

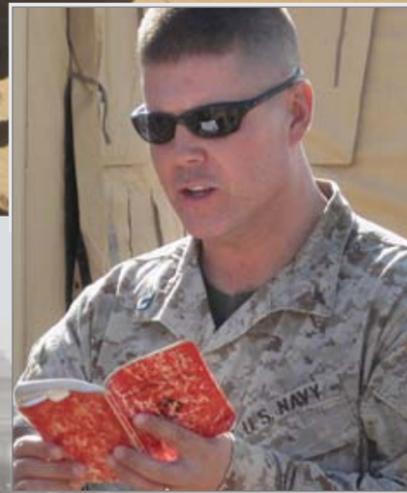


Chaplain Steve Brown, LT, USN, shares the Gospel with Marines in Helmand Province. He is one of several Calvary Chapel-endorsed pastors serving in the military as a chaplain.

Afghanistan

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by RP2 Armando Arias

Chaplain Steve Brown, LT, USN



Steve shares the Word with Marines.

The downpour continued, splashing against the parched ground and creating puddles of mud. The Afghan soldiers and American Marines slipped and laughed as they kicked the soccer ball back and forth in the open

desert of Afghanistan's Helmand Province. Without a common language, smiles were sufficient to build camaraderie among the fellow warriors for Afghanistan's freedom.

"We had a great time with them," said Chaplain Steve Brown of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA. Steve was leading the Americans in communion when the Afghan soldiers approached. Unaware of the moment's sanctity, the soldiers interrupted the service and demanded to know Steve's name. He was puzzled and slightly concerned, but Steve realized the men were friendly when they asked for writing supplies. "Pen and paper are a really big deal over here," Steve said. "People are always asking for it." Eventually the Marines were able to continue worshiping while the Afghans began playing soccer, and the Americans joined the game when they finished taking communion.

A Calvary Chapel chaplain serving his first deployment, Steve has been in Afghanistan since October 2009. He was motivated to become a chaplain by his desire to serve God and country: "When I found out about the chaplain corps, I thought, *that's too good to be true—you can be in the military and be a pastor?* That was amazing to me."

Steve's path to the chaplaincy took five years. He returned to school for the accredited degree required by the military, and he said that the process, though long, was also simple. God opened the door, he explained, in accordance with Revelation 3:8b, "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it."

Raising Up Leaders

Steve's roles as a chaplain include preaching on Sunday mornings, leading nightly Bible studies, and praying at mission

briefs—preparatory meetings for Marines departing the base on military missions.

By appointing assistants called lay readers, Steve uses these duties both to minister and to equip others for leadership. Gunnery Sgt. Robinson, USMC, said that when Steve first asked him to consider being a lay reader, he was hesitant. He feared public speaking. However, he continued, "God has a way of bringing His children out of their comfort zones." Robinson has now led prayer at mission briefs for nearly six months, and he has recently begun leading the evening Bible study when Steve isn't available.

One by One

In the desert of Afghanistan, "We don't have a lot of distractions," said Steve. "There are no malls or coffee shops, no TV or Pizza Hut, no easy Internet access. My prayer is that God would use this time so that when people go back, those who are married will have stronger marriages, those who are parents will be better parents, and all will be better prepared for life."

Steve's heart for discipleship is demonstrated by the personal attention he gives to each individual. Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class Armando Arias, Steve's military-appointed bodyguard, accompanies Steve anytime he leaves the base. Armando said that Steve constantly asks people if they need anything, if he can pray for them, and if they know about the worship services and Bible studies. "He reminds people that whether you are in California or Afghanistan, Jesus is there, no matter what," said Armando. "And most of the time, Steve puts a smile on people's faces."

Steve frequently walks around the base and talks to people as they work, seeking to discover anyone he can serve. One day, he found a Marine repairing a vehicle. The two began discussing the vehicle; soon, the man shared personal needs. Steve prayed with him. Later, the man commented that every time he sees Steve, he remembers their conversation and receives fresh encouragement.

Another day in freezing rain, Steve encountered a disheartened Marine who was about to miss his young child's birthday. "It was another opportunity to be there for someone," said Steve. "I want to be there on Jesus' behalf. It's such an honor to encourage people, to remind them it's not an accident that they're in Afghanistan."



Steve leads Marines in prayer as they mourn the loss of a fallen comrade.

Hope for the Hurting

Another of Steve's roles is providing pastoral support to the wounded. One day, a local family injured in an explosion was brought to the medical center. The youngest boy was in critical condition. The medical team tried everything possible to save his life, but it became clear that he wasn't going to survive. Steve was asked to pray. "All the sounds of that busy room were silenced as everyone gathered around that little boy," he said. Though the boy didn't make it, the pregnant mother and daughters had surgery—a procedure not typically performed in local hospitals—and lived. "The American forces are doing so much good here," Steve added. "I wish everyone knew the amazing work that is being done to help these people."

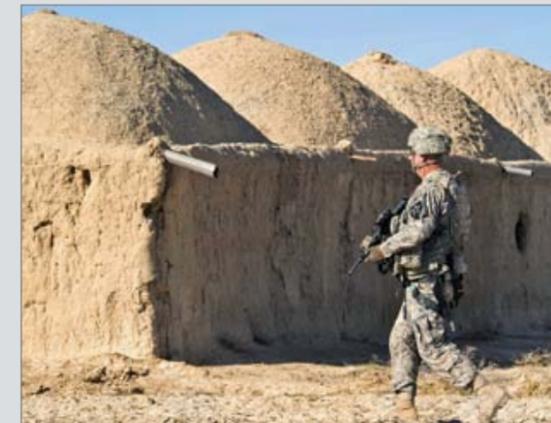
Another day, Steve received an urgent summons to the medical center. A Marine had been shot, and when Steve entered, the man immediately announced loudly that he wanted to recite the Lord's Prayer. "I started to pray quietly," said Steve, "to keep from disturbing the medical staff." But the man joined in, yelling. "It took me by surprise," Steve said. "I glanced up at the medical team. They were surprised too, but then they joined in, very loudly reciting the rest of the Lord's Prayer. The man said that afterward, he felt better."

Being in the Afghan desert reminds him of God's call to live for the Lord and not for himself, Steve said. "The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, and they must have seen storms like we have here, with

dust blowing everywhere," he said. "This is not the kind of place I'd choose to vacation. But it's not about me, it's about the Lord." ↗

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20



A member of the 23rd Infantry Regiment patrols in Helmand Province. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Efren Lopez, U.S. Air Force

CC Chaplaincy Program

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