

HOPE



in HARD PLACES

a Planting Roots Devotional

INTRODUCTION

Charles Spurgeon said, "I have learned to kiss the wave that slams me into the Rock of Ages."

Kiss the wave? That wave comes in any number of ways, from the loss of a loved one to the loss of our health, from challenges at work to challenges at home. As Christians, we are not exempt from life's hard times, and military life can exacerbate those struggles.

- We deal with loss when we're not with our family.
- We walk through our health struggles in a new community with little connection.
- We struggle with challenges at work when they affect not just this job but possibly our assignments and careers hereafter.
- We face difficult seasons at home, whether with children, roommates, spouses, or neighbors, and it seems there is no place to step away and breathe.

These are just a few examples of the hard times we face with our location, careers, and stresses in military life, taking complex challenges and adding a layer of hard because of the lifestyle we've been called to.

But Christ gives hope.

Charles Spurgeon found it as well. He found very clearly that the most challenging seasons of life were the ones that pushed him all the closer to his Savior. It happens to us, too. The closer we get to the Savior, the more we see the things of this life from an eternal perspective rather than a temporary one. Paul noted this in 2 Corinthians 4:18 when he wrote, *"We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*

It's here we find hope not just for today and not just for us but for the world and eternity.

Our prayer through these devotionals is to remind you of God's faithfulness in all seasons and help you learn to "kiss the wave that slams (you) against the Rock of Ages." If you are feeling overwhelmed by the waves that continue to come, we pray you'll find hope in the hard places in Christ today through the stories of God's faithfulness to others.

He is our hope.

Written by Kori Yates Executive Director at Planting Roots.

WHEN TRAUMA STRIKES

Trauma is not exclusive to the battlefield; it can permeate our lives unexpectedly.

The question lingers: can we avoid being traumatized by life's harrowing experiences?

When trauma happens

Father's Day 2021 etched an indelible mark on my life as my husband was hospitalized with a severe COVID-19 infection at our Missouri duty station. What began with an ER visit spiraled into a six-month-long saga.

Fisher House became my refuge for almost five months until my daughter, adjusting her college classes online, joined me. Our sons, 19 and 17, held down the fort in Missouri while our oldest son returned to college.

With my husband's 20 years in the Army Chaplain Corps, I was privy to mental and spiritual health training. Armed with a psychology degree, our family had tools to manage everyday stress, but facing such trauma was uncharted territory.

God sees your pain

Prayer and writing have been my pillars in times of crisis. From the outset, I sought prayers from our local community and close friends, acknowledging that I couldn't navigate this alone. As the journey unfolded, I extended my plea for prayer online, turning daily posts into a public diary. It wasn't until November 2021, sharing our story with a new acquaintance, that I grasped the severity of our ordeal. Lost in survival mode, I had given little thought to the toll on us all.

My family and I each sought help to process what we lived through. Receiving physical help from our community—meals, house chores, and financial support—proved challenging. Learning to accept help, as I would gladly give others, shifted my perspective. It taught me to constantly look for God's answers to our requests, thanking Him for every positive occurrence before sharing frustrations.

He is there for you

The Bible forewarns of hardships, ensuring God's unwavering presence, even in life's storms. The more I saw God working, the more hope blossomed, reinforcing my faith in His promises.

PAST SINS

According to Merriam-Webster, paralysis denotes a total or partial loss of function, particularly involving motion or sensation in a body part.

For many of us, this paralysis manifests as a result of fear—fear of losing a spouse to deployment, fear of deploying ourselves, fear of societal expectations as a spouse, or fear of past indiscretions tarnishing our status.

When past sins haunt you...

Despite trusting in God's forgiveness, a lingering fear persists that our past sins might resurface to haunt us. This dilemma raises a crucial question: do we truly trust God? Or do we doubt the efficacy of His forgiveness when we genuinely repent?

The essence of Jesus' teachings reveals that without obedience to God's word and belief in Him, we remain slaves to sin (John 8:34-36). The shackles of ancestral curses from Adam and Eve need not bind us; through faith, we can break free from the grip of fear that accompanies sin.

You can have freedom in Jesus.

Jesus asserted, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:31-32).

The reality is that we don't have to live in fear once we accept and follow Jesus. While facing consequences for our sins, the beauty lies in being free from sin's eternal wages. To live in accordance with God's instructions, we must believe in Jesus, receive Him in faith, and share His teachings with others.

Regardless of our current situation, Jesus offers relief from the fear of sin and the haunting specter of the past.

The call is clear: take a moment to pause and reflect on the transformative power of Jesus, giving thanks for His salvation. Martin Luther's wisdom resonates—acknowledging the hopelessness of sin marks the beginning of salvation.

PLANT BOUNDARIES

For military families, celebrations away from their loved ones are common.

Work schedules, financial constraints, or a lack of leave time often dictate this. Society is inundated with idyllic portrayals of harmonious family gatherings and celebrations. Yet, the reality for military families involves growth and change, potentially causing conflicts.

To navigate these challenges, establishing and maintaining boundaries becomes crucial. However, many grapple with the notion that setting boundaries may contradict their Christian faith—a fear that requires dispelling.

PLANT your boundaries

This is my acronym for what to do to help maintain positive boundaries. I like to think of it like keeping your feet firmly planted.

- **PRAY** for your heart, your family's heart, your interactions, and peace.
- **LOGISTICS** need to be thought out. Are you taking a car to the event so that you can leave when you are ready or if it becomes necessary? If not, do you have the Uber or Lyft app on your phone?
- **ANNOUNCE** your boundaries to your family. Let them know that you will not participate in things that cross your boundaries.
- **NAVIGATE** the bumps. Understand that it may take your family a minute to adjust to your boundaries.
- **TERMINATE** the interaction if off-limits issues are happening, boundaries are repeatedly crossed, or safety is an issue. This may mean leaving a conversation with a particular family member while remaining at the event. It may look like leaving the event altogether.

A German field marshal, Moltke the Elder said, “No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy’s main strength.”

Be like Jesus.

Drawing inspiration from Jesus' ministry, where he employed boundaries effectively, we can adopt the PLANT acronyms to guide us.

Finally, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 reminds us, *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* In facing family challenges, maintaining faith and values becomes an opportunity to bring light into darkness.

Adapted from a Planting Roots Article by Morgan Farr.

MAN'S REJECTION GOD'S PROTECTION

In my military career, rejection emerged as an unexpected adversary, challenging my resilience and faith. Reflecting on an incident 21 years ago, after five years on active duty, I was interviewed for a position aligning with the natural progression of my military journey. Despite exceptional ratings, outstanding references, and single status for undivided focus—I faced an unforeseen rejection that shook the foundations of my military path.

Time to Grow

The blows of rejection, especially in a society emphasizing our worthiness, felt like punches that brought me to my knees. Lacking the maturity needed at the time, my initial response was anger and accusation. I lashed out, sulking and losing focus on my current responsibilities. Bitterness threatened to derail me from my mission.

Our limited understanding makes it challenging to discern what is best for us. In the two decades since, God became my guiding light, imparting powerful truths about rejection.

Only God, with His depth of knowledge, breadth of experience, and purity of love, can determine our true path. The rejection from that job, now a distant memory, remains a mystery. However, trusting that God made the right decision to redirect my path, I see the beauty in His plans—plans that unfolded with love, family, overseas assignments, and even being on the ground during the historic invasion of Iraq. These plans led to two remarkable sons, the camaraderie of fellow Army Wives, and a deepened relationship with the One who will never reject me.

In Christ

Through Christ, we are accepted into the family of God and given an eternal inheritance. God never rejects those who humbly seek reconciliation. With that acceptance comes a mission—the mission to make Our Father's love known throughout the world.

Now, facing rejection carries less weight as I draw on two decades of God's faithfulness. I've witnessed Him turn past rejections into stepping stones toward something better. More than that, I recognize that when the world rejects me, it rejects Christ first. Running to my heavenly Father for the comfort of eternal fellowship, I rise from rejection, fortified by the assurance that our fellowship with God and His family is eternal.

RISE UP DESPITE DIVORCE

The summer I turned twenty-four, I met him. A young servicemember who lived a life of adventure, we had a fabulous summer teaching kids to rock climb, ride horses, and hike through the trails of the Texas Hill Country while he was home on leave.

We married in December. Weeks later, the military sent him from his duty station in Hawaii back to Texas on compassionate reassignment to help care for his dad.

When it all falls apart

As months passed, my role as Program Director at a camp, planning events for visiting groups, unraveled due to the belief that my husband could handle it better. Weekends left me in tears as his "help" overshadowed my responsibilities. My boss intervened to assert that the job was rightfully mine.

Returning to Hawaii, we sought solace in a church community while grappling with the challenges of military life. Despite outward appearances, our marriage remained a struggle, marked by intimidation, belittling, and eventually infidelity. As a Christian woman, questions about the duration of this painful journey, confidants to share with, and God's ability to mend it all haunted me.

After nearly six years, three moves, and a deployment, I returned home to an empty house. He had left, taking everything he wanted and leaving only a farewell note and \$200, having cleaned out our bank accounts. Amidst the relief, fear, uncertainty, and grief, two friends from church knelt with me in my living room, seeking solace from God. The grand adventure had concluded in divorce, marking the most challenging season of my life.

God is still good

Yet, amidst the pain, I discovered something profound. God is still good. His Word is still true.

For those facing similar marital struggles, I offer a resounding message: God remains good and is a redeemer beyond our comprehension. If your marriage feels insurmountable today, commit to rising up with your whole heart, for God is faithful

WHEN MILITARY CHILDREN SUFFER

Being part of a military family often means witnessing our children navigate challenges due to a parent's service. In this reality, suffering becomes intricately linked with hope, a connection a powerful biblical truth underscores.

When the worry creeps in....

As an Army wife and devout follower of Christ, my journey has taught me the profound significance of suffering. While I despised it then, looking back, I see how every trial points to hope in God's glory. Although the term "suffer" still makes me cringe, I've reconciled with its necessity, understanding its role in my sanctification process.

Yet, when I contemplate military life and its intersection with hope and suffering, I grapple with the idea of this destiny for my sons. Often, I catch myself praying or thinking, "God, let me suffer, but not my kids." I wish to shield them from the trials of growing up in the military—periods of separation, distance from extended family, the perpetual new-kid status, constant relocations, and confronting the unknown.

We can lean on Jesus

I've learned to redirect my thoughts, guided by Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Recently, my heart has oscillated between excitement for my husband's opportunities and concerns about the unknown future my kids will face in the next phase of military life. During a car ride home from youth group, my oldest son shared insights into the challenging life lessons his friends were undergoing. Despite the difficulties, he articulated, "You know, I miss everyone in my old school, but sometimes I'm glad that God took me out of that school so that I wasn't influenced too."

It struck me—suffering leads to hope.

My 12-and-a-half-year-old exhibited discernment beyond his years. Moving and facing challenges led to his development of dependence on God, a process I could never orchestrate for him. I've realized that wishing away suffering for my children means wishing away God's hope. I never want to forfeit God's hope for them.

NAVIGATING LONELINESS

Loneliness has been a steadfast companion on my journey as a military wife.

Sometimes you may feel alone too...

My struggle with loneliness intensified after a PCS move. Adjusting to a new duty station never came easy. Despite the anticipation of fresh adventures, I resisted change. I often daydreamed of having a resume for this, akin to someone new to the job market. I could hand it out to neighbors, instantly showcasing my potential as a great friend. I could take it to organizations I was interested in, proving the benefits I could bring without hesitating to undertake menial tasks.

One particularly lonely period followed an assignment to Korea. Six weeks into our stay, my boys were making friends, and my husband was immersed in his job. I had volunteered for several organizations, taking positive steps to make Korea feel like home, yet the sense of being lost and lonely persisted. We had left behind close-knit friends and lived within a few hours' drive of our families.

But God will provide

The departure was difficult, and the disappointment ran deep. During one challenging day, I volunteered at a gift shop run by the Wives Club. Immersed in the daily tasks of opening, unpacking, and packing boxes and assisting customers, I felt the need to touch the anniversary ring my husband had given me a few months prior. As I ran my thumb over it, I jerked my hand up, realizing one of the diamonds was missing.

Frantically retracing my steps, the stone was nowhere to be found. The reality that it might be lost forever crushed me. Returning home, I asked my sons to pray with me for its possible recovery. I counted the change in my purse while preparing to take a taxi to the commissary. There, among the coins, the beautiful little diamond sparkled at me. It could have fallen anywhere, but fate led it to the safest place—my protected snapped-closed change purse.

Hope in the hard places

That day, the Lord challenged me to trust him with my loneliness. Like that diamond, I felt misplaced and lost. Eventually, I would be set in the setting he prepared for me. Until then, he knew where I was – safe, protected, and sheltered in his loving hands.

FACING MILITARY RETIREMENT

Military Retirement is one of the most formidable transitions military members can encounter. The military drills into us throughout our service that change is the only constant. Roots are only allowed to grow within moving boxes.

When God directs your steps

Then comes THAT day—the day you or your spouse clears post or base for the last time, hangs up the uniform, and witnesses the ID card change color. Forever, once a distant concept, suddenly becomes our reality, the backdrop of fairy tales now tangible.

I was two years old when I moved for the first time. Once abstract, setting down and growing roots transformed into our new reality upon my husband's retirement. The blank page ahead was no longer dictated by the DOD's demands but by our choices, dreams, and desires.

Amid trepidation and excitement, an undercurrent of dread and anxiety lingered. What do we do now? Where do we settle? Can I embrace the notion of a forever home? Is this the end of our adventure?

The story of Abraham resonates deeply. Uprooted from familiarity, he ventured into the unknown solely on God's promise, "I will show you." As my husband shed his uniform for the last time, I could hear God whispering, "I will show you."

You can be sure of your footing

In this new chapter of military retirement, God assures me of his faithfulness and guidance. ETS and retirement are not final acts; they are merely chapters closing. We are all sojourners on this earth, and my roots find their anchor in God and his promises.

The realization struck that I had grown accustomed to the rhythm of movement and change—the concept of forever felt foreign, eliciting a sense of dread. A year into retirement, God has been faithful in revealing my next steps. As I fondly reminisce, I am grateful for God's provision through numerous moves, deployments, and good and challenging times.

Reflecting on the past, I eagerly anticipate what lies ahead. Because I know God will show me. God invites me to pause and rest in the truth that he is God. I remember the incredible journey, relying on God's faithfulness. Worship becomes a lifestyle, acknowledging God's excellence and keeping him at the center of my life.

INFANT LOSS

Allow me to share the deeply personal and unexpected blessings that unfolded during the loss of our infant daughter, Antonia.

When you are living your deepest fear

The pivotal moment occurred on December 23 during a routine 20-week ultrasound. The news was devastating: our second baby, a girl, had anencephaly, a neural tube defect akin to spina bifida. The delicate brain tissue was exposed to amniotic fluid due to the spinal cord not fully closing. Our lives caring for a special-needs child flashed before our eyes.

The doctor's prognosis was bleak; it was fatal. Inducing labor was suggested, but Todd and I let God-given life take its course. Controversial as it was, we clung to the natural course of events. Ironically, we had plans to attend a military family "winter sports camp" just days later. This turned out to be divine providence as God used this time to infuse courage into our spirits. We found solace in the stories of a family whose child battled cancer and a young service member recovering from a severe bout of cancer.

God still has a plan for you

This marked the beginning of a flood of blessings. Every day, gifts came to our doorstep—cards, fruit baskets, flowers, hot dinners, vacation getaways, babysitting offers, specific words of encouragement, and more. Friends reached out from afar, offering weekly calls and including our daughter's life in a 40-day fast.

Amidst this, I experienced a profound, tangible sense of God's presence and protection, a peace that surpassed understanding. Our subsequent doctor's visit brought unexpected joy. Our 18-month-old son, Everett, was present and danced to the rhythm of the baby's heartbeat on the monitor. Though anencephalic babies are stillborn 50% of the time, Antonia's birth spanned three days. She was baptized and nursed, and she never left our arms during this time. The memorial service, attended by much of our immediate family and 300 others, became a sweet and celebratory day rather than a sad occasion.

He will not leave you

In the months following, the local university debated the medical ethics of our case, and my dad embraced faith in Christ. Photos of Antonia's gravesite still reach me, a testament to the lasting impact of her brief existence. Antonia's birthday, Cinco De Mayo, is a family celebration of laughter and joy. I share these moments not to dwell on the sorrow but to emphasize the numerous blessings woven into her life and death.

Adapted from a Planting Roots Article by Andrea Plotner

A PRAYER OF HOPE

Father,

You are life, light, and strength.

Your breath fills my lungs as I breathe out your praise and give thanks for your presence in my life (Genesis 2:7).

Today is hard, Father. I feel broken by the weight of life.

I need you, Father.

I need to hear your voice telling me to be still as you fight for me, as you spoke to the Israelites before you separated the sea and thwarted Pharaoh (Exodus 14).

I need to know you are concealed in this storm, as you hid yourself in the darkness as you descended to thwart David's enemies (Psalm 18:11).

I need to feel the gentle pressure of your rod and staff as you guide me through this valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23).

Please, Father, be my strength as I am so weak.

Holy Spirit, intercede on my behalf, as I only have tears and groaning in my distress.

Set me on the firm foundation of your salvation (Isiah 33:6) that I may stand again with confidence as your child and continue to praise your holy name and give you glory and praise; knowing that this suffering will make me more like Christ (1 Peter 5:10).

It's in the name and power, and blood of Jesus I come to you now.

Amen

WORSHIP WITH THE PLAYLIST

(on Spotify)



ABOUT PLANTING ROOTS

Women in uniform and military wives find themselves:

- Frequently uprooted, yet longing for community.
- Constantly in limbo, yet longing for certainty.
- Consistently weary, yet longing for hope.

We get it.

We understand all the challenges (and the feelings that come with them). As women in uniform and military wives, we also live “in the trenches.” Some for a few years and some for many more. Combined we’ve served hundreds of years in the military community as women in uniform (active, guard, and reserve) and as military wives (or both), representing all branches of service. We have lived the life and continue to do so, experiencing all that it has to offer.

While we would agree that it can be hard, wearisome, and challenging, we also believe it has given us a front row seat to see God at work. We’ve seen hope, certainty, and community come to life as we walk out our faith, trusting the One who holds us all.

We don’t plant our roots in the dirt where we live. Instead, we plant our roots deeply in Christ Jesus. We’d love to testify that military life was a walk in the park as we live and walk with the Holy Spirit, but it’s not. Life can still be hard, seasons can be heavy, challenges still come, but we know who pours grace, mercy, and peace over it all.

Over the years, we’ve learned to study God’s Word, build community with other Christian women, and share the stories of God’s faithfulness. It’s what we do at Planting Roots. Here we provide [resources](#) to grow in faith, [community](#) so we don’t do it alone, and [events](#) that grow courage in us to keep going.

We believe God made us to do this life **TOGETHER** – and who better to “get your life” than those who walk it too? Our prayer is for all uniformed women and military wives to be deeply rooted in Christ, living in the hope and joy only He can provide, and sharing that hope with others.

We are Planting Roots.

