

PRAYING

» FOR THOSE WHO «

SERVE

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Our oldest son now serves in the United States military, and we have often wanted to understand what he feels and experiences as he serves his country. We will never fully be able to “walk in his boots,” to comprehend all the struggles and challenges he faces, but as we converse with him and observe his activities, we get a glimpse of what our military personnel face every day. We have gained a new appreciation for what we so flippantly took for granted over the years. Because of our great love for our son, we have committed to pray for him on a daily basis. Here are some ways we found that we can pray for our servicemen and -women.

SAFETY

The psalmist often points to our safety and refuge in God; He hides and protects those who trust in Him (Psalm 91:1-4). Our servicemen and -women endanger their lives by defending our freedoms. They are placed in harm’s way; thus it is easy to pray to our Heavenly Father for their physical safety. However, the most dangerous place your military loved one can be is away from Christ. The first and most important item of prayer is salvation; if your serviceman or -woman is a Christian, then pray for continued spiritual safety.

STRENGTH

Often God uses burdens and difficulties to carry us to Christ by showing us that we are not self-sufficient. Difficulties can be spiritual assets, not liabilities, that God sends to make us better not bitter. This is what Paul described in 2 Corinthians 12 when he said in our weakness, we become strong. Jesus prayed in John 17 for His follow-

ers to be protected from evil. Jesus doesn’t want His followers removed from the world, but He wants them to be delivered from Satan. In the model prayer in Matthew 6:13 when Jesus asked the Father not to lead us into temptation but to deliver us from evil, the words “deliver us” have the idea of delivering us out of or preserving us through. Thus, during temptation, God promises His protection and His power for our spiritual preservation. We don’t need to worry what man can do to us when we’re on God’s side (Psalm 118:6). Pray for physical and spiritual strength in times of difficulty.

LONELINESS

Military personnel face loneliness when they are away from their families during deployments and temporary duty assignments. Those left behind face the aloneness of being away from their spouse, parent, siblings, and friends for months or even years at a time. Pray for

comfort to soothe the wounds of loneliness. God told Joshua to be strong, courageous, and fearless, because he could be sure of God's constant presence (Joshua 1:9).

Also when Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he was imprisoned under the Roman emperor Nero. He expressed his loneliness but claimed the Lord's presence and strength (2 Timothy 4:16-17). It is no fun being alone and away from friends and family in a harsh and unfamiliar environment. Pray that service personnel and their families will depend on God who is always present.

COMMUNITY

Military personnel miss their church families back home. Christians in the military, as in other secular places of employment, sometimes find it difficult connecting with a group of believers who share their values. Pray that our Christian military men and women find fellowship in a community of believers when they are away from their church congregation and small groups.

EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES

Christians who serve in the military desire that their comrades come to faith in Christ. Even so, Paul encouraged Timothy to grow spiritually so that others



could see his spiritual progress and imitate it (1 Timothy 4:15). Pray that Christian service people have opportunities to be able to present the gospel clearly and share the hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). To most people "hope" means merely to want something to happen without having any real assurance. But for the Christian, hope is a living hope that has life and therefore can give life to us (John 14:6).

GOD'S PURPOSE

One of the greatest challenges of Christians is to trust God in all circumstances. Those in the military face the same types of challenges as everyone else, as well as some challenges unique to their situations. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. We must trust God even when evil abounds. We must also realize that God uses evil to produce good. This is the lesson Joseph taught his brothers (Genesis 50).

Though sold into slavery, later in life Joseph revealed that in spite of his brothers' evil intentions, God meant it all for good (Genesis 50:20). When people have forsaken us, when we've prayed for God to intervene and nothing happens, it's easy to get discouraged and to lose hope. Joseph's story reminds us that God has a purpose for our lives. Pray that your loved one realizes God has a purpose for his or her life.

GOD'S PLAN

When we depend upon God and His plan, we will be fully satisfied. David said, in Psalm 37:25, that he had never seen the righteous person forsaken. God also satisfies with His presence in times of danger. God's presence will give encouragement. God's presence encouraged Moses to stand against Pharaoh. *I will be with you*, God said in Exodus 3:12. In Genesis 31:3, the promise of God's presence encouraged Jacob to return to his homeland. A little girl was working to memorize Psalm 23:1 and said, "The Lord is my shepherd; what more shall I want?" She may have misquoted the verse,

but she got the meaning correct. Christians are never in situations the Lord is not aware of (Hebrews 13:5). Pray that your serviceman or -woman realizes God's plan for his or her life.

CONCLUSION

Throughout your serviceman's or servicewoman's years of service and ever changing military career, your prayers may evolve as their specific needs change. Though you may never walk in your loved one's shoes, praying for your special serviceman or servicewoman can be a rewarding experience. Through prayer you mature as a Christian knowing and learning that God is in control. Prayer journaling is an excellent way to see the answered prayers, and also the journal reveals your heart-felt cries to God. So, whether your serviceman or servicewoman pounds a dusty desert, sails the open seas, glides through murky waters, soars over enemy territory, or crawls behind enemy lines, God sees, God knows, God hears, and God cares.



After 30 years in the pastorate of FWB churches in the Southeast, Jeff serves as Professor of Biblical Studies and Program Coordinator for theological studies and the MA in Theology and Ministry program at Welch College. Terri serves there as Academic Office Manager. They are the proud parents of two sons, Captain J. Drew Cockrell of the United States Air Force and Joel Cockrell, Artist and Professor of Studio Arts and Graphic Design.