

Reuniting after Deployment

Help for the Transition

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Nina is excited. She texts all her friends and posts on Facebook, “Things are looking up.” Her friends realize this is code for an exciting reunion in the near future. After a whole year serving our country overseas, Marc is finally coming home. In the past week, Nina cleaned the house until it was spotless, got a haircut and a manicure, and bought a new dress. To be frank, Nina looked gorgeous—any man on the planet would have been tempted to look twice at her today. Marc, for his part, could hardly stand the anticipation. *I cannot wait to hold my wife in my arms*, he thought. He spent the last year in harm’s way and thus rarely had anything in his arms but his trusty M-16. He endured the heat, the boredom, the grief associated with losing a buddy, and the sleepless nights without Nina. Today, things are different. Marc and Nina are going to enjoy each other in the comforts of their own home and their own bedroom. Today, life is good.

Natasha is finally headed home too. She cannot wait to hug her children. She cannot wait to be the mom-in-residence again. The last year has been a challenge. In the States, she could be a “tough-as-nails” soldier while on duty. She could command her unit with authority and ensure that all work was done with precision. But then she could go home, paint her nails with her daughter, put on a pretty dress for her husband LeBron, and express her femininity. She could snuggle with him and

comfort her children with long-lasting “mommy hugs.” In other words, Natasha could balance being a soldier with being a woman. But during this last year overseas, she was just a tough-as-nails soldier. There wasn’t the balance she had at home. So while Natasha is excited to see her husband and family, she is also fearful that her femininity has been drained out of her, fearful that the kids will no longer need or want those tender hugs, and fearful that she will struggle reconnecting to Lebron on the tender, emotional level that is so significant to their relationship. Natasha desperately wants to be both a soldier and a woman who can unashamedly express her God-given femininity.¹

Can you relate? The days leading up to a reunion after deployment are filled with excitement, anticipation, preparation, and maybe, as in Natasha’s case, a little fear. The thought of being with your spouse is intoxicating, but you also know that the euphoria does not last forever. The emotional high eventually wears off and it’s time for real life. That is when problems can start to appear.

For example, in the weeks following the reunion, Marc struggled to find purpose. Overseas, life was dangerous but it was simple and purposeful: carry out the mission and stay alive. In America, life is safe but also complicated and messy. Marc would go to work and come home with seemingly nothing to do for sev-

eral hours in the evening. The kids had their friends and Nina had her activities and support groups. It was almost like Marc was a “third wheel” in his own home. This does not even mention the challenges in disciplining the children. Marc had to deal with a lot overseas, but rebellion from little children and unending questions about orders did not happen there. Besides, Marc did not want to discipline his children—he wanted to be their hero. Marc felt like he was going to lose his cool on many occasions.

The situation was just as frustrating for Nina. Since Marc had been gone for an entire year, she had learned to manage the affairs of the home without him. She handled the money, disciplined the children, cooked, cleaned, and did the shopping. Now Marc has disrupted the delicate balance she worked so hard to maintain. In addition, Nina had built a life for herself while Marc was gone. Several nights a week she was part of various clubs and activities. “After all,” she had reasoned, “I can’t be at home worrying every single minute whether Marc is safe.” She wanted to stay busy and build relationships with others, if for no other reason than to keep from going crazy.

Similar issues exist for Natasha and Lebron. Like Nina, Lebron has managed the children and the home without his spouse. Maybe that means the children will run to Dad when they are hurt. Maybe it means Lebron

will continue to play unending video games—after all, he had plenty of time for that in the late evenings this past year. On Natasha’s part, it’s a difficult transition from soldier to wife and mother. This transition back to “normal” family life seems to have some major obstacles.

You understand these challenges, don’t you? So how do reuniting couples rebuild their marriages? How do you rebuild *your* marriage? How do you function as a husband and wife as well as parents to your children? How do you overcome the temptation to think, *Why should I even try, since my spouse may have another tour of duty in a year or so?* Is there any hope?

Let me encourage you that God has help for you in the Person of Jesus. The Lord promises that he will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). In fact, he died on the cross for your sins while you were still an enemy (Romans 5:8). Your personal relationship with Jesus sustained you during the year you were apart, and your relationship with Christ can help you reunite too. All hope is not lost. The stories of divorce, discouragement, and depression that you have heard from other couples do not have to be your story. Just as Jesus redeemed you from an eternity separated from God, just as he rescued you from the weapons of the enemy, in the same way he can help you overcome the threats to your marriage. The Lord can ensure that your story is one of reunion, oneness, joy, peace, and thankfulness.

Maybe your chaplain gave you this minibook, but the name of Jesus means next to nothing to you. If that is your situation, please keep reading anyway. We have included a little section at the end to help you learn a bit more about Jesus.

God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, has moved toward you. He is ready to help. Now, please take a few minutes to see how the following truths from the Bible can help you take a step toward him—and toward your spouse after deployment.

Recognize that Jesus Can Help You with Your Struggles

It is important to understand that Christ can help you in all your struggles. When Jesus died on the cross, he did not merely rescue you from the power and penalty of sin—although he certainly did that. He also gives you a new lease on life itself (Romans 6:12–19). Jesus’ death made a way for all who believe that he died in our place to be set free from slavery to sin. Instead, we belong to God and become “slaves to righteousness.” This means you have a new ability to think, speak, and act in good and godly ways that you didn’t have before. God has made you a new person, and he is committed to helping you live out your new identity. At first, words like this sound trite—religious ideas that don’t help much in the day-to-day battles of life. But don’t write this off. God’s

grace is what helped the apostle Paul through some of his darkest and most troubling days.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7–9, Paul describes a form of physical suffering that he calls a “thorn in my flesh.” (We do not know exactly what it was.) When he asked God to take away the “thorn,” God answered by saying that his grace was sufficient. This meant that God was going to give Paul the ability to endure the trials and respond in a godly way to those circumstances. The same grace that God gave Paul is available to you. So, are these days of reuniting challenging for you? Of course. Are they full of change? Certainly. But God’s grace is sufficient. This means that the task of reunification is not one you have to do entirely on your own. Jesus can help you. According to Hebrews 4:14–16, you can come to God’s throne of grace any time to find mercy and help with the challenge of reuniting the family.

Are you asking for this grace? Are you seeing reunification through the lens of God’s promise to help you? If you are willing to take this step, you are on your way toward having a marriage and a family that will honor the Lord.

Seek to Understand How Hard the Last Year Has Been on Each Spouse

Another important truth to help you is found in Proverbs 18:13: “He who answers before listening—that is his

folly and his shame.” This passage warns all of us that we should not respond to a matter before we really hear and understand it. Sometimes it is so easy to view our own problems as the “really big” ones, while the challenges that others face are minor. It might be easy, for example, for Marc to think, *Well, at least your life was not in danger every moment of the day*, and thus minimize Nina’s struggles at home. It’s easy to forget that Nina did not particularly like going to bed alone. She didn’t enjoy disciplining the children, getting all the chores done, or managing the money without her spouse. When Marc listens and thinks more clearly about Nina’s struggles, he will be in a much better position to understand her and care for her. Nina has suffered during their year apart. She does not need a drill sergeant to come home and tell her all the ways she has messed up. She needs a loving husband who is willing to listen to her struggles, hug her, let her cry on his shoulder, and understand that this year has been hard on her too.

The same truth applies to Nina. In the middle of an argument it might be easy for her to minimize Marc’s struggles during his deployment. She could reason in her own mind, *He was not burdened with all the day-to-day decisions and life struggles I had. Who cleaned up the puke at 3 a.m.? Who potty trained little Caleb? And who did 1,400 loads of laundry due to potty-training “accidents”?*² *I did!* she concludes. Nina could feel like Marc has messed

up the routine she has worked so hard to establish in the home. Marc is a distraction rather than a help. Nina needs to confess attitudes like this to God and remember that Marc needs to have his place in the home—just as God directs.

Natasha and Lebron face similar issues. Lebron has had to be “Mr. Mom.” This is not a role he was particularly excited about, but now that it is working, he doesn’t appreciate Natasha coming home and changing things around. Natasha, for her part, may not be very patient with the children *or* Lebron. Her feelings are easily hurt because she is not sure where she fits. As in the case with Marc and Nina, both Natasha and Lebron have a significant place in the home. They must all commit to giving their spouse the place that God assigns.

Real reunification is only possible if you are willing to walk in your spouse’s shoes for a while—and only if you are willing to acknowledge the hardship that each of you endured during the year-long deployment. This will impact how you talk, think, and act toward each other.

Begin to Rebuild Oneness in Your Marriage

Let’s take a look at one more piece of biblical guidance for this time in your life. Early in the Scriptures biblical marriage is referred to as becoming “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Oneness in marriage is not simply sexual—it is relational, emotional, and physical. Reunification