



Story by Christmas M. Beeler

**U.S. Army Captain Lance Blount** lay in his bed at home in Killeen, TX. His wife and children were already up. It had been months since he returned from combat in Iraq. Months since he had lost four of his 89 men in combat. Months since he had called each of the men's wives to tell them that their husbands had fought bravely and were not coming home. The faces of their children rose up in his mind.

He groaned and turned over, trying to fight what he knew was coming: dark thoughts and despair. *I'm so done*, he thought. *I just want to lay in this bed and never get up. I don't want to see anyone, talk to anyone. I don't even want to do those things I used to love—camping, playing soccer with my girls, taking my wife out on dates.* Guilt and depression followed. *How can I think this way? I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ; I know He is the answer. God, help me. Show me where I can find some help. I think I need to talk to someone, but I don't want to hear any psychobabble or be put on any pills. Help me, Lord.*

In the shower, suddenly an image assaulted his mind. He was back in combat: He could hear the loud shells going off; he could smell the smoke of scorched earth and the strange burning fumes of war. He saw his men scrambling to return fire. Then, just as suddenly, it was over. Shakily, he dried off and got dressed.

One evening, Lance drove past a shaggy man with a sign: "Disabled Vet/Need Money." His heart wrenched. Before this last deployment, he would have viewed the man as a bum

# RESTORED BY CHRIST

U.S. Army Sgt. Joseph Saladin leads a patrol in the Rusafa neighborhood of Baghdad, Iraq. Saladin is from the Army's 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Frequent high-stress patrols can lead to problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder upon a soldier's return home.

photo by Staff Sgt. Jason T. Bailey, U.S. Air Force



photo courtesy of the Blount family

**U.S. Army Capt. Lance Blount, from CF Bell County, TX, explains to men in Iraq that each family receives one bag of rice.**



**U.S. Army Capt. Lance Blount**

disrespecting the U.S. military. But today his mouth went dry as he realized, *I know exactly how he feels. That's how I feel—like giving up. Sometimes I even feel like just going home to be with the Lord.*

For two hours John just listened, nodding and occasionally offering encouraging words. Lance wept as he spoke. Finally, he had gotten it all out. John said that he knew the Lord could help heal Lance's heart and mind, but that it would take time. He encouraged Lance to stay in the Word, pray with other believers, and not isolate himself. They decided that John would call Lance regularly to check in on him and pray with

him. Then the two men bowed their heads and prayed together. "We're going to go through this together. I'll be in touch," John said, giving him a hug.

Lance went home feeling a fresh sense of joy and hope. He had a renewed desire to spend time with the Lord and read the Word. *I need to start talking to "Dad" again,* he thought.

He resolved to talk to his friend and pastor, John Newberry. His wife drove a separate car to church that Sunday so Lance could have all the time he needed. At Calvary Fellowship of Bell County, Lance pulled Pastor John aside after church.

### Healing in the Father's House

Sitting in the deserted sanctuary, Lance told John everything—the horrific things he had seen, how his men had died, the guilt he felt as he had informed their families, and especially about the overpowering depression he had been experiencing for months. He knew that some of the dark thoughts were spiritual attacks from the enemy, Satan, trying to discourage him. But some were from his own human weakness—from guilt, from loss.



photo by SPC. Lester Colley, U.S. Army

**Army soldiers from Echo Company, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, prepare to breach the door during a search for weapons caches in Baghdad, Iraq.**

*"While I was deployed, my biggest comfort was knowing that no matter what happened to me, our church family was nearby—whether my wife got the dreaded news at the door or if the lawn mower broke down."*

U.S. Army Capt. Lance Blount

### Part of the Body

The next week, the pastor called Lance on his cell phone. Pausing from his duties at U.S. Army post Fort Hood, Lance shared his breakthroughs and struggles that week. They talked for a few minutes, prayed, and hung up. Lance still felt the burden; but it was getting lighter. For the next few weeks, they talked regularly—sometimes briefly on the phone, sometimes at church, sometimes meeting together for dinner with their families. And God did a healing work in Lance's heart.



**Pastor John Newberry**

***For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*** 2 Timothy 1:7

Lance recalls, "God really used that accountability, those prayer times, and the encouragement from other brothers at church to restore me." He urges others who are preparing to deploy, or just returning, to get plugged into a local fellowship. "While I was deployed, my biggest comfort was knowing that no matter what happened to me, our church family was nearby—whether my wife got the dreaded news at the door or if the lawn mower broke down." When he is home, Lance helps other families who have a dad out on deployment. "We all do the same for each other," he said.

### Going through PTSD

The Army captain likewise encourages men in his troop whom he sees are also suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "When you go through those things—those life-and-death stresses day after day—you return home different. Everybody comes



photo by Jana Rivera

**Pastor John Newberry teaches the Word at Calvary Fellowship Bell County in Killeen, TX. Near a U.S. Army installation, the fellowship has many military families.**

back with something," Lance said. "Now I can see the signs, though at the time you think you're the only one going through it." At first, a person can experience great relief in coming home: "It's like a honeymoon period; you're just happy to be alive," he said. Then, it starts to get hard—either with flashbacks, guilt, or depression. "People try to fill that void with a lot of things: alcohol, video games, other stuff," he said. "But that new [stuff] will only make you happy for a couple of days, and then you realize you are still empty."

He tells other soldiers who have returned home that Jesus Christ is the only One who can make them whole. "He can fill that void," Lance said. "I can't say that I don't struggle. ... Sometimes I still don't sleep through the night. But God has set me free in a lot of those areas. It's easier for me to go to Him now; I know He can help me."

### A Praying Wife

Lance said that his wife, Jen, knew that something was wrong but was "very patient" and "gave me plenty of space." He recalled, "She would encourage me to get out of the house: 'Why don't you go fishing?' But when I would choose to stay home, she wouldn't nag me. I know she was praying for me the whole time."

After seven years as a military spouse, Jen Blount said, "It is tempting to be self-focused during deployment due to the difficulties. But if you put Jesus first and others second, it leads to great freedom in Christ and spiritual growth. ... As difficult as some of those days during the deployment were, I am so thankful that the Lord allowed us to go through them: Because of His faithfulness, Lance and I have both grown spiritually. We have a special appreciation for each other, a deep gratitude to the Lord, and we both want to serve others."

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Jen Blount

## Grace and Space

Because Calvary Fellowship is so close to Fort Hood, most attendees are military families and service members, Pastor John explained. He has learned that when men return from deployments, “you can’t tell them something that’s just going to fix it. You have to spend time with them, love them, encourage them, and help them move forward. All you can do is listen to them and give them the Word of God.”

Kenda Newberry, John’s wife, added, “It’s best to have no expectations and a lot of grace. ... This is such a difficult time for the wives. They are living like single parents, but they are also facing life-and-death situations. We give people as much space as they need.” Ministry leaders encourage wives and children to be heavily involved while the father is deployed, but to “scale back” in their involvement when he returns and make family time their first priority. Deployments can be hard on children, added Kenda: “When the dad is gone, the kids kind of go crazy: not sleeping, feeling insecure, acting out. They don’t know how to behave without their dad. And they worry about him. This all adds stress to the mom.”

Because so many of them are going through the same challenges, the families in the fel-



**Robert and Renee Johnson both serve in the U.S. Army and attend CF Bell County.**



photo by Jana Rivera

**Left to right, retired Sgt. 1st Class Robert Johnson, Staff Sgt. James Ide, and Richard Rivera pray after service at CF Bell County for their families who are relocating.**

lowship are very close. “None of us have family in the area, so we rely on each other. We literally are a family.” Since the fellowship is small and there is a constant turnover of members, she said, “We don’t have a lot of ministries or programs; a lot of what we do is very simple—just emailing or calling someone during the week, asking how they are or what they need.” When a new family comes to the church, Kenda said, “It’s almost like a hospital triage; we get their ‘stats’—are they facing deployment, do they need any help? Then we tell them to give us a call.”

John and Kenda often invite people to their home for dinner or offer to babysit their children. Other mature believers also reach out—especially if someone is struggling after deployment—by inviting the family to dinner and encouraging them from their

own experience. “As they are growing in the Word, people start reaching out to each other. It just happens naturally in the body,” John said.

Lance is set to be deployed again in December. He will likely miss the birth of their third child, as Jen is expecting a new baby in March. Nevertheless, she added, “We are excited to see all the many ways the Lord is going to provide.” ☪

### **CF Bell County, TX**

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