



Christian Report

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Charting a Course For Christian Marriage

A Seven-part Letter of Encouragement to Christian Military Couples—Letter Two

Once again the letter carrier's weary little truck threaded itself through the maze of Monday's empty trash and recycle bins and halted at the mailbox of our salty septuagenarian Navy shrink and his beloved wife. Down goes the handle on his recliner, and he shuffles out to claim his daily dose of "correspondence" from those persistent businesses and politicians in love with direct mail advertising. His curiosity peaked this month because it is the month of his birthday, and there is always the odd chance of finding a Hallmark card from a loved one mixed in with the usual odd-sized entreaties. Yes, we know; a text with a series of emojis or stickers seems to have become the new birthday greeting, but one always holds out hope for something more tangible that can be set on a table or shelf and looked at for a few weeks. Today he finds only bills and junk mail in the box.

As he returns to the recliner, his addiction to checking emails from some of the same direct mail agents kicks in (as they well know it will) and Voila! On Military.com there is an offer for free cruise tickets for veterans and military folks. We may lose some readers at this point because apparently there really is a cruise line sailing out of Palm Beach, Florida, to Freeport on Grand Bahama Island that is offering free passage on three-day, two night trips. The ship has been recently renamed Margaritaville at Sea. Obviously this is aimed at Jimmy Buffet fans.

What a Providential coincidence because (if you are still with us) we were planning on discussing in this letter the three "tickets" that we believe from our professional and personal experience need to be "punched" (i.e., acquired) for a couple to have a chance at charting a good marriage. These "tickets" for a good marriage are definitely NOT free. They have to be earned through self-discipline and commitment to values and virtues



probably not promoted strongly on the Margaritaville at Sea! Let's dig into what they are. They include safety, emotional availability, and trust. If you look at these three qualities and know you have all three without reading further, we ask that you stay with us. You may have a friend or family member, now or in the future,

who may need one or more of these tickets, and this information can be valuable in helping them. Here is what we mean in more detail:

Emotional and physical safety. If either member of a couple does not feel safe, that must be addressed and fixed. Depending on the level of concern, various domestic violence protocols need to be put in place and verified that they are working before anyone ought to be encouraged to do the vulnerable work of sharing their innermost needs and feelings which is essential for a good marriage. Family advocacy programs have existed for decades in the military. We used to be members of our base's domestic violence treatment committee. Sometimes a couple needed to have a period of separation if the abuse was physical and instrumental (i.e., used as a tactic for power).

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If on the other hand, the violence was more accurately characterized as arguments that got out of hand and were (1) mutually regretted, (2) minor in physical impact/injury, and (3) not yet a pattern or habit, we found that a couples course that taught anger control, time out techniques, communication skills, clarification of family roles, and total unacceptability (and moral wrongness) of violence in relationships, could be effective in reducing or eliminating violent arguments. For three years we co-taught a domestic conflict containment class at our base. Our convictions in this area are strong ones.

Freedom from addiction. If there is an addiction at play in the couple by either or both members, then the “drug of choice” will be the primary object of their relationships, not the spouse. The drug of choice can be behavioral as well as chemical. Examples include such behavior as pornography or gambling. Addiction protocols

will need to be started and developed with some period of “sobriety” established before more intimate work can proceed. 12-step programs are deemed essential in this area even if there is a strong Christian affiliation with a church. The disease phenomenon of addiction certainly has a spiritual component that faith and church can be critical in addressing but nothing takes the place of the ready availability of seasoned recovering addicts regularly helping one another through the “stinking thinking” that torments the addict and his or her family experience. Alanon and its equivalents are rich resources for family members of addicts and ought to be utilized regardless of the involvement or progress of the addict in his or her program of recovery. Anne was



clinical director of two Navy alcohol rehab services in naval hospitals. Herschel completed two navy hospital trainings in the treatment of alcoholism and was a co-therapist in the couples group for Anne’s program at her second posting. This is reliable advice.

Absence of a third-party relationship. Even if an affair has not blossomed fully yet, the emotional energy that a third close relationship skims off leaves little energy to invest in meaningful relationship work as well as causing damage to trust and robbing a couple of the prerequisite need to feel unique and special to one another. If a couple is dealing with this situation, the relationship with the third party must end before meaningful improvement in the marital relationship can occur, or if contact cannot be eliminated due to work realities or other necessary affiliations, clear messages of a change in the nature of the relationship with that

third person must be firmly given and lived out. No secrets. The secrets have as much deleterious impact on a marriage as the third relationship itself. If an affair is revealed it is important to know that recovery from affairs are possible, but professional counseling is certainly recommended. Trust takes a lot of time to recover once lost. But where there is true sincerity and remorse, confession and repentance preferably guided by a professional counselor with that training, love and trust can bloom again. However, if there has been a sexual addiction and sexual trauma involved in the betrayal, the Association of Partners of Sex Addicts and Trauma Specialists (APSATS) is a valuable and essential

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Sound corny? I thought so too when the phrase popped into my head. I have heard of “In His Steps,” and “In His Service” but “In His Toolbox?” After all, what is a toolbox anyway? It is a collection of tools stored in a common container that allows the user to perform a variety of tasks. Who uses toolboxes? Mechanics, electricians, carpenters, plumbers, maintenance men and God—all use toolboxes. Perhaps we think of ourselves as highly trained, highly motivated and successful individuals. But who among us thinks of himself as a hammer, a pair of pliers, or a pipe wrench that can be used of God?

I have to admit that in our culture the idea of being a useful tool in someone else's toolbox (even God's) violates the philosophies touted by motivational speakers, success gurus and all the get rich quick promoters. But I'm not talking about worldly success. I'm talking about being a tool in God's toolbox.

Think about it. God, our creator and author of our salvation, is the master mechanic. His desire is that no one would perish and although He could deliver the salvation message Himself, He has chosen common folk like us to be the “tools” of His service. The mechanic at the local automobile repair shop would not be able to fix your car without tools. God has made it so His Church cannot serve without you, His tools.

As Christians serving in the military, no matter where you are stationed, no matter what your occupation, there are those around you in need of The Savior. By God's design, you represent the Savior

and Lord of the universe. The Master's desire is that we allow Him to mold us into useful tools: tools are well maintained and cared for by His love; tools that are resting in the toolbox (His sabbath rest), ready and available for His use on every occasion. What an honor to be gently lifted out of God's toolbox and to be used to heal, nurture, and encourage the Saints or even better yet, share the Good News with those around us!

Why am I excited about being “just a tool?” It is because of my gratitude to our Lord, knowing that He paid so dear a price for my sin. I was once separated from fellowship with Him and doomed to an eternity without Him. But now I am re-

stored into fellowship with Him and I look forward to spending eternity in His glorious presence! When I remember that My Savior and Lord one day long ago shed a drop of blood with my name on it, a crimson coin He used to purchase me out of the marketplace of sin—how could I not serve Him?

I am deliriously happy to be “just a tool” in the Masters toolbox! I endeavor to keep myself well oiled and ready for the His use. Oh, to be so valued by God! Are you a deliriously happy tool of the Master?

SGM Daniel Cartwright, USA (Ret.) is a 28-year veteran of the U.S. Army Special Forces and long-time member of Christian Military Fellowship. Dan is a Local Rep at Ft. Carson. He currently serves as Chairman of the CMF Board of Directors.



Are You Interested in Becoming a Local Leader?

Christian Military Fellowship exists to help you fulfill your calling in Christ to share the hope that is in you with those with whom you interact as part of your daily life.

Briefly, CMF Local Leaders will start, and sustain a CMF fellowship made up of members of the military community in their area. While CMF is an “all ranks” ministry, our area of focus is on enlisted personnel. Local leaders institute and lead the military community in Bible study, prayer, and fellowship,

keeping in communication with participants. They should also seek to build relationships with the chaplains and the chaplain team.

Toward that end we encourage you to study and complete the CMF briefing material:

Orientation (Brief #1) that shares an overview of the CMF ministry.

Developing a Local Ministry (Brief #2) that shares the Biblical foundation

for and delineates the logical steps in beginning your local ministry.

Pray and Plan (Brief #3) that shares the most important activity of all! Asking Jesus what He would have you to do and then being obedient to follow His leading in your local ministry.

If you choose to begin this process, please reach out to us at: leader@cmfhq.org.

We're praying for you!

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resource. Herschel's sister is a certified APSATS partner coach, so we have good data in this area, too.

There, those are the three tickets we believe are essential for a couple to have a chance at a good marriage regardless of their faith profession, but certainly for a Christian marriage: safety, emotional availability, and trust. With these in hand, you can board the good ship "Marriage of the Sea" and begin your navigation. Next month we will begin our discussion of the five practical areas for implementing the Christian truths about love and commitment. Those were, if you remember: (1) becoming more Christlike as a married person, (2) resolving the fundamental balance of power in the marriage, (3) risking emotional vulnerability, (4) resolving daily conflicts, and (5) enjoying the romance and passion of marriage.

So, we'll pass on the "Margaritaville of the Sea" offer. They're probably counting on getting their fares from onboard gambling anyway. That old recliner sounds like a better deal especially since the one next to it has a Lands End model sitting in it!

Dr. Herschel Hughes, Jr., CDR, MSC, USNR (Ret.) and Dr. Anne S. Hughes, LCDR, USNR (Ret.) are CMF Local Reps who are engaged in CMF's Marriage & Family and Combat Trauma Ministries. During different seasons of the year, they are able to adopt a vagabond lifestyle with their RV and enjoy traveling to different military ministry posts while continuing their own Bible teaching and ministry via video conference.

Fighting the Battle

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

I don't know what struggle you have, but one of mine is my imagination. The enemy knows this so he tries to attack me in this area. Sometimes I allow him to, instead of fighting back with scripture. We who are Christians should be aware we are in a battle for our very souls. To be able to get a brother or sister in Christ imagining things and trying to figure things out is a specialty of the enemy. If you feel this occurring stop what you are doing and tell Satan to leave you alone.

A common example is thinking people are thinking something they are not. It is necessary to take every thought captive and focus on good things and not dwell on stuff that will make you start thinking wrong things.

Wake up daily and grab your Bible and saturate your mind with good thoughts. Then go enjoy a peace filled day.

PRAYER: *I choose this day to focus on things above and how I can add joy to someone's life around me. I cast down any wrong thinking. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Becky Jewett Miller is an Army veteran, military retiree wife, prayer leader, and a long-time CMF member and contributor. She is author of God's Lemonade Stand, available free from CMF.

CHRISTIAN MILITARY FELLOWSHIP

An Indigenous Ministry • Discipleship • Prayer • Community • Support
Encouraging Men and Women in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are pleased to announce that MinistryWatch has listed CMF as one of their "Shining Light" Ministries. To become a MinistryWatch "Shining Light," a ministry must have earned a 5-star rating on MinistryWatch's 5-star financial efficiency scale. Further, those ministries on this list have a Transparency Grade of "A." That's MinistryWatch's highest transparency grade. Out of 700 ministries, only 13 meet these strict criteria.

<https://ministrywatch.com/ministrywatches-annual-list-of-shining-light-ministries/>

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We are members of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and Christian Service Charities in order to maintain the highest standards of excellence and accountability.

