

### **Christian Testimony III: Education #4, faith in secular spaces, War #3**

After nearly four years of war, either in or preparing to go back to it, I felt the Lord calling me on a different professional trajectory. I applied for and was accepted to be a Professor of Military Science and lead an Army ROTC battalion. Not insignificantly, the Lord called us back to Penn State at the same time dear friends of ours, Mark and Jen Read, were returning for Mark's doctoral program. In an extremely rare confluence of careers, Mark and I had earned our M.A. at Penn State, taught at West Point, mentored cadets through Navigators—all together. Mark was also a faithful follower of Jesus committed to also being an excellent Army officer. Like us, the Reads experienced war following our West Point teaching assignments. At such a time, in such a place, God provided the Reads (again)—a wholly unexpected blessing at the specific time we needed. Over the next two years Mark and I, now as lieutenant colonels, regularly met for mutual encouragement and fellowship. We also participated in a men's small group ministry at our common church home. It was at Penn State that God again reinforced the power of relationship within the church even as we ministered in a secular environment (at the time Penn State was dubbed the #1 party school in America). Professionally the Lord was growing me as a leader, as I was entering a season that would last for the next ten years on how to lead as a Christian in a secular environment.

From 2011 through 2019 my Army career took many unpredictable paths. Yet at each juncture we sought the Lord, the counsel of His Word, and the fellowship of His people. We wanted to serve Him, go where He wanted us to go, and we asked that the Lord continue to strengthen our family collectively and individually. Yet God also showed us how important it was to look beyond our church walls. In this season in particular we also greatly enjoyed getting to know families and people who did not know Jesus as we did, but who were similar to my parents when I was young: intelligent, professionally excellent, morally upright, unique in their own personalities, and tons of fun. Our heart grew for these men and women, some agnostic, some atheists, even some of different worldviews and faiths altogether. We were also thankful to have been given their friendship and fellowship. I learned practically how, as Christians, we can partner joyfully with people on good, God-honoring things even if our partners don't fully ascribe to our motivations, which are faith based in the Christian worldview.

This was also a season of increased leadership in secular environments. As I took on a range of roles that increasingly gave me professional autonomy to work variously with local governments, law enforcement, high tech firms, and international allies and partners across the globe, I learned how to integrate my faith in work in new ways. Daily I was in a secular environment, often with high financial or policy stakes in play. At one level this was exciting. Personally, as a Christian, I often found myself increasingly isolated and alone. My faith was strong, and I was open about my faith, but I often relied on the Biblical examples of Daniel, Joseph, and Cornelius for wisdom in leadership and service to others who did not necessarily share my faith. Although most environments were not outwardly hostile to my Christianity, I increasingly found that public acknowledgement of one's faith was frowned on, especially for leaders. Despite these challenges, I found that God did not abandon me, that His Word was alive, and that encouragers were still so important. Similarly, I tried to encourage people as I traveled and worked, wherever I encountered them. In this season of senior military leadership,

I aimed to be salt and light where I was leading. In reflection, these were challenging years, and I didn't always sense I was living my faith as well as I wanted to. Yet through these times I learned more of God's grace, mercy, and kindness that only magnified His holiness, goodness, and purity as we took on challenging missions.

In 2015 I deployed for a year to Afghanistan. In my year there, the Lord brought home to me the fleeting nature of our earthly lives. Between my own medical emergency that caused me to be evacuated out of country for critical care, to witnessing a catastrophic helicopter crash, to a friend's vehicle being blown up by a Taliban bomb, the Lord brought me personally to a place I have never been. Life was fleeting, and I was seeing it not once, but with increasing frequency and persistent reality. While these didn't daunt me spiritually, the Lord used these events to show me to live more presently, to regard each day as a generous gift, and to value and esteem each person we encounter—friend or foe—as an eternal being, made in His image. During this time, it also became clear to me that my calling to military service would be coming to an end sometime in the next few years. My prayer—my heart cry—became to ask God what He would want me and my family to do with the remaining days He was giving me.