

Loving those Who Serve

Story Jessica Russell

“He loved his country, and boy, did he love those who served the country,” said Steve Mays, senior pastor of CC South Bay, CA, regarding Pastor Chuck. Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa (CCCM) has 21 active duty and reserve chaplains in the U.S. military. One of them, Lt. Commander Dennis Wheeler of the U.S. Navy, formed a relationship with Jesus while at a Monday night Bible study held at CCCM in 1992—seven years after enlisting in the Marine Corps. In 1996, Dennis left the Marines, completed his Master’s of Divinity degree, and re-joined the military in 2002 as a Calvary Chapel-endorsed Navy chaplain. He is stationed at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, CA. Dennis stated: “Several years ago, Pastor Chuck read a letter from a Navy chaplain who served with the Marines in Iraq. . . . After Pastor Chuck read the letter, he went on to pray that God would open doors and raise up men who would faithfully serve the men and women of the armed forces—and that they would simply commit to teaching the Word of God simply.” Since then, CCCM has endorsed chaplains into the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Set Free in Christ

After serving as a Marine in the Vietnam War, Raul Ries returned home to California and started a family. The young man, overwhelmed with emotions, decided he would end his life—but first, he would end his wife’s and children’s lives. As he waited for them to get home that day in 1972, he grabbed his rifle and used it to destroy the house. In the chaos, he hit the television, accidentally turning it on. It was then that he was first introduced to Pastor Chuck, whom he saw on the screen teaching God’s Word. The joy in Chuck’s beaming smile caught Raul’s attention, and as he listened to the pastor preach, he changed his plans for the day—Raul put away his gun and trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior. He began attending CCCM and was discipled by Chuck. Soon, Raul’s passion for God led to the start of CC Golden Springs, CA (formerly West Covina), where he still serves as senior pastor.

“When I look at Chuck, he’s been like my spiritual father. And his wife Kay has been like my spiritual mother,” Raul said. “He was one of the most amazing pastors I’ve ever known in my life. He loved his sheep [congregation], he loved his family, and he loved each one of us individually. He not only taught us the Word of God, but he brought us into maturity in the Word of God.” Many CCs have large military outreaches, and Raul often uses his experiences as a Marine to minister to other service members—veterans from distant wars and those recently deployed. ☞



Upper left: Pastors Chuck Smith, left, and Dave Rolph of CC Pacific Hills, CA, right, pray for Stephen Brown after his swearing-in ceremony. Stephen is a Calvary Chapel-endorsed pastor serving in the military as a chaplain.

Upper right: Stephen Brown prays with U.S. Marines in Afghanistan.

Bottom: Marines take a break in Afghanistan after returning from a mission.