

Saluting Veterans

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

It was dark and cold as we parked our car in one of the stalls outside of the guard gate. Then a friendly face in the adjacent car welcomed us into hers. As she escorted us onto the Port Hueneme Naval Base, I was in awe at the size and organization of it. Finally, we headed down toward a large building where lights and activity pierced the blackness and we stopped. "Here we are," Jessica mustered, pushing through tears.

I tried not to bother the couple that were in deep embrace next to us as I opened the door to exit the vehicle. Slowly, we walked toward the gymnasium as I lamented accidentally leaving my Bible in the Chevy we had left outside of the front gate. I pondered that God's word is written in my heart for such a time as this.

Plodding past men and women in camouflage, talking on cell phones, or simply latched onto a loved one in the stillness, we quietly strolled up the stairs and tapped on the front door. Brian came to let us in. It was the first time I had seen him in uniform. He looked sharp and ready. The glimmer of his freshly shaved head was outshone by his beaming smile and warmth as he thanked us for halting a night's sleep to be there.

Peering beyond the entryway where we stood into the vast unlit space, I recognized that there were hundreds of people sleeping. We spoke quietly hoping not to disturb anyone. It would only be a matter of minutes before the lights would be turned on and the call to duty would puncture the tranquility. I saw my friend's backpack in the corner with an M-16, locked and strapped in its place. It was solemn, and real, and we were definitely not missing the meaning in the moment.

We reflected on the day before. It was a worshipful morning at church and an emotional time afterward as we huddled around a mobile phone to pray with his parents and sisters in Ohio. Then later, just before dark, after a few hours of enjoying the facilities at Forest Home's open house, they graciously opened the gates of the pool for us. Folks gathered to witness, and cameras flashed, as Brian, Jessica and I stepped into the freezing cold water. Their decisions to follow Christ is profoundly transforming and quite public as they pronounced their faith in their one and only savior, Jesus. As they went under the water and arose to affirming friends' applause, the peace that seemed to wash over them was almost palpable.

Merely hours later, we clutched each other as we prayed one last time. Suddenly, it became bright in the room and soldiers everywhere were erect and getting their gear in place. Then the shout came and they began to flow out of the door. We darted outside from a

different exit where we could intersect with the procession so Jessica could grab one last kiss. We watched as they marched toward the buses that would transport them to their plane. My heart sank and my soul saluted them as they left. These Seabees are on their way to Afghanistan.

It was a penetrating way to start off the week where we celebrate Veterans' Day. I want to personally thank each of our men and women who have bravely served our country in this role. We know that our freedoms did not come free. I hope that you sense honor and gratitude from your fellow countrymen. We thank God for you. I also reflect on another who shed blood to set people free. Many of our veterans might have more in common with the heart of Jesus than they realize.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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