

# COMMAND

Christian perspectives on life in the military

SPRING 2022 Vol. 71 No. 1

COVER STORY

## INTEGRATING FAITH AND PROFESSION FROM THE START

*ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti,  
USN, shares the top lessons  
he's been learning since ROTC*



Building Christian military leaders, families, fellowships...**for a lifetime**



"I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

EPHESIANS 4:1-3 ESV

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# COMMAND

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Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN

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."





**SCOTT FISHER**Executive  
Director

## TO THOSE SERVING AND THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED: STAND FIRM, STAND STRONG

A young man who has an appointment to both Annapolis and USAFA called me today. He's weighing whether, as a strong believer, he should enter military service, given the current state of the country and world. He had many great practical questions about whether he could remain true to God's Word and still serve today. My response was a resounding "Yes!" Moreover, after hearing his heart for nearly an hour, I asked him whether, given his strong faith, he would like to see our military devoid of leaders who passionately love the Lord and obey His Word. The reality is that the need for Christlike leaders serving in the military is as strong today as ever!

Recently, I was able to participate in a USAFA retreat at Spring Canyon with a classmate of mine (True Blue '92). I cannot tell you how encouraging it was seeing and feeling the enthusiasm of these young leaders who soon will be leading our airmen! The fact that the cadets came from various ministries was a great testimony that we are not about lifting up the banner of OCF, but rather the name of Jesus Christ.

As we sat shoulder to shoulder with the cadets, it certainly didn't seem like 30 years had passed since my friend and I were about to commission. While the specific circumstances the cadets will face today may be different, many of the challenges of integrating the dual calling to our nation and the Lord remain the same, and many of the questions they were asking were

Right: United States Air Force Academy 2021 graduation.  
*Photo by Trevor Cokley*





similar to those we pondered when in their shoes.

What will it be like in the “real” Air Force? How do I know God’s will? In which career field does He want me to serve? How do I know whom to marry? How do I witness with truth and grace to a culture that in some ways is growing increasingly hostile to the Gospel? Will I stand firm when my fellow service members ridicule my faith? How quickly will we see combat, and where?

While the world seems to be changing so fast, many of our core questions and challenges remain the same, and this should not surprise us, since Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (ESV).

THE REALITY IS THAT THE NEED  
FOR CHRISTLIKE LEADERS SERVING IN THE  
MILITARY IS AS STRONG TODAY AS EVER!

To those cadets and midshipmen who are graduating this year, or in the near future: Be encouraged—you are not the first to face the questions and challenges that will come, and they will come. Jesus said, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, ESV).

God who calls you will also equip you—and you don’t have to walk the journey alone. Lean heavily on your fellow brothers and sisters and learn from those who have served before you. Don’t let the distractions of your first training or operational assignment pull you out of fellowship. Get involved with a local church or chapel and look up a

local OCF fellowship at [ocfusa.org](http://ocfusa.org)—ideally before you get to your new unit—and if there is not one there, start one.

To those who are serving, thank you for serving with Christlike leadership! You are not alone, and your service is not in vain. Stay engaged with other believers. Don’t believe Satan’s lie that you are the only believer left in the military, or the only one going through your current trial. Continue to do your work heartily, and remember you are serving Christ and not man. And don’t forget, your reward is from Christ alone, not your next performance evaluation (Colossians 3:23-24).

To those who have served, please do not think your time as an integral part of the military community is over and that you have nothing to offer those who follow in

your footsteps. That too is a lie. Again, “there is nothing new under the sun.” Those wearing the uniform and their families need your experience, wisdom, and insight—your successes and your mistakes, real and unvarnished. Stay engaged, or perhaps you need to re-engage, with those serving in the military community wherever God currently has you! If you don’t know where to start, look at the opportunities at [ocfusa.org/volunteer](http://ocfusa.org/volunteer).

To all of us, myself included, remember God is sovereign and He is still on the throne. He still uses broken people like you and me to accomplish His purposes. No matter your age or location, stand up, stand firm, shoulder to shoulder with your brothers and sisters, and say, “Here am I, send me!” 🙏

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DVIDS photo

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## ENS NELSON CHIARAVALLOTTI, USN INTEGRATING FAITH AND PROFESSION FROM THE START

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Nelson Chiaravallotti learned many things from his two Navy officer parents, and his love for the Navy and commitment to serving his country is one of those many things. Raised in a proud Navy home by parents Joe and Kristi, both retired commanders, Nelson knew his dream was to become a Navy SEAL when he learned about the profession in sixth grade.

Right: "This picture was taken to announce that I was selected Corps Commander and Deputy Corps Commander for the following year."  
*Photo courtesy of ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN*



*Editor's Note: The following article was taken from a conversation between OCF Director of Communications Josh Jackson and ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN, who was a guest on OCF's Crosspoint podcast.*

"When I was younger, I'd see any sailor or soldier, airman, Marine in uniform, and to me, it was like I saw Superman," Chiaravallotti said.

A passion for military service was not the only thing instilled in Chiaravallotti during his childhood. He said the character, faith, strength, and leadership his parents and their military friends exemplified provided many role models of who he wanted to be when he grew up.

### **Lessons learned through hope deferred**

"I knew I was going to be in the Navy, and I wanted to be an officer and lead," said Chiaravallotti, who applied and was accepted to the four-year scholarship ROTC program at Texas A&M University at Galveston.

Thrilled to be in a program at a school that would enable him to pursue his childhood dream, Chiaravallotti's experience still tested his commitment to his dreams of

becoming a Navy SEAL.

Chiaravallotti recalled his personal experience with the Department of Defense Medical Exam Review Board (DoDMERB). In pursuit of DoDMERB's clearance to join the military, Chiaravallotti's freshman year at A&M Galveston was marked by a series of disqualification notices for misdiagnoses that did not hinder the cadet's ability to serve in the military.

Despite every "crushing defeat," Chiaravallotti saw the Lord teaching him perseverance and making him truly evaluate how intensely he wanted to join the Navy.

"[I didn't want to serve] because I thought that this would benefit me, but I knew that I wanted to serve my country, and I wanted to serve my sailors especially," Chiaravallotti said. "Nothing was going to stop me from doing that."

After Chiaravallotti received five denials for necessary waivers from DoDMERB throughout his freshman year at Galveston,

Chiaravallotti's prayers were answered in an email with a subject line that read "CONGRATULATIONS," sent by a captain helping Chiaravallotti navigate the DoDMERB process. DoDMERB had granted Chiaravallotti the necessary waiver to serve in the military.

"I was so thankful, because what I learned from that was that it really does pay off to persevere, and not in the ways I thought," Chiaravallotti said, having learned, too, the importance of leaning on a support system during such obstacles. "I could not have done it alone."

That perseverance-producing experience solidified Chiaravallotti's desire to serve his country, but the following academic year offered its own challenges to Chiaravallotti's personal hopes of becoming a Navy SEAL.

Though he was unlikely to be accepted as a then-sophomore, a lieutenant at Galveston encouraged Chiaravallotti to apply for SEAL Officer Assessment and Selection (SOAS). Chiaravallotti was accepted and packed up for SOAS in Coronado, Calif., when, two days before leaving home, he received an email stating he had been medically disqualified. Again.

Disheartened by yet another blow to his dream, Chiaravallotti chose to keep training toward his goals. He says he experienced God's perfect timing during a trip to OCF's White Sulphur Springs Conference Center shortly after the disqualification—a trip that provided an encouraging and much-needed time with friends.

"That was God's perfect timing, because my friends were so supportive of me there," Chiaravallotti said.

Resolved to press onward and contest the disqualification, Chiaravallotti then injured his left knee and left shoulder. He recalls feeling crushed in that moment, having worked so hard, only to receive yet another setback.

"I'm thankful for [the rehabilitation process] now," Chiaravallotti said. "I know how



*Photo courtesy of ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN*  
"Every emergency call after the one in which I lost my first patient, I would draw a blue cross on my palm and say a prayer for my crew and my patients before arriving on the scene. I still do this on my hand every time I have a challenge, including during my time at SOAS. This is a picture taken on the way to an ALS emergency."

to strengthen my joints and how to strengthen my knee and my shoulder when they're injured. I came out stronger."

With patience in his rehabilitation process, Chiaravallotti recovered. He applied and was accepted for SOAS the following year. Yet halfway through his training, Chiaravallotti received another medical disqualification, redirecting him to serve as an officer in the submarine community.

THE CHARACTER, FAITH, STRENGTH,  
AND LEADERSHIP HIS PARENTS AND  
THEIR MILITARY FRIENDS EXEMPLIFIED  
PROVIDED MANY ROLE MODELS OF WHO  
HE WANTED TO BE WHEN HE GREW UP.



While he remains hopeful of transferring later to special warfare, Chiaravallotti said he is “content with being a submariner,” noting his entire experience has been “so exciting, so exhilarating, so chaotic, it can’t be anything but God’s hand.”

Each unexpected challenge provided and reinforced Chiaravallotti’s bigger-picture vision of his life and a focus on the lessons learned, rather than the obstacles endured.

### **Lessons learned through heart palpitations**

Through his own individual saga that produced perseverance, Chiaravallotti experienced several hardships while going through the ROTC program at Galveston alongside other cadets.

Motivated by advice from his father about the importance of experience, Chiaravallotti made an effort to be as involved as possible upon arriving as a freshman.

He took on the role of PT officer, a rare role for a freshman to fill. Failure in that early leadership experience proved to be one of his favorite, most growth-producing experiences as a leader, Chiaravallotti said.

“I really failed, and I really did not do as well as I was hoping to,” Chiaravallotti said. “I had to learn not to rely on what I knew about myself and not rely on the lessons I’ve learned, and instead, start to learn new ones and start to trust others, their guidance, and their wisdom.”

Chiaravallotti said that after choosing not to give up and to instead take feedback as he received it, his areas of improvement during that challenging semester were to accept his responsibilities and own his mistakes.

Chiaravallotti became a company commander his junior year at Galveston, making

him responsible for approximately 50 cadets. He also became a resident assistant (RA), making him responsible for the well-being of his many residents.

One particular experience that struck Chiaravallotti while serving in these two roles occurred when one of the freshmen in ROTC went to the hospital with heart palpitations caused by a then-undiagnosed condition. Though he felt helpless at the moment, Chiaravallotti knew he and the rest of his company could at least encourage this freshman during such an unsettling event.

Chiaravallotti set the scene that brought a smile to the scared cadet resting in a hospital bed—cadets gathered in the hospital room, taking in a heated game of the World Series matchup between the Houston Astros and Washington Nationals, doing homework, and laughing with each other. That night, Chiaravallotti understood the impact of putting people first within a company.

“Take full advantage of what your opportunity has to offer,” said Chiaravallotti. “Even if it’s one or two things, don’t toss them to the side and think ‘It’s not purposeful enough,’ or ‘I see I can do this task, but it’s not going to be that impactful.’ You really never know.”

### **Lessons learned through heartbreaking loss**

Chiaravallotti’s time working with Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in high school and losing his first patient taught him the value of integrating faith and service, a vital combination for persevering.

After hearing the Holy Spirit’s prompting to pray with parents of the patient who had just passed, Chiaravallotti obeyed.

“We just prayed, and arms were lifted high. There was immense grief and sadness, but



“I took this selfie right after waking up from my endoscopy which we would submit to Navy BUMED to finally clear me to commission in August of 2021.”

*Photo courtesy of ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN*





Photo courtesy of ENS Nelson Chiaravallotti, USN

“This picture was taken during my first march-in at Texas A&M. I was selected as the guidon bearer for my freshman year.”

there was so much peace in this moment,” said Chiaravallotti. “That fire to serve with the backbone of faith has been essential to my leadership.”

Two deaths in the corps within just over a year during Chiaravallotti’s time at Galveston prompted a deeper understanding of what it means to persevere.

“How do you persevere when you have such a weight of guilt and just sadness on your shoulders?” Chiaravallotti asked himself when the second death of the two, this one by suicide, occurred.

“Any decision I made was going to be for my guys and the benefit of their well-being. I could not have [persevered] without caring about what I was doing and caring about the mission that I had.”

### Knowing and applying biblical perseverance in leadership

Through all these hardships, Chiaravallotti always comes back to God’s Word in his

understanding and application of perseverance, especially in leadership roles.

When defining perseverance as “an enduring and faithful pursuit in the face of affliction,” Chiaravallotti referred to the letters to the churches shared in Revelation 2. He noted the tenth verse of that chapter, which encourages Christians to continue in faithful endurance in all affliction.

Looking to John 18, which details Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Chiaravallotti observes the importance of personal ownership of those who one leads. During His arrest detailed in this passage, Jesus defends His disciples, telling antagonistic soldiers and officials to let them go.

“That’s ownership right there,” Chiaravallotti said. “As a leader and as a service member, you have to have ownership of what you’re doing and your job and your role and your people most importantly. Their well-being is your well-being.”



### Nelson Chiaravallotti: Enduring and faithful pursuit

Be sure to catch Nelson in season 2, episode 15 of the OCF Crosspoint podcast as he shares more of his story (link is case sensitive): [bit.ly/chevy15](https://bit.ly/chevy15)

Here are some questions to ponder as you listen to Nelson’s story of military life at the intersection of faith, family, and profession.

1. Nelson’s childhood desire to become a Navy officer was sparked by his parents and their friends, who he calls “role models,” for the way they lived out their Christian faith and character in leadership. Of those in your life who influenced you either positively or negatively, what are some of the ways you have built upon the positive examples? What about the negative ones?

2. Nelson emphasizes the quality of perseverance—which he defines as an “enduring and faithful pursuit in the face of affliction,” essential to the Christian walk, and is “built on your why,” which is trust in God. Consider this Scripture: “...we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character” (Romans 5:3-4, NKJV). How do all those things help hone Christlike leadership as military leaders?

3. Nelson quotes John 18:8-9 as a backdrop to the importance of taking ownership as a leader of “what you’re doing, your job, your role, and your people most of all.” How does ownership of what Christ has entrusted to you as a leader impact how you lead others? Is it true that “their well-being is your well-being”? What are some of the ways you care for those you lead?

### 10 Leadership Lessons for the Christian Officer

Before graduating from Texas A&M Galveston, Chiaravallotti provided a detailed, 10-point list of leadership lessons to his successors in the ROTC program.

1. Care for your people (John 18:8-9)
2. Know your job (Proverbs 24:5)
3. Do not be a product of your environment (Psalm 27:3)
4. Be the light (John 1:5)
5. Let your character speak for itself (Daniel 6:4)
6. Have courage to go anywhere and do anything (Psalm 23:5)
7. Be slow to anger (James 1:19)
8. Eliminate negative thoughts (Proverbs 3:5)
9. Be stable in all your ways (James 1:8)
10. Rest (Mark 2:27)





KRISTIN GOODRICH  
WHAT DO YOU  
THINK OF WHEN  
I SAY MILITARY  
SISTERHOOD?

Answering this question is paramount to OCF's annual Leading Women Retreat, a weekend event for women who are serving or who have served in uniform.

USMA cadet Dani Cross speaks in front of other attendees during the annual OCF Leading Women Retreat, held 18-20 March at White Sulphur Springs.

*White Sulphur Springs photo*



BY COURTNEY TAYLOR, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

*Editor's Note: The following article was adapted from a conversation between OCF Director of Communications Josh Jackson and Kristin Goodrich, who was a guest on OCF's Crosspoint podcast.*

**L**ike many with family connections to the military, Kristin Goodrich, the daughter of a U.S. Navy reservist, chose to pursue an education at the U.S. Naval Academy. Despite low expectations and fears of not making it through her four years before graduating, Goodrich said her plebe summer proved to be “instrumental.”

“I did wind up going to Sunday School [at the Naval Academy] because of the air conditioning at that time and the donuts, not realizing that my Sunday School teacher was an outstanding man of God,” said Goodrich.

That outstanding man of God was none other than then-Captain Art Athens, USMC, who later went on to serve as an executive director of OCF, among other roles in the Marine Corps and nonprofit sector. Thanks to Athens’ spiritual guidance, Goodrich received a different kind of refreshment and nourishment than she expected.

Goodrich said the Lord used three habits—reading her hymnal on Saturday mornings, reading nightly devotions to relieve stress and fall asleep, and going to Sunday school for air conditioning and donuts—that first summer at the academy to lead her to attend the OCF USNA retreat at White Sulphur Springs over Labor Day Weekend. On the porch of WSS’ Harrison House, Goodrich committed her life to the Lord and to military ministry.

“In the 30 years since I graduated from the Naval Academy, the Lord has really placed

a calling on my life for military ministry, especially for women in the military community,” she said.

### **From Panama to Hong Kong, from plebe year to class reunions**

The non-military observer may perceive the military as an impossible environment in which to establish and sustain long-term friendships. Goodrich’s relationships forged during her time in the Navy, however, proved the opposite and deepened her God-given passion for ministering to women in the military.

“We’ve really walked out doing 30+ years of doing life together,” said Goodrich of her roommates at the Naval Academy, recalling opportunities to surprise them despite geographically diverse duty stations. Female friendships within the military, Goodrich explained, are afforded special opportunities because of the unique vocational demands.

“People don’t jump aboard ships, transiting the Panama Canal. People don’t show up in Hong Kong on the transit back from the Persian Gulf,” Goodrich said. “We have this opportunity to go into some really cool and exciting places and to experience that level of friendship that really Christ calls us to.”

Long-term military friendships not only consist of adventures in international waters but of things that make up any deep friendship: meals together when paths overlap, support in times of personal loss, and



“Friendship is a means that the Lord uses to build relationships and have us practice in the laboratory of life.”

KRISTIN GOODRICH

attending family celebrations, among others.

Even external to military sisterhood within the Christian context, Goodrich spoke of a “Fab 50” celebration that brought together 60 of the 94 women who graduated from the Naval Academy in 1989.

“It was a huge synthesizing moment where it was full of laughter and tears. Sometimes the tears were because of the laughter, and sometimes the laughter was because of the tears,” said Goodrich. “I can say I love them like my sisters, and [that sisterhood] has been such a blessing.”

### **Launching the OCF Leading Women Retreat**

An active OCF member since that first life-changing year at the academy, Goodrich served as a president of a service academy OCF group and was an OCF Council member from 1996-1998.

“Even at that time with the integration of women into the military academies and into higher profile military life, we’ve spoken a lot about the role of women in the military, but we hadn’t done anything,” she said. “It just felt like it was the time to do something.”





Goodrich joined forces with Tami Waring, a USAFA '84 graduate and now Staff Representative for Women's Engagement for OCF, to create an opportunity for uniformed women to come together.

The two women set out to host the first OCF Leading Women Retreat at WSS in 2019, and approximately 60 Christian women in the military gathered for time in fellowship and in the Word. Roughly 50 of those 60 attendees were female cadets from the U.S. Military Academy, and the remainder were active duty, retired, or separated officers.

"It was just this really wonderful dynamic to have 60 of us in an age range of teenagers into sixties," Goodrich said. "It was just a really blessed time."

While speaking at that inaugural Leading Women Retreat in 2019 at WSS, Goodrich posed the question, "What do you think of when I say military sisterhood?"

Goodrich had pondered this question in her 30 years of military ministry and determined that military sisterhood is much like any relationship with siblings.

"You don't get to pick your brothers and sisters, you're assigned them, so to speak," Goodrich said. "That's really what happens in the military community."

She felt the question hadn't been addressed on a larger scale, and one cadet's response struck her, "What sisterhood? We don't have a military sisterhood."

Goodrich explained women in the military often work hard not to stand out as women, intending to be "recognized as leaders" first and foremost.

"[We're not] tucking our womanhood away, but we don't want it to be the focus," Goodrich said. "All of a sudden, being a female was the focus of this question."

Seeing the cadet's response as indicative of little progress since women were first admitted to service academies more than 40

years ago, Goodrich was nonetheless grateful for the freedom to explore the undiscussed topic of military sisterhood.

### **The art of friendship in forming sisterhood**

During those discussions the rest of the retreat weekend, Goodrich said friendship was a key aspect of establishing military sisterhood.

"Friendship is a means that the Lord uses to build relationships and have us practice in the laboratory of life," Goodrich said.

The group discussed what friendship is and is not. Rather than a science, Goodrich said Christian women in the military ought to perceive friendship as an art.

"There's a subjective component in friendship and how to make it happen and how it can be changed and adjusted at different times," Goodrich said. "What works for one person, certainly doesn't work for another person."

John Ortberg's *Soul Keeping: Caring For the Most Important Part of You* informed Goodrich's friendship advice to retreat attendees.

"[Ortberg says] sin ultimately makes friendship impossible. Thankfully, we have a Lord who has a response to that and who demonstrates the best kind of friendship that we can have," Goodrich said.

Goodrich had another takeaway from Ortberg's book: seeing fellow servicemembers, whether male or female, as God-given brothers and sisters will solidify any individual's commitment to forging good friendships.

Goodrich also points out another author instrumental in analyzing emotionally unhealthy spirituality. In his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero lists 10 symptoms, two of which stood out to Goodrich as threats to friendship: dying to the wrong things and doing for God instead

An OCF Leading Women Retreat guest returns from a horseback ride through the wooded trails of White Sulphur Springs.

*White Sulphur Springs photo*



### Dispelling a common misconception among women in uniform

“Because [Christian women in the military] are so entrenched in a man’s world, a uniformed woman often does not think she needs other women,” said Tami Waring, OCF Staff Representative for Women’s Engagement.

The latest annual OCF Leading Women Retreat, however, disproved this common misconception yet again.

“Every time we hold a Leading Women Retreat, we have women who leave amazed and encouraged,” Waring said. “They are emboldened to be the women that God has called them to be right there in their jobs in the military.”

Hosted March 18-20 at White Sulphur Springs Conference Center in Pennsylvania, this unique retreat featured speakers Brigit Jogan, Kristin Goodrich, and Waring, representing the Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force, respectively. Throughout the weekend, these three addressed 30 cadets, midshipmen, active duty servicemembers, and retirees.

Precisely how Christian military women can connect with each other still proves to be a challenge, but ministries like OCF and Planting Roots are blazing the trail for more effective ministry within this unique group.

Between annual OCF Leading Women Retreats, hosted at WSS as well as Spring Canyon in Colorado, and Planting Roots’ publications, uniformed women can expect to find fellowship and teaching sure to meet a previously unmet need.

Thinking of the broader community reflected by OCF Leading Women Retreat guests, Waring said, “My encouragement for women officers is to find each other and encourage each other as Christian military women.”

of being with God.

“God really did design our healthy desires, our pleasures of life, which do include friendships and joy and laughter and great stories, frankly,” Goodrich said. “We understand that we will make mistakes in relationships and friendships, but He will still work his message of love and truth through those experiences we have.”

Goodrich said she was encouraged to see small groups of cadets and officers of all ages peruse this list of 10 symptoms. This collective time of reflection gave retreat attendees a chance to address their own emotional immaturity, which can easily hinder spiritual maturity and solid friendships with others.

“After 20 years of walking with the Lord, we don’t want to be a one-year-old in the faith who repeated [those sins] for 20 consecutive years,” said Goodrich. “[It was]

especially exciting to see gals in their early twenties and late teens addressing these questions.”

### The future of ministry to women in uniform and the challenge to all

“There are a number of resources for any one of three components: Christians for the first, military for the second, and women for the third,” said Goodrich. “What I find is that there’s really nothing out there for Christian military women.”

The lack of resources for this niche group where these three identities intersect is a problem Goodrich and her fellow female servicemembers strive to solve. Combining military experiences, passions for ministry, and areas of expertise across all branches of service, women like Goodrich have worked to equip and encourage their peers who have long gone underserved.

To that end, these women began a ministry called Planting Roots. A ministry ally of OCF, Planting Roots is an organization “by military women for military women” with the intent to see women in the military community grounded in their faith, said Goodrich, who serves as Planting Roots’ deputy director, along with executive director Kori Yates.

This ministry, led by women with more than 1,000 cumulative years of experience as active-duty service members, military kids, military wives, parents raising military kids, and/or parents of service members, has published four Bible studies and, in partnership with the American Bible Society, the devotional book titled *Bible Bootcamp for Military Women*.

“I’ve really enjoyed the vast resources that are offered for Christians in the military or Christian women, but I’m super excited now to have Christian military women’s resources,” said Goodrich.

Beyond taking advantage of print resources and event opportunities like OCF Leading Women as individuals, Goodrich said her one challenge to all Christian, uniformed

women is to “develop a healthy sisterhood as Christian women in the military community.” She would love to see members of this unique community encourage and exhort one another in their shared walk as female servicemembers following Christ.

### For more resources and connections

- Find *OCF Crosspoint* wherever you listen to podcasts to hear from Kristin Goodrich, Planting Roots Director Kori Yates, and other Christian women of military backgrounds.
- Christian women who have served or currently serve in the military are welcome to join the Facebook group overseen by Goodrich and Waring. Use this short link, which is case sensitive: [bit.ly/OCF-leading-women](https://bit.ly/OCF-leading-women).
- Keep an eye out for more information on the next OCF Leading Women Retreat, scheduled for Spring 2023.
- Visit [plantingroots.net](https://plantingroots.net) to learn more about our ministry ally, their Bible studies, devotional book, and upcoming events. 📖

### TEN TOP SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONALLY UNHEALTHY SPIRITUALITY from Peter Scazzero’s book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”

1. Using God to run from God
2. Ignoring the ungodly emotions of anger, sadness and fear
3. Dying to the wrong things
4. Denying the past’s impact on the present
5. Dividing our lives into “secular” and “sacred” compartments
6. Doing for God instead of being with God
7. Spiritualizing away conflict
8. Covering over brokenness, weakness and failure
9. Living without limits
10. Judging other people’s spiritual journey



### Kristin Goodrich: Building Community

Be sure to catch Kristin in season 1, episode 47 of the OCF Crosspoint podcast as she shares more of her story (link is case sensitive): [bit.ly/goodrich47](https://bit.ly/goodrich47)



A man in a USMC uniform is seated, reading an open Bible. He is wearing a black face mask. To his left is a large, colorful stained glass window featuring a cross and the word "HOPE". The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window.

COL CHET ARNOLD, USMC (RET.)

# MAY A CHRISTIAN SERVE IN THE MILITARY?

BY KAREN FLIEDNER,  
COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

*Editor's Note: The following article was adapted from a Crosspoint podcast conversation between OCF Director of Communications Josh Jackson and Col Chet Arnold, USMC (Ret.), who was part of a panel to junior officers that addressed several topics about the question: May a Christian serve in the military?*

**M**ay a Christian serve in the military? When it comes to taking the life of an enemy combatant, how do our military men and women who are Christians reconcile that with Jesus' command to love your enemy and to pray for him?

Those questions have often been posed to OCF members over the years by future junior officers in a variety of venues such as the chapel-sponsored Bible studies available to cadets attending the annual Cadet Summer Training at Fort Knox, KY.

"Cadets would ask me, 'How do I answer my Christian friends who ask me why I am involved in an activity that kills people when I'm supposed to be bringing Christ to people,'" recalls COL John Haddick, USA (Ret.), a longtime OCF volunteer at the chapel services when CST was conducted at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington.

In his discussions with cadets, COL Haddick would give each inquiring cadet a copy of *May a Christian Serve?* written by LTG William Harrison, USA (Ret.), who served as OCF Council president for nearly 20 years. Available as a booklet and online digitally, *May a Christian Serve?* typically receives more diverse feedback than any other resource on the OCF website.

As OCF's SE Coastal Regional Coordinator couple, Col Chet Arnold, USMC (Ret.), and his wife Michelle are not only asked about Christians in military service during

many ministry interactions with the young men and women attending flight school in Pensacola, it's also a question Chet intentionally broaches.

"I will bring it up on purpose to make sure the folks we're working with here have considered the question," said Chet, who shared a conversation he had with a retired Air Force officer. "As a Christian, he had not considered this question prior to being put into a combat environment.

"He realized that as a believer he had made a mistake in not first resolving in his mind the Biblical basis for military service, particularly as it applies to going into combat and potentially taking human life."

It was a subject Chet, a retired Marine aviator who flew A-4s and Harriers, had to resolve for himself early on in his military career.

"I became a Christian while on active duty," Chet recalls, "and I felt I needed to answer that right away." A ministry member who had combat experience in war with whom Chet was already meeting "was able to take me through Scripture and demonstrate how clearly the Bible teaches the basis for military service."

So, what are the truths found in the Bible regarding Christians and military service?

"As with everything in our faith, it starts in Genesis," said Chet, who lists the sanctity of life and God's establishment of human government as two key components of the

Photo by PO1 Class Diana Quinlan, USN



discussion. “God created humans in God’s image, and we need to never lose sight of that, even as we are in armed conflict with other human beings.”

It’s in Genesis 9, “where God essentially establishes the basis for government and gives to the human government the authority to take human life,” Chet says.

“As you work your way through Scripture, you see that continually reinforced,” he said. “God has chosen to use human government, the military police forces, to protect and defend so humans can flourish in peace. That protection and that defense sometimes require taking human life. God is working through fallen humans in a fallen world.”

“From our perspective, it doesn’t look pretty, but it’s clear that is God’s plan, and we need to make sure our attitude and our understanding are right before God.”

It’s an attitude that stems from the heart, one of motive—what’s going on inside the heart and minds—while confronting enemy combatants and how those combatants are viewed.

“Am I seeking to defend myself, or am I part of a larger effort to protect and defend society and a way of life from what is perceived to be evil aggression?”

“The way God has set it up is that if we remember that person is an image-bearer of God, when we go into combat and we’re in a position where we may take human life, we mourn the loss of an image-bearer,” said Chet. “We do what needs to be done. With proportionality. With restraint. But we would want to be in a position where we mourn the loss of an image-bearer—even

one who is across the line and considered to be an enemy.

“All the people I’ve talked to who work with those who suffer from post-traumatic stress agree that if you are properly mourning and properly understanding the value of human life, the impact of those events will be lessened. You’re still going to have some things that will be there from your experience, but properly grieving and properly understanding the value of human life is very important.”

How do military men and women who are Christians live distinctly within a military culture where they are confronted not only with the issue of taking human life, but with one of serving in a society filled with immoral behavior?

In his conversations with others, Chet touches on a myriad of points: “How we are to be the salt and light wherever we are, that it is an honorable profession,” all while serving along with others who have “a way of living that is inconsistent with what we see in Scripture.”

He recalls his own experience while on a Marine expeditionary unit. “We had a SEAL team with us. I was spending some time

with the lieutenant and came to find out he’s a Christian. And my first thought was, ‘Wow! A Christian who is a SEAL?’ And then I thought, ‘Yeah, but who would you want to have that kind of responsibility doing the kind of things that they do? You’d want somebody who values human life, one who’s going to be restrained in their use of force.’ If you have people in your military and in your police forces who are unrestrained in their use of force and have no regard for human

life, it’s going to be awful,” Chet said.

Chet also emphasizes to the young officers he mentors that they should serve with God-centered professional excellence in trustworthiness and competence, rather than solely “to gain the next promotion and that sort of thing.

“[If others] look to you as somebody who is competent, somebody who is trustworthy, when they have a question about important issues in life, they’re going to come to you because you’ve demonstrated that you are serious about life and you’re not in it for yourself. You’re a team player, you’ve got their back.

“[You can have] two people who are both professionally excellent. One is doing it for themselves, the other is doing it for the glory of God and for others. That’s always the choice it seems we’re making in life.”

But he adds a warning to military members who are Christians as they rub shoulders with those in the secular military society in life and work.

“If you don’t actively pursue Christian fellowship and aren’t meeting with members of the body of Christ to spend time in the Word and prayer and to encourage and exhort one another, you may find yourself slipping into lifestyles that someone who was a follower

“If you’re in the military, you are in a noble profession—one that is clearly in line with the teaching of the Bible.”

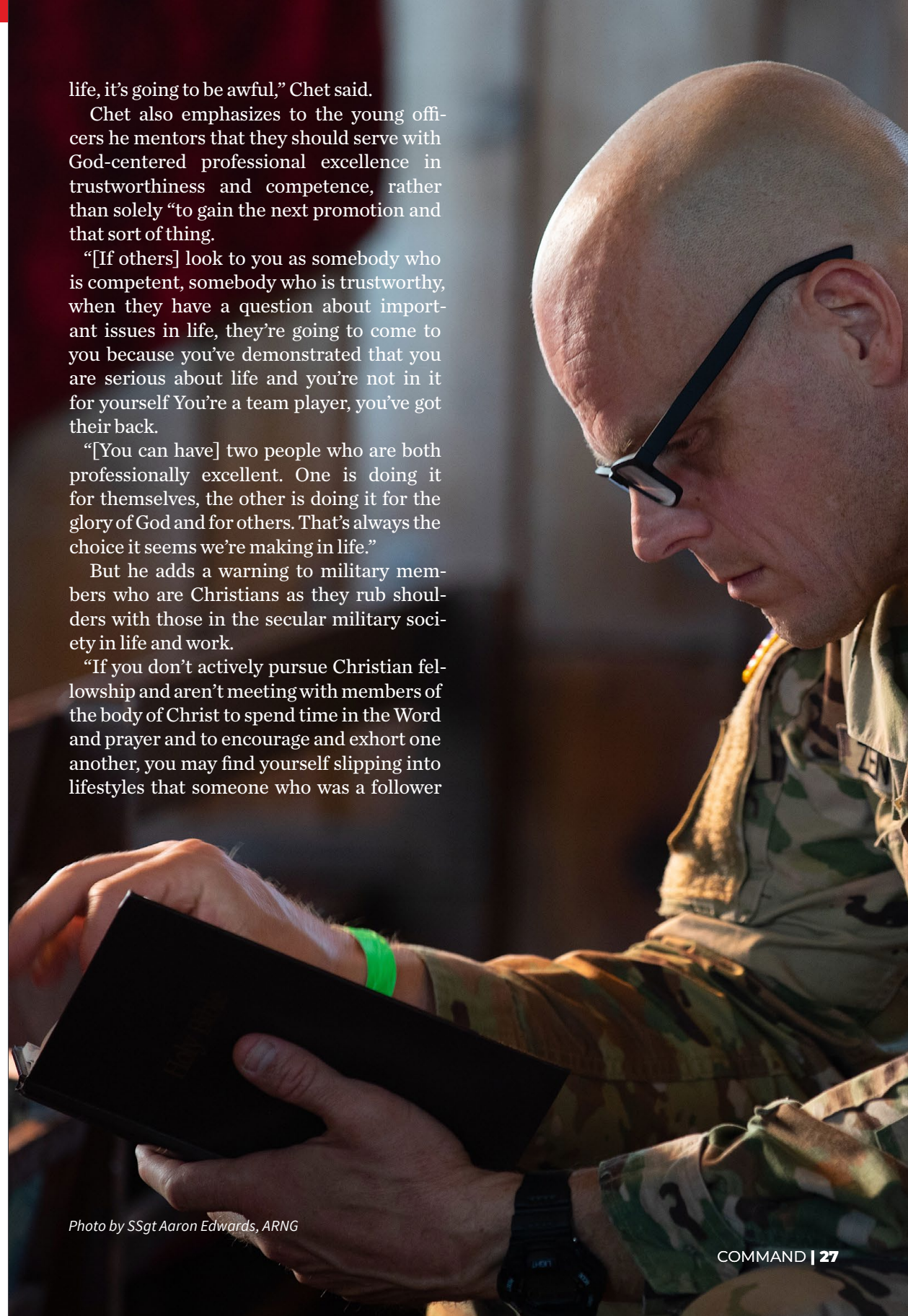


Photo by SSgt Aaron Edwards, ARNG





Photo by LCpl Ryan Hageali, USMC

of Jesus wouldn't want to find themselves in.

"It's very important to stay in Christian fellowship. You don't want to wall yourself off from the world—we are to be in the world, but not of it. Spend time with these folks. You may actually, in your personal convictions, think it's okay to go into a bar and drink seltzer water, but you're not going to be there all night long, engaging in the same sorts of behaviors."

"This covers a lot of areas of life. It's substance abuse, sexual behavior, the language we speak, of being someone who's set apart and yet not someone who comes off as 'holier than thou.' It's a delicate balance. And it's really hard to do if you're not in Christian fellowship. You really have to find that.

Sometimes you will be in a unit where there are only a couple of other Christians, as far as you know. Whoever they are, spend time with them in prayer and in the Word."

As for Christians asking themselves whether they can indeed serve in the military, Chet is emphatic: "If you're in the military, you are in a noble profession—one that is clearly in line with the teaching of the Bible. As such, understand what the Bible says about things like the sanctity of human life. Those who are in service in the military, [which is] a high calling of defending, protecting a way of life so that other human beings can flourish—that's really the reason for the military, and why they should be serving." 🇺🇸

## May a Christian Serve in the Military?

For more information on this topic, check out the podcast and article online: (link is case sensitive) [bit.ly/ChristianServe](https://bit.ly/ChristianServe)

It is also available as a booklet. Contact [laura.kalinus@ocfusa.org](mailto:laura.kalinus@ocfusa.org) to order a copy. Some of the Scripture verses that Chet Arnold discussed in his podcast interview include:

### Thou shall not kill, thou shall not murder

In Exodus 20:13, some versions (KJV) say "thou shalt not kill," while others say, "you shall not murder." What is the difference between killing and murder?

Chet: "If you look back at the original language, the word always used in the Hebrew is translated to mean the unlawful taking of human life. If you look at Numbers 35:16, which reads in the English, "the murderer shall be put to death," the word for murder and murderer is different than the word used for death. The word used for death is used in reference to judicial killings.

### Turn the other cheek; pray for your enemies

Matthew 5:39, 44—"Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other"; also, "...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Chet: "Jesus' words about loving our enemies would seem to contradict this notion that God has given the authority over life and death to human government—which would include police and military in taking human life. But as you look at the original language, the command given here by Jesus is about a very personal interaction between me and one other person who has given me either a physical slap on the face or a verbal assault that's meant to insult."

### Jesus and the centurion

"For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Matthew 8:9-10).

Chet: "There's never any indication in the Scripture that someone is to give up their military service because they've become a follower. They're always encouraged to do things the right way—don't take advantage of your position, protect those who need protection—which is really the primary purpose of having military and police forces."



### Col Chet Arnold, USMC (Ret.): May a Christian Serve?

Be sure to catch Chet in season 1, episode 46 of the OCF Crosspoint podcast as he shares more of his story (link is case sensitive): [bit.ly/chet46](https://bit.ly/chet46)



# 1ST LT KASEY RAI STOUT & 1ST LT TYLER SCOTT STOUT

United States Air Force

## **Came to OCF (Kasey):**

I started with OCF in 2015, as a 3 deg (sophomore) at USAFA.

**(Tyler):** I first attended an OCF event when I went to an open house the day before Basic Cadet Training at USAFA in 2015.

## **Why OCF (Kasey):**

My original draw to OCF at the Air Force Academy was two-fold: I loved that there was a large ministry team that was constantly pouring into the cadets, and the idea of going on three retreats a year was very exciting to me!

**(Tyler):** Upon attending OCF the first time, I quickly felt welcomed and could see God working in this ministry. OCF had such a huge impact on my walk and relationship with Christ while I was at the academy! I love the mission of OCF to equip military members to be leaders for Christ in the mission fields He's called us to.

## **Why a military life (Kasey):**

After graduating high school in 2011 in Colorado Springs, I headed to upstate New York to a Christian school to play volleyball. After fully surrendering my life to Christ, I felt like He had something different in store for me and was calling me to leave the college where I was. I returned home to Colorado, and after months of searching, asking, praying, and meditating on His Word, He called me to

pursue the Air Force Academy. After two more colleges, an internship, four jobs, three moves, and two rounds of applying, I received my appointment one month before I-Day in 2014.

**(Tyler):** Military life allows me to grow in relationship with and empower others to serve! It comes with fun new adventures and places to visit, while getting the opportunity to spread the Gospel around the world.

## **What's on your bucket list (Kasey):**

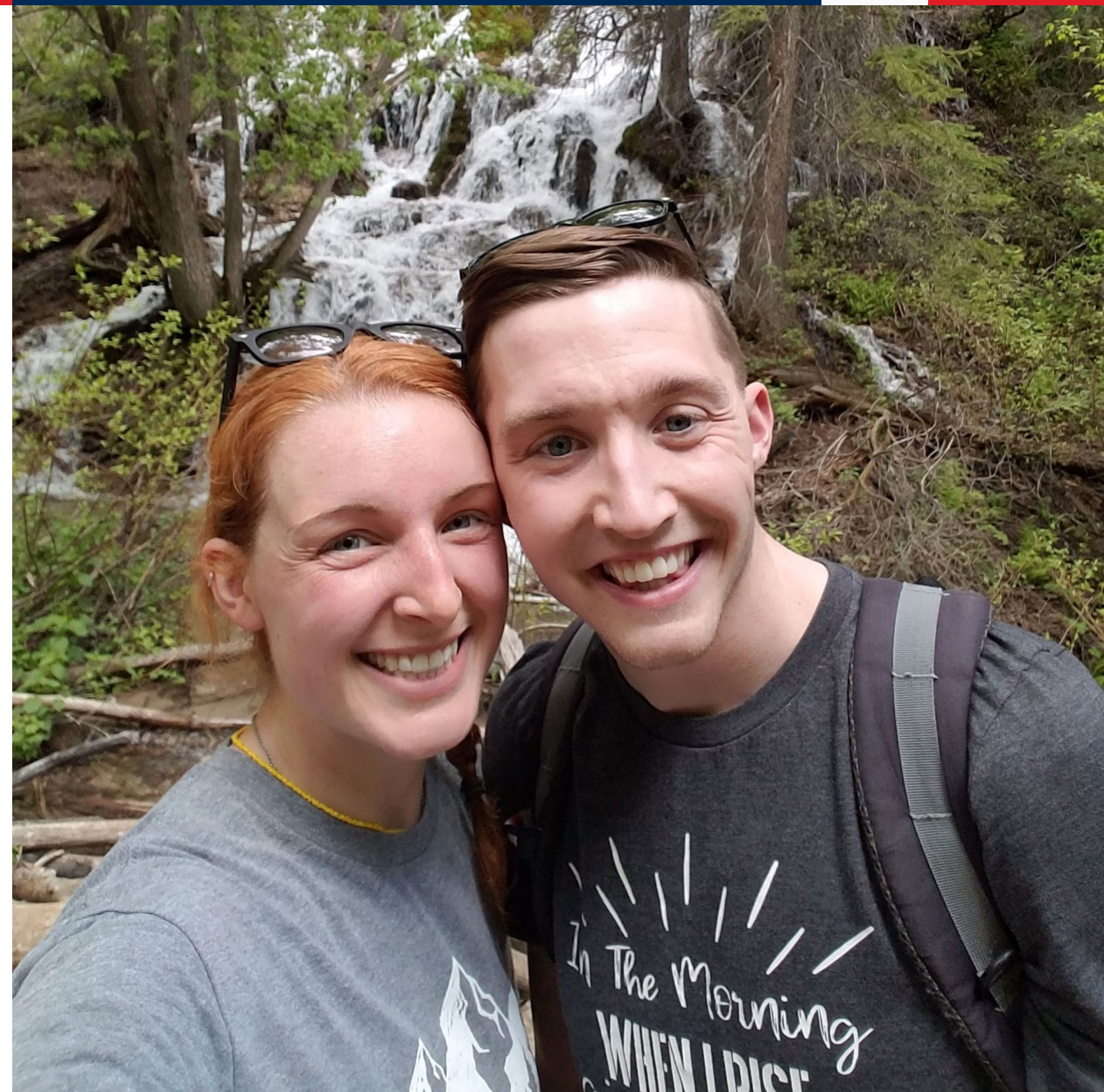
What's left on my bucket list? Get a Dalmatian! (I have wanted one since I was three-years old and had a little rubber Dalmatian toy I named "Little Puppy.") Also, travel across Europe, live in New York City a few years, do missionary work overseas, write/publish a book, be in a flash mob, be fluent in a foreign language, and own a yellow Chevy SSR.

**(Tyler):** I really don't have a bucket list, but I love to travel and try new activities!

## **Best advice given you (Kasey):**

"Never settle." This motivates me to keep reaching and growing personally, professionally, and spiritually.

**(Tyler):** The best advice I've been given is to love God and love others. This was our motto for USAFA OCF.



## **Most memorable places visited**

**(Kasey):** Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, and Cambodia.

**(Tyler):** I've been able to visit Nicaragua and Finland, but the most memorable place I've visited was Glenwood Springs, Colo., as part of my honeymoon with Kasey.

## **Life Bible verse (Kasey):**

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

**(Tyler):** "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). 📖





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