

Daddy, I Don't Want You to Go Back!

Cindy Wesley

This article is the first in a new series called Hope for Homefront Heroes, dealing with issues faced by spouses of deployed servicemen in support of the Global War on Terror.

Tears were streaming down her face. Her daddy said, "What is the matter, Honey? Why are you crying?" She said, "Daddy, don't you know?" He said, "No darling, what is it?" She pressed into his big chest and sobbed, "I don't want you to go back!" Many of us have probably witnessed this with our own children and husbands. I was that little girl 35 years ago, telling my dad that I didn't want him to go back to Vietnam.

Years later, tears flowed in our house when my husband, Eric, was preparing to return to Iraq after having been gone for a year. The day Eric left will always remain vivid in my mind; as moments ticked away, we videotaped Eric with the kids. They clung to him, and we said heart-wrenching things.

With this being our second yearlong deployment, we knew all too well the dangers that lay ahead. This time, though, as a battalion commander, Eric would be out daily in his HMMWV (High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) in an area that includes the town of Tarmiyah-part of the Sunni triangle.

I knew all the facts and figures; how many lives the previous battalion had lost due to IEDs, the hours of casualty notification, and also that Eric's predecessor had been targeted by the very same people he was meeting with to help democracy take hold.

War is not fun. Worry, anticipatory grief, and taking care of others, all take their toll. Thankfully, Eric returned in late January of '05, but he had lost brothers in arms, and some heroic Americans' lives were forever altered due to serious injuries. The human response is to say, "We have served our country and done our duty (the whole family), maybe we need to rethink all of this and consider getting out." We will have a high school freshman this year, an eleven-year-old, and our youngest, a girl, is eight. Will there be an end to this, or does the Lord want us to continue to do this to our family?

The answer is...PERHAPS. The longer I live, the more I realize that life is not about us, and that most of life is difficult. God will not waste hardship or suffering. First Peter 1:6-7 says, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

This article is the first in a new series titled, "Hope for Homefront Heroes," in which we will explore aspects of the challenges for those left behind. The articles will be written by those who are currently experiencing deployment, or have experienced it recently. As the

kickoff to this series, I want to share a few of the positives that we have experienced as a family when Eric was deployed. I would also like to offer a few words of encouragement.

Our Children Learn Life is Not About Temporal Satisfaction, & it's Not About Them

Recently, when we had lost three soldiers in eight days, one of my children complained about something that I couldn't do at the time. I said, "I am sorry; a soldier has just died, and his family is very sad and I need to be with them. You will need to be patient-I can't be with you now." That may sound harsh, but it was the reality of the situation.

Looking back on the last year, I get emotional at what my children have experienced. But, I truly believe they were all life lessons that the Lord will use in their lives in a powerful way.

We get into some very good discussions with our oldest children about the geopolitical situation in the world, and what is occurring. They realize that we are in the fight of our lives, much like we were in WWII against the Nazis and fascism, and in the Cold War years against communism. Now, post 9/11, it is against Islamic extremism. (I recommend you read Tony Blankley's book, *The West's Last Chance-Will We Win the Clash of Civilizations?*)

Going Deeper

I do not wish deployments, danger, or hardship on anyone, but I cherish the sweetness that comes in my relationship with the Lord when Eric is away. We military wives are blessed because we are forced to come to the place that Jesus is enough. As I would read Scripture every night, I would pray the Psalms for Eric and his men. Doing this gave me restful, peaceful sleep, not knowing what the next day might bring. "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14).

Listening to praise music and focusing on the Lord in times of difficulty is healing and therapeutic-"Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness" (Psalm 89:15-16).

"Each day has enough trouble of its own," as the Lord said, so I would try to focus on each hour at first, and then each day-one day at a time. If I looked much beyond that I would be overwhelmed with the uncertainty those days could bring. One of my favorite verses that has sustained me during Eric's absences, particularly in combat, is from Lamentations: "Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23).

The Field is Ripe and Souls are Hungry

I wonder what people who don't know Him, and don't have the hope of eternity, do in our circumstances. I am not sure how they survive. But one thing is certain-they are hungry for hope, prayer, words of comfort, and spiritual things.

Use this time to speak into people's lives about the hope you have in Him. Remember there are no atheists in foxholes and none at home either, desperately waiting. We have heard countless stories of men coming to know God while in combat, and being baptized. Who is planting seeds with the wives and families back home so that they are receptive to their loved one's newfound faith? I challenge you to reach out! Help bring a Wives of Warriors conference to your installation, or offer to start a unit prayer group and open it up to everybody-you may be surprised by who comes.

I knew of one young lieutenant's wife in our OCF group at Fort Stewart who invited a different family (the wife and children) in her husband's platoon over every Friday night-no matter who, not matter what rank. That is reaching out, feeding their lives and hearts and souls-and giving them hope. Women are hungry to be listened to and drawn out during a combat deployment; they are just as lonely and scared as you are. Let your kids catch your vision of being "Jesus with skin on" to other families.

Renew and Revamp

One thing that aided my outlook profoundly was taking time to exercise. Not only did exercise help my physical frame and keep my stress in check mentally, but it also gave me a great time to talk to the Lord and meditate and pray. Many of my friends have gone back to college, learned something new, or picked up a new hobby. You will grow and change while your husband is gone...make sure it is for the better. Be intentional about it. Make him proud of how you used the time he was gone.

Final Thoughts

I try to view my husband's being in the military as not just a job but as a calling, and something to which our whole family has been called. This is our portion. And while it might not be the "life of my dreams," it is the life God has given us-all of us in the Wesley family.

The Steven Curtis Chapman song "Bring It On" has challenged and inspired me when Eric was deployed. It talks about how troubled times can drive us to the One who is strong. May we (the Wesley and OCF families) continue to be salt and light to a military that is giving over and over again-sometimes at great personal cost.

Cindy Wesley is an army brat and a second generation OCFer. While her husband, LTC Eric Wesley, was in battalion command she served as the Family Readiness Group's senior advisor. Eric recently changed out of battalion command at Ft. Riley, where he now serves as the 1st Infantry Division's G3--he also is the OCF area coordinator. They are blessed with three children.