

COMMAND

Christian perspectives on life in the military

FALL 2022 Vol. 71 No. 2

COVER STORY

**'WELL, WHO'S
LOOKING IN
ON YOU, CHAP?'**

*Compassion fatigue can wreak havoc in
the lives of our chaplains if left unchecked.*



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Photo by LCpl Jacob Bertram, USMC

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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.”

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**SCOTT
FISHER**

Executive
Director

WE'RE NOT IN IT TO WIN IT—CHRIST ALREADY WON THE VICTORY

A pastor recently came out with a book called, *Not in It to Win It*. As an overly competitive former fighter pilot, I was taken aback by that title and the intent behind it. I confess I like winning, and I would guess that some of you reading this do too.

The pastor states, "...the church is not here to win. By every human measure, our Savior lost. On purpose. With a purpose. And we are His body." And He calls us to walk in His footsteps.

Rather than calling us to *win something*, He has called to *love someone*, actually everyone, not just the loveable or those of the same ____ (fill in the blank) as we are (1 John 4:11, 20-21). Christ served the ones the world and the church deemed unworthy and died for the "powerless" and "ungodly" (Romans 5:6). *God demonstrated His love* for us by having His Son die for us "while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8).

After first loving the Lord our God, Jesus says the next greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). (If you are looking for a get-out-of-this-commandment-free card by claiming the unlovable person you are thinking of is not your neighbor, read Luke 10:25-37.)

In fact, as we saw in 1 John above, God tells us not to say we love Him if we are not willing to love those around us. So, we must ask ourselves, are our actions toward the unlovable demonstrating the unwavering depth of love He lavished undeservingly upon us?

Second Corinthians 5:18-20 states that God through Christ reconciled us to Himself, not counting our

trespasses against us. We love this part! But then, it continues that He *entrusts* to us His message of reconciliation.

John Stonestreet, president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, recently said that too many believers are *more interested in making a point than making an influence*. Making a point is often easier, doesn't typically require listening and today can be accomplished through the safety and distance of social media. Making an influence is often more challenging, requires more time and effort and frequently requires relationship nurtured over time.

God calls us His "ambassadors for Christ" and that God is appealing to a broken world through us to come back into relationship with Him.

Peter says, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:14-16).

There is so much in these couple of verses, but I will touch briefly only on four points. First, yes, there will be trouble and it is likely to increase for us as we move forward, but regardless of the difficulties and chaos around us, our sovereign God says throughout Scripture, we do not need to fear (Joshua 1:7-9, John 16:33 and 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 13:6).

Second, Christ has to be set apart above *all* else in our lives; this includes our career, our passions and our politics.

Third, do people see a hope in us that supersedes our circumstances and the division and acidity permeating our world?

Fourth, are we attacking defensively or offering a defense with gentleness and respect?

Please don't misunderstand me. We are at war, just not with each other (Ephesians 6:12). And praise God, we don't have to win the battle. God already has through the death and resurrection of His Son, and by His grace He places us on the Victor's side. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he said again, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Are we spreading the fragrance of Christ to a dying world, or accentuating the hatred rampant by sin? Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

As my pastor said, "True love requires a love for truth." As 1 Corinthians 13:6-7 states, love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Our Lord's love was not weak, pointless, or passive; it drove Him to lay down His own self-interests on the cross. This same Lord is now calling us to submit our self-interests and our lives to serving Him and those He has sovereignly placed around us (Philippians 2:3-8).

No matter the odds, let us obey our Lord's calling with joy, confident that **He has already won the victory**. "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). 📖



Photo by SCPO NyxoLyno Cangemi, USCG

‘WELL, WHO’S LOOKING IN ON YOU, CHAP?’

If left unchecked, compassion fatigue can lead to discouragement, depression, and a lack of pastoral identity among our chaplains

BY JOSH JACKSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

During a recent podcast interview with LT Jonathan Gentry, CHC, USN, we were talking about how people can support their chaplains. Once we had stopped recording the interview, our conversation about chaplain support continued and included a brief chat about compassion fatigue.

He shared this insight with me: “Anybody who provides any type of care to others is usually the worst able at taking care of themselves. Sometimes we need people to check in on us. One of our sailors asked about that one time. She said, ‘Well, who’s looking in on you, chap?’”

It was this conversation with Jonathan that prompted us to focus on crafting a variety of chaplain-related content in this issue of Command, both for chaplains and for those serving alongside chaplains.

The following pages will briefly examine compassion fatigue, offer ways you can pray for chaplains, share stories of how the role of chaplain is a lonely one, and inform you of OCF’s perspective on supporting chaplains as outlined in the OCF Handbook.

CH(LTC) TODD CHENEY, USA, RECALLS A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FIVE-DAY span while serving as the coverage chaplain for the combat support on a deployment to Iraq in 2008.

“We had a tank rollover that injured four Marines, an infantryman who was killed by a sniper (our med team worked on him for 45 minutes to revive him), and a medic who was going through a very difficult divorce who shot himself through his left shoulder to expedite a trip home because his soon-to-be ex-wife would not allow him to talk to their daughter on her fourth birthday,” said Cheney.

The series of events left an indelible mark, draining him “emotionally, physically, and spiritually after a week of non-stop pastoral care.”

The exhaustion Cheney described is known as “compassion fatigue,” which is the result of frequent and cumulative exposure to trauma and stress.

The National Library of Medicine defines compassion fatigue as stress resulting from exposure to a traumatized individual. It’s the convergence of secondary traumatic stress and cumulative burnout, a state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by a depleted ability to cope with one’s everyday environment.

Because compassion fatigue isn’t always evident and often manifests in different ways and to varying degrees, studies suggest the rate of compassion fatigue could range from 40%-85%.

CH(COL) Bob Phillips, USA, has seen and experienced firsthand how compassion fatigue impacts chaplains differently, saying it can span the spectrum from feeling mildly discouraged and slightly disoriented for a

few days, to a total breakdown, depression, questioning of one’s calling to ministry, negatively impacting family relationships, and loss of pastoral identity.

“I have seen chaplains who returned from deployment whose lives became totally unraveled,” said Phillips, who also serves on the OCF Council. “Their experience with trauma, death, and combat ministry left them emotionally wounded and spiritually exhausted. Some doubted their faith, some left the ministry. Some recovered, some didn’t.”

Phillips recalled one chaplain friend whom he described as being a very pastoral and caring man before a difficult deployment in which his friend was “surrounded by death” left him overwhelmed and suffering from compassion fatigue.

“Our paths crossed while we were down range and we met for dinner one night. I was completely taken aback at how calloused and hard he had become,” said Phillips. “He was almost uncaring about the deaths of his soldiers. It’s ‘business as usual around here’ was his comment to me. He said, ‘That’s what we do here, we fight and our soldiers die.’”

“I knew he was hurting but I also knew that the mess hall was not the place to start a discussion about what was going on,” Phillips said. “I also knew that his callousness was the way he was coping and that was what kept him doing his job.”

Phillips went on to say his own experiences with compassion fatigue were mild, leaving him a bit disoriented and a little depressed for a few days.

One experience occurred while he was enrolled in a one-year hospital chaplain residency at Duke Medical Center in North Carolina. Phillips was the on-call duty chaplain one evening.

“During that night, in a twelve-hour period, I was called to six death visits. Three of them were very traumatic and I can still remember

How does OCF support the chaplaincy?

OCF encourages its members to reach out to their chapel staff, build good relationships with them, and seek to bless the chaplain teams whenever possible. While we are careful to say that we support the chaplaincy, we do not ask members to support a particular chaplain or chapel program. Supporting the chaplaincy can be done regardless of whether the doctrine and theology of a particular chaplain or religious affairs professional are Christian, since they remain responsible for implementing the commander's religious program.

12 ways you can support the chaplaincy

1. Learn the name of your chaplain(s).
2. Make an appointment to meet with at least one chaplain a month.
3. Note the vision/goal of the chaplain team. Learn their focus.
4. Invite your chaplain/team to your unit, workspace, etc. Make them welcome.
5. Pray for your chaplain, their team, their family, etc.
6. Make regular visits to your chaplain. Become a friend.
7. Invite them to your home, to a meal out, to your Bible study, etc.
8. Plan for them to sit with you during mandatory events, dinners, or socials.
9. Once you know the chaplains, try to recommend the right chaplain for those in need.
10. Take a snack, a drink, or other item to your chaplain. Show that you love them.
11. Remember the civilians and contractors who support the chaplaincy's work. Learn their names, demonstrate love to them, and encourage them.
12. If appropriate, volunteer to be part of advisory-type councils or committees. Bear your influence wisely.

From Appendix E in the OCF Handbook



DOWNLOAD A COPY: Read more about supporting the chaplaincy in Chapter 17 of the OCF Handbook:

www.ocfusa.org/handbook/chapter17

them vividly,” he said. “For several days afterward, I was withdrawn, discouraged, feeling numb, lacked energy, and questioning my ability to be a chaplain. Fortunately, these feelings lasted only a few days and I was able to regroup, focus, and return to my regular routine.”

At other times in his career, Phillips said it was difficult not to take the problems of others personally.

“One night I was unable to get to sleep because I couldn’t stop thinking about a couple I was counseling through some marital difficulties,” he said. “I came to realize that I was owning their troubles, dysfunctions, wounds, and pain. I was allowing the deep emotion of it all to impact me personally. I also realized that for some of these

soldiers and couples, I was working harder to resolve their distress than they were.”

After retiring from 26 years of chaplain ministry, CH(COL) Marc Gauthier, USA (Ret.), says he had fatigue he was not even aware of. “I felt much like a turtle tipped upside down. I knew I was there but didn’t know how I got there.”

He explained that while going through a mediation, the facilitator looked at him and said, “Marc, you need to find someone to grieve with you!”

“It caught me totally off guard and I thought, ‘And who would that be?’” he recalled. “However, I prayed that God would provide someone, and He graciously provided people and

memorial service. The day after the service one of our chaplain assistants committed suicide. We found him in his room,” he said, adding that his supervisory chaplain made several extra trips just to provide pastoral care to the unit ministry. “He set the standard for chaplains caring for other chaplains when they’ve gone through a dark time. supervisory chaplains need to care for their own.”

When Ch(Lt Col) David Merrifield, USAF, was deployed to Iraq in 2009, his wife immediately noted a change in his demeanor while connecting via Skype.

“We had some very long days with counseling out the door for several weeks in a row as well as a few tragic events,” he recalled. “My wife immediately noticed something

“I FELT MUCH LIKE A TURTLE TIPPED UPSIDE DOWN. I KNEW I WAS THERE BUT DIDN’T KNOW HOW I GOT THERE.”

CH(COL) MARC GAUTHIER, USA (RET.)

opportunities to process a backlog of grief that has accumulated over the years.”

The NLM goes on to say that compassion fatigue can impact standards of patient care, relationships with colleagues, or lead to more serious mental health conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, or depression.

Gauthier recounted another instance in which his unit had experienced a number of deaths through several months and was supporting in a rear detachment capacity.

“We have our first combat deaths in [Operation Iraqi Freedom], and I was a part of the notification team, providing follow-on care for two spouses and conducting the

and wondered what was wrong with me. We hadn’t had comms in a few days and she could see and hear that I was different.”

Merrifield said he apparently made such comments to her as “I didn’t think I was making a difference and that I didn’t think I cared about people’s problems as much, and that I didn’t have enough hours in the day to walk people through the Word like I knew was necessary for real help and hope.

“Before this, I had never noted a lack of concern for people since becoming a chaplain in 2005.”



Photo by MSgt Kyle King, USAF



Photo by MSgt Kyle King, USAF

4 Ways To Pray For Chaplains

Here are four ways you can pray over chaplains by praying the prayers of Colossians 1:9-12, Ephesians 1:15-19, and Ephesians 6:19-20. For the complete list, visit ocfusa.org/2010/10/praying-chaplains/

1. Spiritually

- Pray for chaplains to faithfully minister God's Word.
- Pray for spiritual protection for chaplains.
- Pray that each chaplain's relationship with God will be what it should be.

2. Relationally

- Pray for chaplains to find strength in the Lord when they are hurt (spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically).
- Pray for chaplains to hold themselves accountable to other Christians in order to avoid temptation, including the scourge of pornographic material.

3. Personally

- Pray for every chaplain to participate in a local Bible study with other Christians.
- Pray for chaplains to have the ability to focus on the needs of others.
- Pray for the chaplains you know by name.

4. Professionally

- Pray for deployed chaplains to grasp at the deepest level that God is sending them downrange for a purpose.
- Pray for chaplains to have favor in their chain of command.
- Pray for chaplains as they do spiritual warfare in places others can't go.

Because compassion fatigue affects everyone differently, it's not always easy to pinpoint a single solution to dealing with or healing from such stress, but self-awareness and the support of a community of believers appear to be good places to start for most.

Several years ago, seven OCF military chaplains were interviewed for an article in *Command* magazine titled "A Questionable Life." When asked how chaplains can deal with the gravity of the information that they heard from those they counsel, CH(LTC) Kenneth Stice, USA, said:

"Establish accountability partners to share the burden. Without breaking confidentiality or privacy, it is possible to have others agree to pray and listen to your load. Pour out your heart and soul to God. I have found the honesty of the Psalmists to be the ticket to 'getting real' with God," Stice said. "I lay it out for Him in my journal—where I can collect and express my thoughts—just myself and Him. Months later, when I flip through those pages, I can then appreciate how God was working on me and through me to do something. It also helps me share private expressions that I don't think anyone else would understand, but He always does!"

Merrifield says some of his compassion fatigue "symptoms" were mitigated by several intentional steps, which included: "Extended prayer, fasting, time in the Word (usually the Psalms), encouragement from loved ones and mentors who disciplined and counseled me. Also, more sleep, additional exercise, and sharing the 24/7 on-call hours with additional chaplain partnerships."

Gauthier says grieving can be a tricky thing for chaplains.

"When a death or crisis comes, chaplains need to put their emotions on hold so they can provide the ministry that is required," he said. "Usually, they intend to find a time when things slow down to grieve, but instead, it just gets stuffed."

MORE CHAPLAIN-RELATED CONTENT IN THE INTEGRATED FAITH PROJECT

For resources, Scripture references, and study questions related to the topic Supporting the Chaplaincy, visit online: ocfusa.org/ifproject/community/chaplaincy/

A RETREAT FOR ALL CHAPLAINS


The OCF Chaplains' Family Retreat at Spring Canyon provides restoration, recreation, and refreshment for military chaplains and their families. For more information about the upcoming retreat in May, visit springcanyon.org.

It's also important for those in the military to keep their eyes on their chaplains, said Gauthier.

"When they are aware of times they are redlining in their care for their units and families, reach out, be a listening ear," he said. "Pray with them and be a Christian brother or sister to them. Grieving is best done in loving, caring community."

Gentry echoed that sentiment, saying, "Get past the basic pleasantries and really check in on them. Sometimes we need that. We have a lot on our hearts that we can't share with anybody. Just ask, 'How are you doing? How can I pray for you?'"

Although he admits he's just getting started in his role as a chaplain, Gentry offered this advice to other chaplains: "Take leave when you can. Take care of yourself. You're going to be no good as a chaplain if you aren't in Christ and if you aren't taking care of yourself."

And to everyone else? "Pray for us. Pray for wisdom for all chaplains. Pray that we minister well," he said. "I have no clue what I'm going to hear when a sailor or Marine walks into my office." 

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DVIDS photo

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USS Somerset OCF photo



Fort Benning OCF photo

▲ Fort Benning OCF

Ministry within the transient military community makes for countless opportunities to watch the Lord provide the right people at the right time to continue His labors. Fort Benning OCF is no exception! Before PCSing this fall, OCF contacts Freddy & Sara Luna hosted new 2LTs for lunch and games, and the Lunas passed the baton of local leadership to new Area Coordinators David & Marie Baum in the process (with support from the Krehs from USMA OCF!). Shortly thereafter, the Baums hosted a Pray-Discover-Obey to follow the Lord's leading for ministry at Fort Benning.

▲ USS Somerset OCF

Earlier this summer, LT Edwin Handley, CHC, USN, reached out to Col Larry Simpson, USAF (Ret.), OCF's Pacific Northwest Regional Coordinator, expressing a desire to start a Bible study.

The two prayed and planned from states away, and Edwin has seen enthusiastic officers and enlisted gather for study and fellowship multiple times ever since. These men and women have shared testimonies, discussed topics such as servant leadership and being people of faith per Hebrews 11, and, yes, enjoyed Chick-fil-A while hearing from OCFer, former Army officer, and now Chick-fil-a operator Rick Preciado!



Schofield Barracks OCF photo

▲ Schofield Barracks OCF

“Ministry on Schofield has been growing like a wildfire!” shared 2LT Audrey Dillman, USA. “We have an amazing community of young officers and their families that meet the first Friday of the month on the North Shore.”

This young OCF group enjoys themed potlucks during each of their monthly gatherings, and group members take turns leading devotionals and discussions. Audrey shared the following prayer requests for Schofield Barracks OCF:

1. Continued guidance as our group matures and seeks direction.
2. Encouragement and peace as many of our members head into intense training cycles.
3. Opportunities to continue engaging with the Hawaiian community around us.



Colorado Springs OCF photo

▲ Colorado Springs OCF

The Colorado Springs OCF group recently hosted its area-wide picnic. The day was a great example of the broader OCF community coming together. More than 100 singles, couples, families, retirees, volunteers, members, and staff of various military backgrounds all gathered to meet new friends and reconnect with old ones. The Leavenworth team provided fantastic BBQ, and growing local OCF groups were well represented.

MINISTRY IN ACTION



Hampton Roads Region OCF photo

◀ Hampton Roads Region OCF

“Watch out for pirates” is not a phrase you’d expect to hear in your OCF small group, but OCFers in the Hampton Roads Region in Virginia now know there’s a precedent for pirate sightings. Two OCF small groups in the area got together over the summer for a day on the water and had an unexpected surprise. One crew was enjoying their time together aboard Local Leader Clay Thomas’ boat when a second boat full of other OCFers posing as pirates and wielding fake swords suddenly appeared! The laughter that ensued was only a small portion of the laughs these friends share on a weekly basis when they gather for meals, Bible study, and fellowship.

Stuttgart OCF (bottom)

“While the Stuttgart area has a thriving Men’s Bible Study, we have struggled for the past year to get anything else started,” shared Maj John Gerlach, USMC, local leader of one of the Stuttgart OCF groups. “This summer provided a unique opportunity to minister to U.S. Army ROTC cadets who come to EUCOM and AFRICOM for follow-on summer training before their senior year in college.”

Two ways to pray:

1. Pray for these cadets as they conclude training and prepare for senior year, graduation, and commissioning.
2. Pray for Stuttgart OCFers as many of them face family struggles, which can often prove more challenging while stationed overseas.

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Stuttgart OCF photo

MAJOR CHRIS REARDON

United States Marine Corps

Came to OCF:

Through my time at the U.S. Naval Academy. One of my company mates introduced me to then-Capt Craig Clemans, USMC, who was an OCF rep. I had a lot of questions about the Christian faith, especially the concept of killing in battle. Craig led me through the salvation prayer and from there on, I became affiliated with OCF throughout my service.

Why OCF:

This group of Christian military leaders allows you to network with other like-minded individuals on a spiritual and professional level. At the same time, you build deep friendships, support, and ultimately the wisdom and strength to be a catalyst for influencing the military community to understand and know Jesus—especially from serving inside the government/military services.

Why a Military Life:

I dreamed of being an astronaut, following in the footsteps of my boyhood hero Neil Armstrong. Or becoming a Navy fighter pilot, after being inspired by the famous “Top Gun” movie. I watched a lot of other military movies, had veterans mentor me while in Boy Scouts, and was involved in Marine Corps JROTC in high school, where I was introduced to what it means to be a Marine Corps Officer and join the U.S. Naval Academy. After 9/11 especially, I was inspired to be part of the “President’s 911” and serve in one of the most elite military organizations in the world. I still have a passion for serving my beloved country and being part of protecting others through my service. I also

love the adventure, the significance, and the amazing men and women I serve alongside each and every day.

What’s on your bucket list:

I want to raise my pre-K son to be a dedicated man of God who will one day change the world. I want to serve in the military/government for the long haul to influence important national security and social issues that will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of many. I also want to grow the non-profit organization I started, Freedom Fitness America, to integrate physical fitness and outdoor adventure racing for the military audience and beyond with spiritual fitness from a secular and Christian perspective in order to be a life-changing catalyst in the world.

About your identity in Christ:

When I gave my life to Christ in 2005, I asked God for strength to overcome a sinful temptation, which He did. I also asked God that I might feel His love, which He did as well. From that point forward I knew God was real and have seen Him act in my life more times than I can count. He has also spoken to me through many various people about my life calling literally all over the world through the span of more than a decade, which inspires me forward to a blessed future fought through difficult battles.

Life Bible Verse:

Psalm 78:72, NASB: “David shepherded the nation of Israel from the integrity of his heart and guided them with the skillfulness of his hands.” In other words, both character



and competence must be operational in our leadership if others are to trust and follow us to accomplish much of anything. Anything less than both will sabotage our leadership. I desire to be like King David in my generation and he is my biblical hero.

Tunes You’re Listening To:

I listen to Christian contemporary music, Elevation Worship, Skillet, and patriotic country songs on YouTube such as “Mr. Red, White,

and Blue,” “The Ones Who Didn’t Make it Back Home,” “God’s Country,” “American Soldier,” “Made in America,” and “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue” among others. I also like listening to rock singles such as “Eye of the Tiger,” “Thunderstruck,” “Back in Black,” “Highway to the Danger Zone,” and “Amazing Grace” by Dropkick Murphys to motivate me! Lastly, I listen to a lot of Military Life YouTube channel for motivational military music playlists. 🎧



WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO INTEGRATE FAITH AND PROFESSION?

For some people, that can perhaps be an ambiguous question. Maj Chris Reardon, USMC, unpacks what that looks like for him as a Marine and shares some practical application.

**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 Maj Chris Reardon, USMC.

In his passionate desire to live for God, family, and country as a Marine Corps officer, Major Chris Reardon integrates his faith and profession through the daily life opportunities that arise from interacting with others or from his personal interests in life.

While he saw friends sharing Bible tracts with strangers on the street, Reardon said he felt the Lord putting it on his heart to use relationships to share his faith instead.

"I was very fortunate that I had mentors who had taught me that as well," he said.

Having dreamt as a youth about joining the military, being an astronaut, or a Navy fighter pilot (after watching *Top Gun*), Reardon said he was encouraged by his middle school counselor to check out Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) in high school. It was an interaction with a retired Marine Corps sergeant, who gave him a catalog for the U.S. Naval Academy, that stoked his military career interest toward attending a service academy.

"I decided I really wanted to be a be part of the Marine Corps...I didn't want to be a pilot anymore. I wanted to go on the ground side," Reardon said. "I was really drawn to combat leadership, the idea of being the first in, taking the lumps with your guys."

Inspired from influences such as a Boy Scout chaplain who was a World War II Navy veteran or impacts from his own religious upbringing, his desire to be a combat leader began to take on a spiritual emphasis as a servant leader.

"I had a desire to serve God, but nobody really taught me about what it meant to have this deep relationship with Christ,"

said Reardon. "From a spiritual perspective, I grew up Roman Catholic. I went to CCD classes at my church—a Sunday school type of thing. But I honestly didn't learn a lot—just a few principles here and there."

Reardon went on to say he was done with religious church life—calling it "very boring." However, during his first couple years at the Naval Academy, he began meeting people who were really serious about their faith.

"I was invited to a Bible study by other midshipmen, and they were all Christians. There was something unique about them. I saw something different, and I couldn't put my finger on it," he said. "I started realizing that there came a point where what I had learned as a kid growing up was not going matter anymore, that I was on my own as an adult. And especially going in the military at 22-23 years old, I'm going to be down range leading Marines in combat. I have to make some decisions. And one of the decisions I had to make was, what am I going to do about this question of God?"

Reardon sought out an officer for insight: "He honestly didn't talk to me about [the down range issue] as much he listened to me talk about my faith background."

"And he said, 'You know, I think the biggest issue here is I don't think you have a real relationship with Christ.' And we walked through what that meant," said Reardon. "I was really just trying to be this good person who had never truly committed my life to Christ."

"All of a sudden, I just knew in my heart that I'm going to live for eternity. I'm either going to heaven or hell, and I want to go to heaven—and that Jesus was the answer," he

recalled. “It was about a complete decision to turn my whole life over to God. Whatever that meant, whatever it cost, I had to do it.”

Reardon also underscored the relational importance of investing in the lives of others, recalling a time when a company officer disciplined him and helped launch a “trajectory of God leading me in terms of my military career, but also...where I knew that I was called to be a light for Him inside the military.”

“I learned the importance of living out my job with a spirit of excellence, doing the job to the best I possibly could, building rapport with people, learning them, being their friend, serving my leaders just as God called me to do,” Reardon said.

One of the most difficult aspects of living out the dual calling of military service and the Christlike calling of a believer, said Reardon, “is this idea from a politically correct standpoint that when it comes to sharing your faith, people don’t want you to share your faith because they feel it’s something very private. And if you’re talking to somebody about your faith, then you’re pushing it on somebody.”

“And especially in terms of the military, it could almost seem like you just have to go along with the crowd and do whatever the crowd’s doing, because if you’re going against it, you’re not going to be good.”

Chided by a peer for not laughing at a dirty joke that had been told to the group, Reardon was told “if you can’t learn to laugh at a dirty joke, you’re not going to cuss...you’re never going to fit in.”

Reardon admits “there was this temptation at that moment, ‘maybe he’s right. If I’m really going to be successful in the Marine Corps, I have to be like everybody else.’ I made a decision at that moment, though: ‘Lord, I don’t know what you have for me, but I’m going to do things Your way—not the world’s way.’”

How was Reardon able to work through the struggle between faith and wanting to

fit in? He said it was first the conviction to “set Christ apart as Lord” in his heart (1 Peter 3:15, AMP). “You have to determine that whatever do, you’re going to serve God, because if you don’t make that decision, the world will always blow you off course,” he said. “Step number two: you have to be flexible and understand your culture, like where you are in your rank, what can you do, what you can’t do.”


Reardon’s encouragement toward Christlike leadership to Christians serving in the military community is to think creatively. He said it’s important to be able to share biblical truths in relating to others without necessarily reciting chapter and verse, adding that leaders should not cross the line into proselytizing, which is not allowed in the military.

“Somebody asks me a question, ‘Hey, what do you believe about this?’ And I say, ‘Well, I believe this,’ I’m actually speaking a biblical principle. I just didn’t say it came from John chapter 4. And they’re like, ‘Oh, that’s really interesting.’”

One example of a biblical truth that Reardon has used in conversation without quoting verse and chapter is leadership, citing a variety of principles contained within a John Maxwell leadership Bible Reardon has.

“One of the things I learned was this idea of influencing—influencing my leaders my peers, my junior leaders,” he said. “As I started learning those principles and understanding where they came from in the Bible, I was able to start articulating those principles and live them out.”

Like so many spiritual principles, he said, you have to live it before you can share it. That way, when someone asks about his actions, it offers a chance for him to share those biblical truths and principles.

“How do I use my talents, my time, my treasure, my position to make an impact? It doesn’t mean you have to force your faith on people, but you can do something to make the environment better.” 



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