

COMMAND

Christian perspectives on life in the military

FALL 2021 Vol. 70 No. 2

COVER STORY

LIVING THE MILITARY LIFE TOGETHER

Long the mainstay of the ministry for nearly 78 years, the rich community found in small group Bible studies continues to flourish today throughout OCF. 6



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COMMAND

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COMMAND strives to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in the U.S. Armed Forces by informing readers about His work through OCF to fulfill its mission "to engage military leaders in biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christlike service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession."



LIVING TOGETHER IN BIBLICAL COMMUNITY



**SCOTT
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Executive
Director

Community has been at the core of Officers' Christian Fellowship since our initial foundation in 1943. The Oxford Dictionary defines community as "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals." Our need for community is as strong now as ever in our history. One of the clearest Biblical outlines for true community can be found in 1 Peter 4:7–11:

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

If we genuinely take to heart what the Lord commands us in this passage, we will find that OCF continues to offer so much to one another, the military community, and our world, wherever He has providentially placed us to live, work and serve.

It begins with the reminder that our Lord and Savior is truly going to return to this earth and that we should be living with the realization that His return could be any day (v 7). In light of this fact, we need to be self-controlled and clear-minded *so that* we can pray as we should (v 7). I for one am too easily distracted by all around me, even the "good" things, to remain in a constant attitude of prayer as He commands us (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

Above all, we need to keep on loving one another earnestly, recognizing that love covers a multitude of sins (v 8). Rather than grumbling and finding fault with one another, we need to love each other deeply the way Christ demonstrated love to us, not waiting until we are loveable, but loving us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). We need to be honest about

“Above all, we need to keep on loving one another earnestly.”


our own brokenness and willing to embrace others in the midst of theirs.

We need to show hospitality to one another, and we are reminded to do so without grumbling (v 9). Like community, hospitality is at the heart of OCF.

We need to recognize that as believers, God has given each of us gifts (v 10). It doesn't matter our position or title, whether we feel gifted, or even whether we think we deserve a gift. It is, after all, a gift. But the purpose of this gift is not to elevate or promote ourselves. It is not even for us at all, but rather to serve others and to be stewards of His grace. If God has freely given us His grace, which He has, are we being a good steward of sharing His grace with others as He commands us? He doesn't give us the option of only extending His grace to those we like or agree with on every issue. Since God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation, as His ambassadors we need to extend His grace freely to others for the purpose of being reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

When we are speaking, do we consider what and how God would have us speak to a person, or do we merely voice the first thing that comes to our mind (v 11)? Even Jesus said He did not speak on His own, but only what the Father has given Him to say (John 12:49). How much more do we need to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19)?

While we may not think we have the gift of serving, Jesus has called us all to serve (John 13:14–17). In the military community, it is quite common to hear about servant leadership, even within secular environments. But servant leadership has intense implications. Warren Wiersbe says we will know we have a servant's heart when we don't mind being treated like one. I don't know about you, but I don't always like being treated like a servant, yet that is part of our calling. We can only be successful in this calling if we remember that we can only accomplish it through His strength (v 10).

Finally, we need to remember that in addition to the gift not being for ourselves, but for others, the reason we serve others is ultimately not only for them, but *so that* “in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (v 11). This is important, because even if we get everything above “right,” if we serve only for others, then when we do not see the response we desire, we might be tempted to lose heart, or pull back from community. But if we remember we serve and sacrifice because He did, and He calls us to do likewise so that He may be glorified, then we can awake each morning eager to get about His business of deeply loving the community where He has placed us. In the process, the military community—and the world—will be impacted by Christlike leaders for His glory! 



OCF SMALL GROUPS:
**LIVING THE
MILITARY LIFE
TOGETHER**

USNA OCF photo

Small group Bible studies have been part of the DNA of OCF since the ministry began in 1943. Within these small groups, there is spiritual growth, an increased understanding of what it means to be a Christian, and a resilience developed for all of life—especially life within the military.

BY JOSH JACKSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Have a conversation with Cadet Ashley Conrad, and it won't take long to figure out that she has a heart for developing relationships with others and having real conversations about faith. "This is what I live for," said the University of Mobile senior.

During her junior year, she began talking to other cadets about their faith and even invited a few to church with her. "I had some really interesting discussions about where they are in their faith," said Conrad. "I noticed a lot of people would say they're Christians—they believe in God—but they don't really know what to do with that and what that means for their life."

Bothered by the disconnect between faith and life among her classmates, Conrad was left pondering one question: "What can we do about that?"

After committing this question to prayer, the answer came when she got a call from her mom, who, during a conversation with a friend, found out about OCF. Her mom suggested that Ashley contact Hous Waring, OCF Director of Field Engagement.

"I talked to Hous for about 30 minutes, and it was, honestly, super amazing," said Conrad, who admitted she had never heard of OCF. "Really, the mission of OCF—building Christian community, developing our faith with other believers, and having that community—I thought it was super cool and exactly what I wanted."

Conrad would take the next steps by joining OCF and getting a small group started for ROTC at the nearby University of South Alabama campus.

"I felt like I was kind of going out on a limb in my faith, which is super exciting," said Conrad. "I'd never led a small group before. It was all new to me. Sometimes you just have to go for it and step into it. And God gave me what I needed to start."

Small group Bible studies like the one Conrad started for ROTC have been part of the DNA of OCF since the ministry began in 1943. Within these small

groups, there is spiritual growth, an increased understanding of what it means to be a Christian, and a resilience developed for all of life, especially life within the military.

"Small group Bible studies have been the essential core gathering of OCF for more than 75 years, following Paul's explanation in Romans 10:14–15," said Waring. "It is in

small groups that lifelong relationships are built. These are groups where food is eaten, conversations go deep, and we learn from one another how to put our faith into practice."

If one were to compare an OCF small group to a community, one sees that these communities have their own unique way of doing life together.

"Small group Bible studies have been the essential core gathering of OCF for more than 75 years."



Colorado Springs OCF group & photo
Led by Chuck & Donna Hendrick



Ramstein/KMC OCF photo

For cadets and midshipmen who enjoyed iron-sharpening-iron Christian community through OCF efforts, their already-drastic transition into the operational military also means a significant change to fellowship opportunities as well. After leaving the vibrant USAFA OCF group, and lacking a stable church or Bible study for two years while in Guam, Capt Jen Cutler, USAF, (center, in uniform), “jumped into OCF” at Ramstein/KMC once in Germany. She calls it “the one consistent thing in my work week that I get to look forward to,” where they enjoy fellowship or a home-cooked meal together. “Community is only as successful as the time you commit to it,” said Jen. “To know that you had a group of Christians to walk alongside you in this military life while you were far away from your home support network is immeasurable.”

A group to ‘be real with’

Building lifelong relationships are one of the things LT Sam Alexander, USN, has appreciated about several of the groups he’s been part of. He recalled experiencing those connections at a Bible study group in Bangor, Wash., that went deep into Scripture and allowed him to share what was going on in his life in a safe space where he knew vulnerability wouldn’t be met by betrayal.

Eventually, he transferred to a different duty station in Washington state, and while the OCF group was filled with new faces, Alexander says the dedication to Bible study and authentic living in this group remained familiar. During this time in his life, he hit a rough spot.

“The fact that I had that small group of guys I could just talk to and be real with was something I depended on

heavily,” Alexander said. “I could go to them when I was having trouble and just vent or just let it out. And they’d be willing to listen.”

His small group stayed in contact with him while he was at sea and then made sure to keep him included when he got back home. The group, Alexander remembers, was an anchor of encouragement for him.

“I’d say that being involved in that small group was what restored me,” Alexander said. “Because I could get back, and immediately these guys were like, ‘Hey, man, how you doing?’ Just pouring into me immediately.”

Changing duty stations since then hasn’t meant abandoning relationships from those groups either. Alexander says he has remained in touch with people from several small groups. That’s been everything from periodic text messages to picking up a friend from a former small group at the airport when he needed a ride. Alexander also made sure to tell others about his appearance on the OCF Crosspoint podcast.

A ‘big extended family’

Joe and Kristi Chiaravallotti’s small group in the Washington, D.C., area

started off with an intentional communications effort...and cuisine, in the form of quarterly potluck dinners.

The Chiaravallottis, both retired Navy commanders, got a list of OCF members in the area, and Kristi painstakingly called every name on the list to find out who didn’t live in the area anymore and who was still there.

“We knew that we have a dynamic area,” said Joe. “It’s not like being stationed on a base or a post somewhere where you have one center of mass and everybody focuses around it. There are tens of commands all around the area. Everyone is spread out, and everyone has good churches and good Bible studies they go to from their churches. So typically you don’t see a lot of people trying to pull OCF small groups together.”

The Chiaravallottis started hosting quarterly potlucks and invited all the OCF members from the area. They’d usually get around 18 to 20 people, but they were rarely the same people. At those potlucks, the Chiaravallottis would field the question, “Who would be interested in starting a Bible study?” For years, nobody expressed any interest. Then one year, it was

IF ONE WERE TO COMPARE AN OCF SMALL GROUP TO A COMMUNITY, ONE SEES THAT THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE THEIR OWN UNIQUE WAY OF DOING LIFE TOGETHER.

nearly unanimous: “Yeah, let’s start a Bible study.”

For the past five years, they’ve led a group of members who have chiefly been serving in the early parts of their military careers.

“They’re going through getting married, having babies, buying houses, all that stuff that you do in your 20s,” said Joe. “And we have been able not only to provide Bible study for them, but also to bring them together as a group and have really true fellowship. There are times when we get together and have more fellowship than Bible study.”

Their group is all about what the Chiaravallottis call “doing life together.” They’ve done everything from hosting people in their home, to helping them with house-hunting, to even officiating the marriage of one of their small group couples—true story. For example, Kristi babysat for a mom in the group who played the music for the wedding and whose husband was ushering, while Joe officiated the ceremony.

“So that was really neat because all of us who were part of the Bible study took part in the wedding,” Kristi said, and also pointed out that other small group members had served in a variety of ways.

“We don’t view [weekly meetings] as, ‘OK, check that box off and go on with the rest of the week,’” Joe added. “This is an ongoing community that is doing life together. We’re constantly getting together. We’re constantly doing things together.”

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How did they build a group like this? Joe says the answer comes from a model they followed during 20 years in the Navy—the wardroom, a group of all the officers on the ship. Because they moved every two years or so, they often ended up in a place where they didn’t know anyone. Joe says the wardroom would reach out to them before they left wherever they were moving from and help them transition into the new area.

“Those 20 or so officers—and their 20 or so families—would simulate a big extended family,” said Joe. “These were people who would bring you food if something went wrong, or babysit for you, in addition to helping you move in. And because everyone was always away from their actual extended family, the wardroom would serve as an extended family on holidays—with big gatherings and celebrations.”

It was this sort of dynamic—this sort of extended family re-creation—that the Chiaravallottis wanted to model their OCF small group after. And they have. They let everyone know that they’re welcome to come over for Easter or some other holiday (or the Super Bowl)—and people will show up.

A group of ‘lifelong friends’

Starting from scratch and not yet having embarked on her military career, there was no Navy model for Ashley to use when she set up the ROTC group at the University of South Alabama. Instead, she took a different approach.



*Mobile, AL OCF group & photo
Led by Army cadet Ashley Conrad*

“What was super helpful for me was talking to [the officer] who leads the OCF group at Auburn,” said Ashley. “Two weeks before school started again in December, I was like, ‘OK, I need some help figuring out how other people do this.’”

That leader at Auburn University is Col Tony Abernathy, USAF (Ret.), and in addition to several email exchanges with Ashley, Tony says he remembers her initiative in contacting him, asking questions, and following through on how to get started. And he remembers her drive—literally.

“Ashley’s not even at Auburn. She’s 3-4 hours away,” said Tony. “She came to the Bible study at Auburn. It was great for her to see other cadets, to talk

about life and be encouraged, and to pray. Ashley is a gem.”

The help and encouragement Tony offered came from his own experiences participating in and leading small groups throughout his 25-year career in the USAF. While Tony is in his fourth year leading at Auburn, it’s actually part of a journey that has come full circle since his days as an Auburn student.

“When I came to the Lord in ’89 as an ROTC cadet here at Auburn, I was searching for other believers. I saw a flyer in the detachment advertising a



*Silver Spring, MD OCF group & photo
Led by Joe & Kristi Chiaravallotti*

ROTC Bible study. It was led by a CPT Jim Treharne (Army now O-6 retired). So I went and realized you could actually be a Christian serving in the military. I made lifelong friends from that group,” Tony recalls.

“So fast forward to 2016. We move back to Auburn after 25 years in the Air Force and I’m praying about the cadets and wanting to start something but have no idea how to make this work. An Air Force ROTC cadet, Gideon Wiff, goes to a Valor/OCF retreat and gets excited about starting a Bible study in Auburn and finds my name through someone at the conference and calls me to ask if I could help him start a Bible study. Amazing answer to prayer!”

As an OCF local leader, Tony says he makes sure he impresses upon the cadets some of the important advice and encouragement he’s received over the years, including one thing from Tom Schmidt that has stuck with him for years.

“He really solidified ‘if there isn’t a group, start one,’” Tony says. So, he and his wife once walked through their neighborhood handing out flyers about the Bible study group they were starting.

For himself and for the ROTC students with whom he has Bible study, Tony is big on community—about living life together. He says that while Bible study is key in a Christian community, living in community includes so much

more—whether it be for Frisbee golf, going out for dinner, or other activities.

“We meet once a week at a local coffee house. Typically, we’ve had a few outings at the lake for BBQ and boating,” said Tony. “A few of the cadets have also asked to meet one on one for some mentoring. Being in a community group is life giving.”

Be ready to ‘stop and adjust’

While Tony says he either joined an already-established OCF group or started one at almost every assignment over his 25-year military career, Nathalie Chauta has experienced multiple OCF groups her entire life, but from a different perspective.

Nathalie grew up in OCF, and wherever her Air Force parents (Hous and Tami Waring) moved, they either joined the local OCF group or started one. Nathalie says she learned the value of hospitality and having people in her home.

“I can still remember being that kid who got up at midnight or 1 a.m. to get a drink of water only to find guests still in the house chatting with my parents,” she said.

Her husband, Shaun, had his first exposure to hospitality in a small group setting after enlisting in the Air Force. Shaun said he found himself attending a weekly Bible study at a local Cadence Hospitality House. That Bible study quickly turned into a multiple-times-per-week event.

“It was kind of a revolving door,” Shaun said. “So that was my first exposure to the idea that posting a group like that of like-minded believers would be not just a one-night thing, but that you could kind of make it a recurring thing

throughout the week so you would share life together.”

After they got married, their first experience leading an OCF small group was at Robins AFB in Georgia from around 2013–2016. It was a small group that never grew beyond more than 10–12 officers, but it was during this time that they decided hospitality and leading small groups were things they wanted to commit to.

“And that was really, I think Nathalie and I as a couple, that was our first time thinking, ‘You know, we really want to do this and we hope that God can use this in our lives,’” said Shaun.

For the Chautas, building community within their small group started with transparency and authenticity. Shaun recalls that after moving to California, the group they were in started sharing prayer requests. The Chautas used the opportunity to share some of their struggles and what was going on with their lives candidly.

“We said ‘Look, this is a really hard season of our life, of our marriage, of our family. You know, we just moved and uprooted our lives. We had a group back in Georgia, and we were looking for that again,’” said Shaun. “So, we were just really honest.”

It wasn’t long before they found themselves leading and hosting that group, which grew to about 20 people in their home every week—sometimes several nights a week.

“We still joke about it now where I

would come home from work and there would be people in the house and I hadn't known that there were going to be people over," said Shaun, who added that their lives felt like the book *The Gospel Comes With a House Key*, by Rosaria Butterfield.

"Basically, seven nights a week our house was open. It could be just one woman coming over to vent to Nathalie about a hard situation and her marriage and allowing Nathalie to speak truth into that situation, all the way up to our weekly Bible study night, where either I or one of the other husbands would lead the study, and we would just facilitate discussion."

The Chautas say their commitment to openness and hospitality has allowed them to develop a deeper and more well-practiced faith as well. Shaun explains that he couldn't imagine going through the Christian life as a military officer without the ability to run into another officer from his small group and spontaneously check in with him about how he's doing—with work, with his witness, and the like.

"When I first enlisted in the Air

Force, I would have said I was a Christian, but I wasn't really walking with God in terms of, I wasn't doing anything overtly rebellious against God. But I was just kind of stagnant," Shaun said, adding that the group at that Cadence Hospitality House "would challenge me, would keep me accountable.... It completely changed my view of Christ and of the body of Christ and the church's role."

Nathalie says for her, what keeps her motivated to continually open their home in community with others is that it's part of the sanctification process. "It's not always easy to be in community," she said.

Nathalie quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* to explain the mentality she's tried to develop: "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God."

"God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions," she said. "And when you open yourself up to an OCF group, or any small group, you're opening up yourselves to canceling plans and being ready to stop and adjust."

"THIS IS AN ONGOING COMMUNITY
THAT IS DOING LIFE TOGETHER. WE'RE
CONSTANTLY GETTING TOGETHER. WE'RE
CONSTANTLY DOING THINGS TOGETHER."



*Fort Campbell, KY OCF group & photo
Led by Greg & Lucy Lane*

A group that stands in the gap

While some OCF small groups are comprised primarily of one age demographic—for instance, Ashley’s group of college-age cadets or the Chiaravallotti’s group of 20-somethings—the community that has developed over the years at the home of Chuck and Donna Hendrick in Colorado Springs, Colo., is a multi-generational group that runs the gamut of ages.

“You know we have an older couple who are about 85, and he’s been retired from the Navy for quite a number of years,” said Donna. “And then we have us—we’re 70. And then we go down to people that are 50, and on down the line to lieutenant colonels and majors, and then there are lieutenants who’re just beginning their military careers.”

“I remember one young guy saying, ‘How do I cope with this really difficult boss? How do I do that in the military?’ And the major and the lieutenant colonel, they spoke to that. That’s what you

need,” she explains. “Because maybe if you were home, you would say to your dad, ‘How do I do this? How can I put up with this?’ But you don’t have a dad here.”

The multigenerational makeup of the group seems to naturally create opportunities for mentoring, as the junior officers in the group have chances to interact with and ask questions of those who may have already run their race in uniform.

“They are very open to coming and fielding questions of us and using us as a sounding board for how they ought to react to things as a young Christian,” said Chuck, also acknowledging that there are challenges that young officers are having to deal with in today’s military “that we never, ever would have imagined having to deal with.”

How to Get an OCF Small Group Started:

1. If you're not an OCF member, click on **Join OCF** at www.ocfusa.org/join to become one since we only make the OCF studies of members visible.
2. Ask God for a partner(s) to join in getting things started.
3. Before you sign as a group at the OCF website, first do a Pray-Discover-Obey with at least one other person, or hopefully several. Then **"Pray"** for wisdom about when to meet, where, what you'll study, chaplaincy support, etc. The **"Discover"** phase is when you draft out the inputs, narrow down what you'll do, then agree on implementation. **"Obey"** is doing what you believe God has made clear to you and asking others to help you follow through on what you said you would do!
4. Ideas to consider as you PDO: what to study in the Bible, prayer, music, food, children participation/childcare, welcoming strangers/TDY folks, ROTC outreach, chaplaincy support, administrative role, PCS/deployment transitions, etc.
5. After your PDO, complete the **List Me!** form as a local leader (you can be an "OCF Contact" even before you do the PDO), making the details of when, where, what, and who regarding your group visible in the **OCF Directory** (www.ocfusa.org/list-me).
6. Please keep the OCF Home Office updated if there are changes to when or where the group meets so that the home office staff can update the online OCF Directory listing: 1-800-424-1984 or laura.kalinus@ocfusa.org.

The Hendricks say there are all sorts of questions being asked by the active-duty lieutenants in the group. Maybe there's a situation with an NCO or a question about counseling a young soldier's family that split up after he came back from deployment.

Donna says it's important for the group to take this approach when building trust among its members: "There's nothing that's off limits. There is acceptance. So, you don't feel that you're coming in and anything would be a topic that wouldn't be OK to throw out and have prayer over."

For example, Chuck recalled an incident involving a lieutenant who was relieved of duty for something that

wasn't his fault.

"He was the platoon leader, and he was in charge when this tragedy happened," said Chuck. "Who is your sounding board that you go to when you're just grieving over something that's happened in your military career? Right up until the last moment before this young man left, we were trying to support him, encourage him, love him, and help him along his way to figure out what's next. We were here for him."

Donna added: "And then the other young lieutenants were watching that because you never know when that's going to happen in your career. You might think everything's great, but things do happen in life. And your

hopes and dreams are crushed. These deployments are very hard for these soldiers, to leave their families here for a year, but knowing that we're going to stand in the gap for them is huge."

Standing in the gap, as Donna puts it, has taken on many forms as they've witnessed numerous instances in their group of people banding together to do life together—outside of a single meeting time each week.

For example, some of the young guys might ping the Signal group-chat to say, "I want to hike this 14-er out here. Anyone done that before?" and then away four of them go. Or there's the group member who pinged everyone to ask if someone has a fold-out bed that they can borrow for a guest coming into town that weekend. Or the group member asking for someone to come with her to get her car repaired. And a mother whose husband is deployed asking if someone could help with teaching her teenage son to drive.


"Our mission is to support Christians who are in uniform, regardless of the color of that uniform," said Chuck. "We are here in a support role to help them

grow throughout their military career. It's not just sitting down and sticking our noses in the Bible study. It's applying that stuff that you learned in the Bible study in your daily walk.

"So how can we wrap our arms around the active-duty military and our community and love on them and support them."

Back in Mobile, Ala., Ashley is gearing up for another semester and the prospects of continued Bible study in the book of John, relationship developing, and community building.

"I don't know the impact of having this group. I don't know how much it's impacted people. I don't know where people are ultimately at with their relationship with the Lord, but it's a step of faith," says Ashley. "God will call us to do things we're not going to ever fully understand on this side of heaven. But as long as we are following where He's leading, that's the important part.

"And I'm just encouraged now. That he gave me the courage to start the group. And I think it's something I can look back on and say, 'Okay, God was faithful here. He's going to be faithful in the future as well.'" 

Communications Intern Joshua Schumacher and Content Specialist Karen Fliedner contributed to this article.

Leading Effective Small Groups

Leading small groups is an art, not a science. The adage "practice makes perfect" is only partially true. Even after much practice, the study will rarely ever be "perfect" and usually will not go as planned. But as a leader gains experience, better group results usually follow.

For some practical tips for small-group leaders and to download a copy of "Leading Effective Small Groups," check out: bit.ly/ocfgroups (link is case sensitive).



MY STORY

FINDING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN MY BROKENNESS

BY KARIS MEIER



The difficult sojourn through the valley of chronic illness can be how God draws us to Himself in unimaginable ways. Discover how in this military wife and mother's utter brokenness through daily affliction and the stresses of the military life she continues to find restoration for her soul from the one God, who is "the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).

I stare at the intricately woven carpet fibers. I have been for a while and don't plan on moving anytime soon. The tears in my eyes begin to blur the threads together. I hear sounds coming out of my mouth, but no intelligible words reach my ears. In my heart, I know I am connecting with the Father, driven by a desperation I don't want to admit. I don't have any words left today, only groans and sighs. I feel pain and discomfort in my body, but a numbness threatens to overcome my entire being. I start speaking the name, Jesus. Over and over again. And then some more.

After many minutes, I feel spent and empty. I've laid it all out, and now I wait. For words. For comfort. For hope. For a touch from God. But only silence meets me.

I have struggled with chronic illness since 2006 when I contracted parasites while visiting my family, who were serving as missionaries in Pakistan. I started experiencing symptoms while my husband and I were on our honeymoon. Weeks went by, and I continued to grow sicker. After losing 25 pounds and seeing multiple doctors, I was diagnosed with parasites. I took several rounds of antibiotics until the parasites were gone, but my digestive system was left compromised. I couldn't eat anything without pain and felt weak and miserable most of the time. The doctors gave no assurance that my body would ever fully recover.

Five months after getting married, my husband Ben deployed to Iraq for 15 months. I was alone at our first duty station in Fort Richardson, Alaska. The stresses of being a new military spouse, the deployment, and illness felt more than I could take. I struggled daily in body and spirit.

The depth of fear and anxiety I was experiencing took root many years earlier. As a child, I developed a deep fear of illness and disease when I watched the process of my grandpa dying of cancer. Sometimes I was paralyzed by it, and I remember nights lying in bed crying in fear. Now it seemed as though my worst nightmare had come true.

Life went on, and I learned to live with this "thorn" in my flesh, although I struggled daily as my declining health affected every area of life. Many days I woke up dreading having to live another day. But during these difficult days, the Lord graciously showed me that

this life was not about my comfort and happiness. These words of Jesus brought needed perspective, "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). The Lord revealed how much I depended on this life to bring satisfaction,

instead of setting my hope on eternity.

After we were told I would probably never have children, God blessed us with a son in 2010. Shortly after, Ben deployed as a commander to Afghanistan, and I took on the role of FRG (Family Readiness Group) leader. It was a devastating deployment, and there were many spouses suffering loss and pain. Little did I know that God had been preparing me for this position over the years. Because of my pain, I was very much aware of others who were suffering and was eager to share the hope of Jesus with them.

In 2012, I visited my family in Malaysia and contracted parasites again, but it wasn't diagnosed until two years later. Several more rounds of antibiotics further

**"So here I
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Karis and Ben Meier: Patience in Suffering

Be sure to catch Karis and Ben in episode 13 of the OCF Crosspoint podcast as they share more of their story. Check it out here: bit.ly/meier13

weakened my digestive system. In April 2014, I was admitted to the hospital's cardiac ward because my body was so emaciated that my organs were beginning to fail. I still clearly remember lying in that hospital bed feeling the threat of death when God spoke to me through Psalm 73:26, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." During the two-week hospital stay, several tests were performed, but no solid findings were made. A PICC line was inserted into my arm, and I was put on intravenous feeding for four months.

We now had two young children and lived in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. During this time, God demonstrated His power through my weakness. Amid my struggle for survival, the Lord called me to start a neighborhood Bible study. After some hesitation, I obeyed. A week later, I had 25 women in my living room, most of whom were unbelievers. I studied the Bible with those women until we moved a year later. During that time, many of them started following Jesus. Only God could have done this. In my weakness, God showed himself strong.

A few moves later, in 2017, we found ourselves in Fort Lewis, Washington. We had three children now, and Ben was TDY more than he was home. Amid this stressful time, I began experiencing peripheral neuropathy (numbness of limbs). Once again I was

hospitalized; more doctors, more tests, and more disappointments. It seemed like my body was wanting to give up, and no answers were in sight. Over the years, I had tried several natural remedies, herbs, food restrictions, oils, and other therapies. Nothing proved very helpful. It was humbling to realize time and again how quickly I put my hope in my health and bodily comfort rather than in God. Psalm 62:5 reminded me, "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him."

So here I find myself once again seeking hope from God. As I ponder how God has been faithful through all the years, I know He will be now. I reach over for my Bible and flip it open. I read what is before me and take in the words of life. This book, written thousands of years ago, speaks directly to the secret places of my heart. Hundreds of times has God, in His mercy, found me in my brokenness and restored my soul.

My story is far from over, though. I long to be healed of these bodily afflictions, but for now, I continue to bear them. As I close the Bible and take a deep breath, I thank God for using affliction to draw me unto himself in ways that could only be ushered through utter brokenness. God is faithful and will complete His greater story in my life as He will for every one of His children. And we can be confident that the ending will be far more glorious than we could ever hope or imagine. 📖

About Karis

Karis, who has a bachelor's degree in Christian Education and a master's in Counseling, is a writer and counselor and is engaged in women's ministry at her church. Karis is passionate about sharing with others who suffer about how God is leading her through her journey and to seek comfort and hope from Him. Read more on her blog: karismeier.wordpress.com. She and her husband, LTC Ben Meier, USA, have four children.



Courtney Taylor photo

OCF Leading Women Conference

These conferences, which draw military women from across the ranks, branches, and ages, involve “deep dives” into discussing what leadership looks like for women who are Christians serving our nation. As of press time, Spring Canyon was hosting an event 12–14 November. The retreat pictured above took place earlier this year at White Sulphur Springs, where Tami Waring, staff rep for Women’s Engagement (front left) and Kristin Goodrich (behind Tami) led the conference.

Summer wrap-up from the Conference Centers White Sulphur Springs

“WSS provided an incredible opportunity to take a knee and recoup spiritually and physically after a recent retirement, move, career change, and COVID,” was the comment of one guest at WSS this summer, where we safely and successfully ran seven full weeks of summer operations and programming after having to cancel week 1. We are so thankful to the Lord! We absolutely loved the amazing fellowship and encouragement with our guests and campers here this past summer.

Some of the highlights: 13 baptisms; our third largest Summer R&R ever, behind only 2019 and 2018; Camp Caleb’s second largest summer ever, behind only 2019; and more kids into AO! than in 2019 (95). While this fall the groups came with smaller numbers, about 50-60% of their typical group size, because of COVID impacts last fall, 60% of groups canceled their events. Be sure to check our three Winter Retreat events and register for whichever retreat catches your eye (see the back cover of this issue)!

Spring Canyon

COVID did not impact the summer—praise God! We had a wonderful summer here at Spring Canyon. What a joy to see Him at work in the lives of so many families. Lodging was full for five of the eight weeks of Summer Celebration, RMH, and FTA! Families spent time together before deployment or reconnected after back-to-back deployments. Kids, young military leaders, and many others encountered God in the glory of His creation; guests enjoyed powerful teaching sessions and fellowship. Some of the comments from our guests included: “This week helped me a lot in my faith. It challenged me spiritually, mentally, and physically. I drew closer to God,” “My hope and joy were renewed,” “What a blessing to rest here with my son’s family before he deploys to Germany.” The Christmas

and New Year’s seasons are a wonderful way to spend the holidays. Check out our upcoming Winter Sports Retreats (see the inside front cover of this issue).

Academies Summer

USAFA

After such a unique and difficult year of ministry because of COVID, we weren’t sure the end of year banquet and first spiritual commissioning for the class of ‘21 would be an in-person event. But we were able to do that, thankful to be able to honor and send them off with their spiritual commission before their military commissioning.

We gathered weekly this past summer for fellowship and Bible study with the upper three classes and had amazing interactions with the new class of ’25.



KMC OCF photo

OCF Defenders & Cookies

Capt Jen Cutler, USAF (second from right), spearheaded a cookie drop among 500 of her fellow Air Force Security Forces specialists last Christmas. The local KMC OCF community in Germany made and donated 75% of the 1,000 tasty treats given to these defenders of our nation and U.S. air bases around the world.

USNA

Earlier this year marked 12 months of online OCF, online classes, masks, physical distancing, and everything else that goes along with COVID restrictions. After several fits and starts (five cancelled retreats), we were finally able to go on retreat to White Sulphur Springs for the new plebes and for the class of '21 one final time. It was a great weekend where many of us met face to face for the first time. (It's amazing how unrecognizable people can be in three dimensions!). Unlike last year, we actually had a commissioning week, with our spiritual commissioning in person, although

parents and guests were not permitted on the Yard! It's always bittersweet to say farewell to each class when they graduate, but the class of '21 plebes were the first class after Juli and I were hired. We met in person with the class of '25 plebes each Sunday and had some great discussions as we studied 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. After the return of the Brigade, we had our first in-person leadership meeting and overnighter at Maranatha Mansion since March of 2020! It was so good to see everyone and even meet some people in person for the first time.



USNA OCF photo

USNA OCF

"It was so good to see everyone and even meet some people in person for the first time," said CAPT James Baca, USNA (Ret.), about the first in-person meeting at Maranatha Mansion since the COVID shut downs of 2020 and the subsequent restrictions. The combo leadership meeting/overnighter, the first in person gathering since March 2020, took place at the OCF fellowship facility after the return of the Brigade this past summer. CAPT Baca (middle, back row) and his wife Juli (left, front row) serve as the USNA OCF Staff rep couple.



Fort Campbell OCF photo

Air Assault

“As Larry Sherbondy said so well three summers ago at our ROTC Leaders Conference at WSS, ‘the LORD is moving in ROTC,’” said Greg Lane of OCF’s ministry efforts in collaboration with other sister ministries to future military leaders. “We had a record 23 Army ROTC cadets attend chapel services at our Fort Campbell chapels.” Sixteen of the 23 attended the Protestant service at Memorial Chapel, with another seven attending the Catholic service at Soldiers Chapel. “God has been so good to cause this to happen this summer at Fort Campbell,” said Lane, who served OCF with his wife Lucy for as the staff rep couple for ROTC Ministries (both pictured front left). Sherbondy and his wife Rita now serve OCF in the role vacated by the Lanes this past summer.

USMA

Tuesday night in-person worship and small group Bible studies started back up earlier this year after the cadets returned from the holiday break and completed a 14-day quarantine. Men’s and women’s events, marriage and financial planning seminars, and continued Tuesday night worship and small group Bible studies met in-person and led up to the year-end picnic and recognition ceremony for the class of ’21. It was a night of fellowship, prayer, celebration, and recognition. We had our spiritual commissioning following the graduation ceremony. The new leadership team met to conduct a PDO focused on developing their Vision and Mission for the next academic year. During the summer, we hosted an ice cream social at the Fellowship House for each of the three separate Reception Days

for cadet candidates and their families. The candidates enjoyed meeting each other, the families enjoyed seeing their candidates settle into their new roles, and we were blessed by more than 150 people getting to know the OCF ministry. A ministry team synchronization was followed by a kickoff dinner. It was an amazing sight to see Trophy Point filled with cadets and ministry team members worshipping the Lord in fellowship, an absolutely the perfect way to dedicate the academic year to the Lord.

USCGA

Ministry to the class of ’21 cadets and their underclassmen peers involved the most fruitful, busiest, most engaged group of more cadets at Shepherd’s Fold than any year since the history of USCGA OCF. What makes that remarkable is that

we thought we were going to have zero because of COVID—incredible when you compare it to the other academies that could not go to OCF host homes. Cadets come here to have community they have not been able to have anywhere else. The end-of-year bonfire for the class of '21 grads was a special event as they shared a testimony and an exhortation to the lower class about the faithfulness of God and encouraged them to be Christlike leaders in uniform. At the commissioning prayer lunch for the 17 grads, speaker CAPT Rob Warren, USCG, challenged them to be lights for Christ in the midst of trouble as they go out like sheep among wolves. The cadre cadets rallied to be lights for Christ to the SWABs during the summer, and a record number of SWABs came over for liberty. Cadets and ministry partners helped this past summer to finish projects to enhance the ongoing fellowship, mentoring, and men's and women's Bible studies, and other activities.

Council nomination period underway; voting starts in February

The nomination period to endorse candidates who will run on OCF Council's Class of 2025 ballot for the February 2022 election is now taking place through the end of November. OCF regular members (present/former officers, officer candidates, cadets and midshipmen) are eligible to participate in these Council activities.

Each nominee must have an endorsement from at least three members. Endorsements can be submitted online. The OCF website will have comprehensive candidate information in preparation for the February 2022 election. Those elected to the Class of 2025 will serve a three-year term on the Council starting 1 June 2022.

For more information on the nominations and upcoming elections, contact tori.mcdaniel@ocfusa.org or call 800-424-1984.

Transitions

Tami Waring, a 1984 USAFA graduate who served on active duty for five years, began a new post earlier this year as OCF Staff rep for Women's Engagement. Serving with husband Hous in staff positions on the field and in the home office, Tami's efforts help support a critical need as identified by OCF's FY22 priorities and the Strategic Framework 2.0.

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Retired Air Force LTC Dr. Larry and Rita Sherbondy joined as OCF Staff reps for OCF's ROTC ministry earlier this year, a role vacated by LTC Greg and LTC Lucy Lane, USA (Ret.), who had served since 2018. The Sherbondys spent the last nine years as founder and director of the Navigators ROTC Ministry.

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LTC Ryan Wainwright, USA (Ret.), began a new role earlier this year in OCF as Assistant Director of Field Operations. His efforts, in conjunction with FY22 priorities and the Strategic Framework 2.0, are geared toward bolstering OCF's goal of greater engagement with members and leaders according. The 1999 USMA graduate served in the military for 22 years. 🇺🇸

Where do you see yourself serving in OCF?

If you have wondered how you could volunteer in some capacity within OCF, check out the ever-growing list of opportunities posted on the OCF website. As more chances to volunteer become available, we'll add them to the list: ocfusa.org/volunteer.

Your Gift Matters

There are many ways to make an impact at Officer's Christian Fellowship, and we want to help you discover news way to plan a gift that fits your goals. Our new website has put the gift planning resources you need at your fingertips.



DVIDS photo

NO MATTER WHAT STAGE OF LIFE YOU'RE IN...

On our new website, you can:

- Find the right gift for you based on your age, assets or the amount you would like to give
- Learn about ways to give and how to fund your gift
- Download brochures and watch videos on types of gifts
- See your potential benefits with our Gift Illustrator
- Get your plans in motion with our Personal Estate Planning Kit

Get started by visiting <https://ocfusa.myplannedgift.org>

Need help or have questions? 800-424-1984 | OCFPlannedGiving@ocfusa.org

MAJOR LYNDA JOHNSON

United States Army, Retired

Came to OCF:

I returned from Iraq as a new believer in 2005. It wasn't until attending resident CGSC at Ft Leavenworth, Kansas, in 2008, that I came across in-home Bible study by OCF. They haven't been able to shake me since. OCF at West Point included a mission trip to Dominican Republic with cadets. I also experienced OCF at Fort Gordon, Georgia, at the OCF Anchor Points training, the Local Leader Conference at White Sulphur Springs in Pennsylvania, and an amazing retreat weekend at the Spring Canyon location in Colorado.

Why OCF:

A body of believers sharing the varied blessings and challenges of military life while united in Christ is such a unique thing. Take advantage of it!!

Why a military life:

I joined because of a guy, but mainly because I needed a job—LOL! I really did flourish under the structure, so there was no reason to get out before 20 years. The patriotism piece also gave me a sense of community. That hasn't changed.

What's on your bucket list:

Full time missions—sharing the gospel domestically or overseas. I have NO IDEA what—just anywhere God takes me.

Tunes you're listening to:

Popular stuff like *Next to Me* by Jordan Feliz and *Together* by For King & Country. And this 2012 gem by Citizens & Saints—*Oh God* (Alternate Version).


Best advice given you:

"Everyone is doing the best they can." I don't remember who said this to me during my Army time, but I know it jarred me free from expecting so little from people. The implication was to have some grace and patience in the workplace. I still hear this in my head when I see people struggling on their jobs and am tempted to make an ugly judgment.

The ah-ha moment of your identity in Christ:

When the physical strengths are stripped away, you can still show your strength in other ways. Running was something I did in my own power—it was mine. Even as a Christian, I didn't think to submit this to God. When it was taken away, I realized where my true strength came from (in my weaknesses, God is made strong).

Life Bible verse:

"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47, NIV). 



Lynda Johnson: Embracing powerlessness in self

In this OCF Crosspoint podcast episode, Lynda shares both her life story and the story of how she found her identity in Christ. Check it out here: bit.ly/lynda6





Cozy accommodations covered with snow, great home-style cooking, and meaningful connections between friends and family all make our winter retreats unlike any other. Join us for one of three sessions this holiday season:

Winter Retreat #1 (21–26 December)

Col Hous & Tami Waring, USAF (Ret.)

Abraham's Gospel in our Christmas Celebration

Winter Retreat #2 (27–30 December)

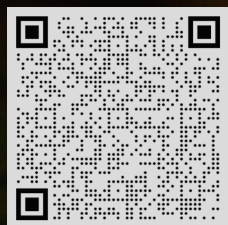
Dr. Gary Phillips

Resolved: In 2022, I Will 'Trace' Christ

Winter Retreat #3 (31 December– 3 January)

CDR Joe Chiaravallotti, USN (Ret.)

Living Boldly in the Face of Persecution



Scan the QR Code or visit bit.ly/wss-winterretreats to learn more and make White Sulphur Springs part of your holiday plans today.
