

ANOTHER VIEW: A pastor dad's advice on ministering to military families_72604

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By Lee Brewer

Our son Daniel is a Marine in Fallujah, Iraq. As you might imagine, these past five months have been difficult for our family.

Here are some ideas that would help Christians minister to families with troops in harm's way. Because of our family's context, I will address a Marine, but you can apply the branch that fits your situation:

Nothing encourages families like hearing that you are praying for their Marine. So every now and then, drop them a card or e-mail and just say, "Hey, we prayed for your troop today."

- ◆ Nothing demonstrates true concern like sending a card, letter or package to their Marine. When the occasion permits, ask them what you can send. We have been so encouraged to hear from our Marine about all the people who have mailed him letters, cards and packages.

- ◆ Sometimes, the families want to talk and will talk nonstop about their

Marine. Be courteous and just let them talk. Sometimes, they don't want to talk. The key is to let them decide.

- ◆ Don't tell them you just heard on the news that five Marines were killed. There are two kinds of families—families who watch and read the news nonstop and families who never watch or read the news. The point is those who can't stay away from the news already know five Marines have been killed. Those who don't watch or read the news don't want to know. It's their way of coping.

- ◆ Avoid asking every time you see them if they have heard from their Marine. Odds are, if they have heard, they will let you know. It is painful to be asked time and time again if they have heard, when weeks pass by without hearing anything.

- ◆ At times, family members of Marines may appear to lack faith or to be losing their minds or having a nervous breakdown. Each family member struggles with how he or she is perceived in handling the fact that the Marine is in harm's way.

Be careful not to make a judgment. Let them have days of being down. It's not a sign of a lack of faith. Every family member with a Marine in harm's way is growing in faith by leaps and bounds. Some days, it may not seem like that to you. Let them make mistakes. Let them say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Let them fail in handling things from time to time. Their decision-making abilities are not in top form.

- ◆ Allow them to have times when they don't seem to be present. They struggle with being preoccupied. At work or at church, they may seem to be somewhere else. The truth of the matter is they are. Give them some freedom to not be like they used to be at times.

- ◆ If you don't support the war, keep that to yourself. You can still be

friends with them and not share your politics. It is really painful for families to hear that, in your opinion, their loved one is in danger for an unjust cause.

- ◆ If you're going to drop by their house for a visit, call in advance. Every time their front doorbell rings, their hearts stop. Bad news comes through the front door.

Think about how you would want to be treated if the shoe were on the other foot. That's what Jesus said to do.

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