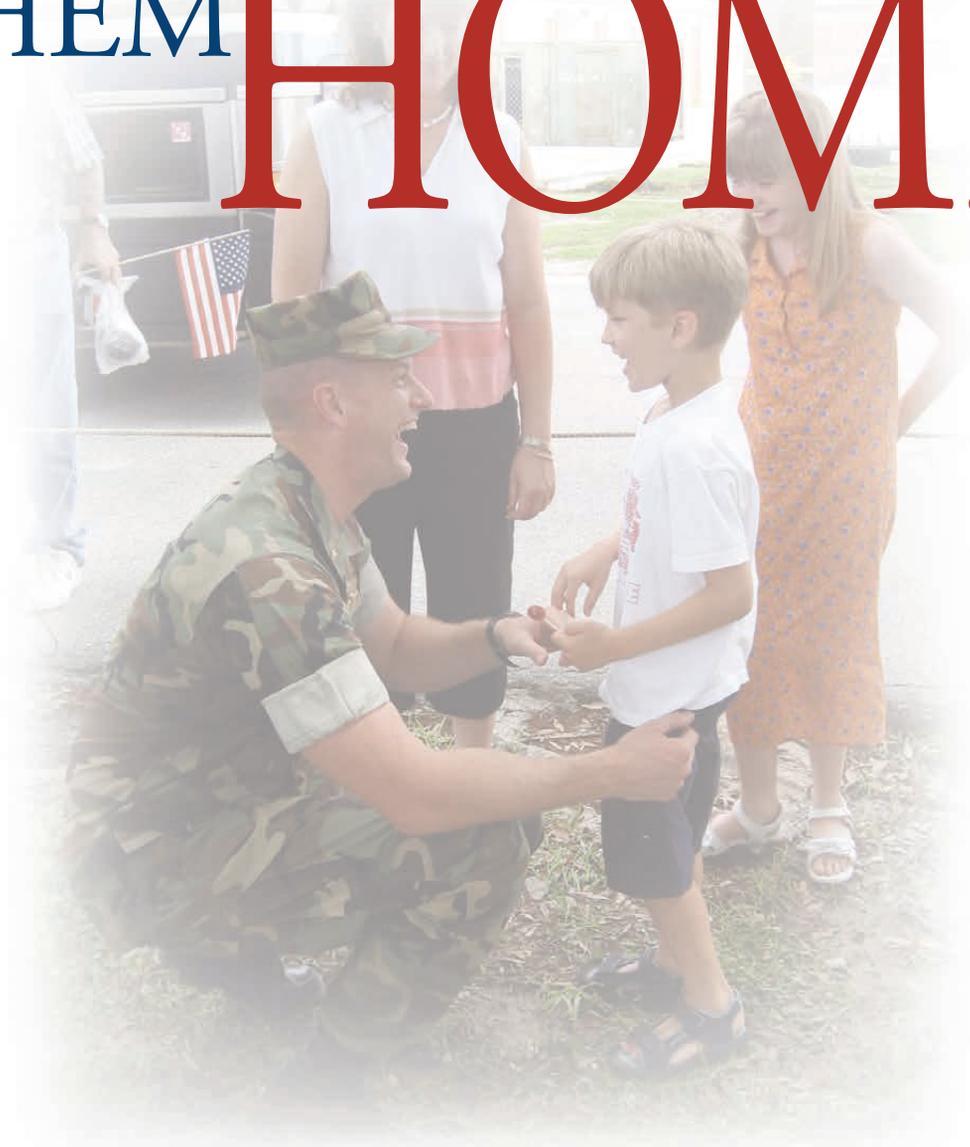


# WELCOMING THEM HOME



**G**race had been only 10 months old when he left. Captain Mario Schweizer wondered if his daughter would recognize him when he returned from combat in Iraq. The Marine officer had longed to hold her for the past eight months. Now, in the early morning hours at Camp Pendleton in southern California, his family waited to be reunited with him. His wife, Jenni, beamed when she saw him and nudged Grace awake.

The toddler sleepily blinked up at the man in front of her and then held out her arms. Mario smiled and reached for his daughter. Grace put her head on his shoulder and went back to sleep.

“To come back and have her remember me was a sweet blessing, to both Jenni and me,” he said from their home in Oceanside, CA. While it was wonderful to be back with his family, being in Iraq was a time of seeing his faith come alive.

Since his return, Mario has been able to share what he learned with youth and young married couples at their church, Calvary Chapel Vista. “It’s not fun to be out there in combat, but it’s an honor to see God work,” he said.

During intense fighting, Mario’s faith was strengthened as he saw God working “in a physical battlefield and a spiritual battlefield” simultaneously. “Not many people get to see both of those things side by side; I saw them coincide.”

*Story by Christmas McGaughey and Sean Mercadante  
photos by the U.S. Department of Defense*

Being in a physical and spiritual war zone opened his eyes to the reality of warfare that all Christians face. “The biggest lesson I learned about spiritual warfare was to live with that spiritual warfare in mind all the time. As Christians, we live in a spiritual battlefield.” One way to have victory is through faith.

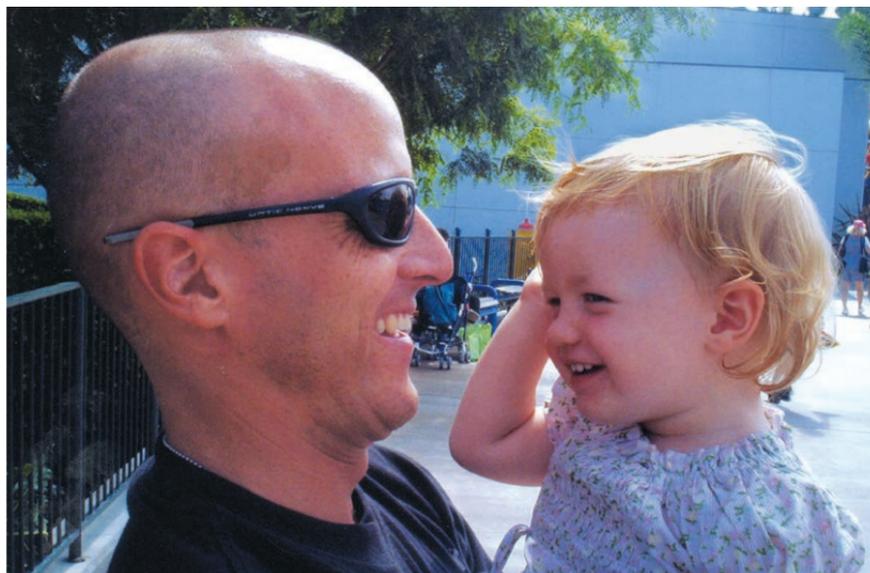
One Scripture that Mario clung to was 1 John 5:4-5, part of which says, “... this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” He added, “It’s not what leads us to victory; it is the victory. So, regardless of what happens, if you’re living in faith, you’re living in victory.”

Mario’s machine-gun equipped vehicle retrieved casualties during heavy fighting. One blistering afternoon, he found himself waiting with a wounded corporal who had been hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. “The Marine was going into shock because of the internal injuries.” Mario gently laid his hands on the man and began praying for him softly, asking the Lord to help him hold on until the helicopter arrived. “He was coming in and out of consciousness,” Mario said, “but he made it, and now he’s all right.”

After an ambush, Mario remembered feeling God’s protection as he retrieved casualties from the front lines. “I realized as things were flying around me and blowing up, I was very calm and had peace. God was really carrying me through that time,” he said. “It was so surreal; worry didn’t enter my mind.”

God’s protection did not guarantee that he would live, but it did mean he had nothing to fear. He cited Psalm 91:5–6: *You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.*

Although he is thankful to be back home, Mario said he would go back if the Lord called him. “It was kind of tough to leave. You had done a lot of work, had put a lot of heart into rebuilding a country. You didn’t want to stop if it wasn’t finished yet. But it’s good to be home, back in fellowship at CC Vista.”



*Eighteen-month-old Grace welcomes her dad, Captain Mario Schweizer.*

## New Challenges at Home

Adam Morton, 22, his brother, Sam, 20, and their cousin, Joel Hight, 22, from the Philadelphia area, were spared in battle several times as they fought in Iraq. Coming home brought a new set of challenges—adjusting to the climate, American culture, and civilian life.

Being in a land of peace and abundance has almost been more difficult spiritually. “The only thing I miss about being over there is being close to God. It was easier to be a Christian over there,” Adam said. “You had time to pray, go off on your own, and read your Bible. There weren’t as many distractions and temptations over there.” Talking to other people about God was easier too, he said, since the Marines regularly faced life-or-death situations.

Adam said he is thankful to be back at his home church, Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, under the teaching of Pastor Joe Focht. Chapel services in the desert were often geared to all religions, and “were too vague” for him to feel that he was being fed spiritually. “It’s nice to be back.”

**When Your people go out to battle against their enemies,  
wherever You send them, and when they pray to You ...  
then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication,  
and maintain their cause.**

2 Chronicles 6:34–35

**“It’s not fun to be  
out there in combat,  
but it’s an honor  
to see God work.”**

Captain Mario Schweizer



## A Time to Heal

Some Calvary Chapels ministered specifically to those returning from Iraq. Pastor Greg Schmidt, CC Jacksonville, NC, himself a retired Marine, has a natural mission field among his former comrades at Camp Lejeune. This past spring the couple’s study had turned into a lady’s ministry as Marines headed off for combat. There were only four men left in the church.

Greg ministered to the families, making sure he was available for their spiritual needs. God then impressed upon his heart to begin preparing for the Marines’ homecoming. He studied the Scriptures referring to soldiers returning from battle: the Hebrews were to spend seven days outside the camp as part of a purification ritual after having come into contact with dead bodies.

“Similarly, we wanted to make sure these guys had time for a proper emotional and spiritual return home,” Greg said. So he organized a retreat for returning servicemen at the Billy Graham Training Center, called The Cove, in Asheville.

The Cove offered the weekend free of charge to the returning combat veterans. Mike MacIntosh, Horizon Christian Fellowship, and his assistant pastor, Mickey Stonier, came to counsel the men. Mike had ministered to the emergency personnel at Ground Zero following the September 11th terrorist attacks, so he was well prepared to minister to these returning veterans.

“My first thought on Friday evening was, ‘Wow, these are just kids,’” said Mike. “But these kids were unsung heroes—many seeing combat, and many dealing with post-traumatic stress. Yet, with the Bible in hand and the Spirit of God in the room, we watched tears turn to joy, broken hearts healed, and struggles released to Jesus Christ.”

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Pastor Mike MacIntosh, Horizon Christian Fellowship



Mike told them that Horizon’s congregation was praying for them. Sergeant Mark Redding had just returned from a nine-month deployment, where he experienced combat in Iraq.

“That meant there were thousands of people praying just for us,” commented Sgt. Redding after the weekend. “Everyone at The Cove treated us so well. Many people came up and thanked us. Mike and Mickey gave us gifts to take home to our loved ones. Older people were holding doors open for us. It blew us all away—we didn’t think we did anything to deserve this kind of treatment. It’s just like God’s gift of salvation.”