

The Honor of Military Service

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As a teen growing up in Korea, one of my dreams was to move to America. At the time, it was not easy to receive a visa from the U.S. Embassy in Korea. It was next to impossible to meet all the legal requirements for immigration unless you received an invitation from a family member living the U.S. But surely God had a plan for my life in America. In May 1967, the legal process for my family's immigration was finally approved! After three long years of waiting, it was a miracle of God's grace.



Day of departure to America, 1967 - Kimpo Airport, Seoul

One of the main reasons I wanted to go to America was because I had a strong desire to serve in the U.S. Army. Whenever I saw American soldiers stationed in Korea carry out their duties to defend our small nation, I felt a burden to pay back even just a tiny portion of the great national debt we owed to the U.S. I thought it would be such an honor for me to acknowledge my gratitude to my newly adopted country by enlisting in its armed services. So within three months after arriving in Hilo, Hawaii to join my mother and my older sister, I volunteered for the U.S. Army in September 1967. My heart swelled with pride as I fulfilled this worthy life goal.

My decision to enlist was during the Vietnam War era. While many young people were traveling out of the country to dodge the draft, I rejoiced that I could be in America and join the army. So at 19 years of age, I began this new journey of life not knowing what my future would hold. As I reflect on my four months of BCT/AIT and two years of active duty in 1967-69 stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, I can see how God provided so many blessings, far beyond my imagination. It was an opportunity to grow and mature as a human being, to learn about American culture, the English language, military life, and even earn my U.S. citizenship. After two years of active duty, I was discharged so that I could attend college and obtain two seminary degrees under the GI Bill. During those days, tuition was free for seminary students of the Southern Baptist Convention through the Cooperative Program.

In 1986, seventeen years after my discharge from active duty, I felt God's calling to serve as an Army Reserve Chaplain. At the time I was the founding pastor of a growing collegiate church in Berkeley, California. But despite the busyness of ministry, I knew helping our troops through pastoral care and counseling was another worthy "duty" that God was calling me to. I served in this capacity for nearly a decade, and since then God has opened the doors for me to advance the Gospel through the military chaplaincy.

Now, as the national chaplain of the Korean War Veterans Association, I'm so grateful to have served my country for the cause of defending freedom and upholding the Constitution of the United States. Our freedom is given by God; no government should take away from *We the People*. The Bible says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage (Psalm 33:12)."



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America's Christian heritage began with a small band of Separatists known as the Pilgrims when they established Plymouth Colony in 1620. They came to this new land looking for the freedom to worship God in a way that was denied to them in England. We know the story well—how they suffered much in that first winter, yet they never lost hope that God would honor their faith. We are indebted to these Founding Fathers and Mothers of faith. As Plymouth colony's governor, William Bradford (1590-1657) wrote: "All great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage." These were honorable soldiers of Christ, fighting the spiritual battle, and equipped with the weapons of faith, hope, and love. The Bible says, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him (2 Timothy 2:3-4)." Our God is a mighty conqueror, warrior, and King on the lookout for faithful soldiers.

It is the sacrifice of our veterans that have made our nation strong and honorable. All veterans live by the code: "Honor, Duty, Country." I pray that each and every one of us can also add faith, hope, love,

and Christ. As we continue to serve our veterans, their families, and our communities, may we all carry the banner of faith by serving the greatest commander—Jesus Christ who is the victor over Satan, sin, and death. God is seeking honorable soldiers of Christ to serve His Kingdom. The Bible says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).” Live each day for Jesus who is the coming King who will establish His Kingdom of peace and justice for eternity. Maranatha!