiers.

Jim Collins, author of the best-selling book *Good to Great*, had the opportunity to spend some time with Stockdale. Collins wrote, “What separates people, Stockdale taught me, is not the presence or absence of difficulty, but how they deal with the inevitable difficulties of life.”

Stockdale believed that if you retain faith you will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time confront the most brutal facts of your current reality – whatever they might be – and you will be victorious.



Stockdale’s convictions were not based on blind optimism, he said. He was asked about prisoners who did not survive.

“Oh, that’s easy,” he replied, “these were the optimists. They were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. One by one,” he said, “they died of a broken heart.”

James Stockdale did not die of a broken heart. In fact, in 1992, after the war, he was Ross Perot’s running mate in the race for President of the United States.

Stockdale’s emphasis was summed up this way: Hope is not the same as blind optimism – the belief that somehow everything will somehow work out fine. Without God, nothing is certain to work out fine.

A good example of such persistence in the face of adverse circumstances was the early Christian community. They faced terrible situations at times, yet they never gave in to doubt and fear. They were certain that God was with them and God would see them through.

They embodied the Apostle Paul’s words: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18 NIV).

In these challenging days, these are words we can live by and take comfort in

– Beecher Hunter