

LIFTING UP MILITARY FAMILIES

CC BANGOR, MAINE

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Military Families



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jacob N. Bailey, U.S. Air Force

Nine-year-old Michael Kervin was not himself. His mother, Lisa, had noticed that her son's normally quiet, easygoing demeanor had been replaced by a short fuse, and he was lashing out at his little sister, Lizzy.

She suspected her husband's recent deployment to Iraq was the reason. Serving in the Army Reserves on a helicopter Medevac unit, Staff Sgt. Matt Kervin had been overseas several times. Though every deployment was hard, the last time he came home, Matt had gotten sick and had to have a brain tumor removed. After he recovered and received deployment orders again, Matt and Lisa, who have been married for 14 years, were surprised but accepted it as God's will.

Over the past few weeks, Michael had been asking questions about his father: what would happen if daddy's helicopter crashed, if he was stranded in Iraq, or if he got sick? That night as the couple talked on the phone, Lisa related their son's recent behavior and anxieties to her husband.

"Why don't you ask the pastor to talk to him?" Matt suggested. The next day, Lisa called the office at CC Bangor, ME, and asked if Senior Pastor Ken Graves could speak to her son. That day, Ken walked to the elementary school classrooms on the church grounds and asked to see Michael. As he and the boy walked around the school building, Ken asked how he was doing.

They talked about the honor of serving and protecting one's country, and about the importance and value of his dad's job to many people. Ken shared that he knew how hard it was not having a father around since his own father had died when he was a boy. Michael confessed, "I don't want to grow up without my dad."

Ken, not wanting to give Michael false assurances about his father's safety, encouraged him to continue praying for his dad and trusting in the Lord, his heavenly Father. He said, "No matter what happens, the Lord



Pastor Ken Graves of CC Bangor, ME, uses Scripture to encourage Michael Kervin, 9, whose father—Staff Sgt. Matt Kervin—is serving in Iraq with the Army Reserves.

In northwestern Iraq, a U.S. Army soldier from the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team runs to board a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter operated by the Alaska National Guard's 207th Aviation Regiment.



Ken, left, talks to Michael on the church grounds, encouraging him to lean on the Lord for comfort while his father is deployed in Iraq. Michael goes to school at CC Bangor, affording opportunities for him and Ken to talk without scheduling formal counseling sessions.

will always be your Dad.” He then cited Philippians 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Michael came home and told his mother that he was going to memorize the verses from Philippians that Ken had shared with him. “After their meeting, Michael began reading his Bible more on his own,” Lisa said.

Ministering with Wisdom

“When ministering to children,” Ken added, “You don’t always have to say something or give them some monologue. Often, all they need is for you to spend time listening to

them, giving a little practical help, or offering some assurance.” Instead of singling Michael out for formal counseling sessions, which can be intimidating for children, Ken often talks to Michael when he sees him at school or church.

“The people in our fellowship try to be sensitive to the families who are dealing with this,” said Ken. There are several service members in the CC Bangor congregation. “Besides worrying about their loved ones being hurt or taken from them, the families are dealing with all of the inconveniences—the transition from being an intact family to being temporarily separated, the hardships, and the sacrifices. For the children, it’s things like not having your dad there rooting for you at a game. That’s a big deal to a child. Then there’s the political situation: How the war is spoken of in the media makes it seem so purposeless. The contradiction of ‘support the troops but not the war’ can be very confusing for children.”

This war has also seen many soldiers who are demoralized upon their return home, he added, citing a recent *Time* magazine article which reported that Army suicides hit at an all-time high in 2007.

Several men in the church serve in the “helps ministry” by aiding military or single-parent families with practical things—car repairs, home repairs, and yard work. Ken said these things should be done with wisdom—especially by always sending two or more people to serve together. “We really believe the Lord Jesus set the example by always sending the disciples out in pairs,” Ken explained. “We discourage a man from doing anything on his own that would make him as an individual the ‘hero.’ Rather, we can act as a team of brothers, or we go as a husband-and-wife team.” It’s important to protect the military marriages and the hearts of the single moms, Ken explained. If an individual needs counsel or prayer, then it’s wisest for women to minister to women, and men to men.

Not Burdening Tiny Shoulders

Sometimes well-meaning people can say things that are crippling to children. “I think it’s frustrating when boys are told, ‘Now you are the man of the house.’ It makes them feel so inadequate because they are never going to fill their dad’s shoes—not at 9 years old. They’re too little and not strong enough,” Lisa said.

Ken agreed. “When I was a child and my father left us, someone told me that I was now the man of house. It was a crushing weight to put on tiny shoulders. You don’t know what it means, what’s expected of you. I had a bunch of little sisters, and the burden was overwhelming,” Ken recalled. “But God used it for good in my life; I had to call out to God because there was nobody else.”

Instead of being given such a burden, children should be encouraged to see God as their source of strength, comfort, and refuge, Ken explained.

Lisa said it has been helpful for her children to be involved in church—including things like vacation Bible school. She said, “We need to have fun together—milestones to help us make it through till Daddy comes home.”

God Uses All for Good

The frequent times apart have been hard on everyone in the Kervin family. “Matt has missed five of Michael’s birthdays,” Lisa said. But she praises the Lord for helping them through it.

“There’s no way I could do this by myself. So many people are unable to endure—mentally, physically, and spiritually. They fail, or their marriages fail. But with God we can get through anything.” She added, “He is always reminding me that He is right here with me; I’m never alone.” Other ladies from church have often encouraged her with a phone call or prayer.

God has also brought good from it. Lisa related, “The time apart has strengthened our marriage; but it also has strengthened our relationship with God—we don’t rely on each other but on God Himself.” Depending more on the Lord on a day-to-day basis,

she said, “has done wonders for my walk.” She added, “And Matt seems to come back a lot stronger spiritually. He’ll be in his room [in Iraq] studying his Bible, and guys will come in and ask what he’s doing. One time, three guys ended up doing a Bible study with him.”

Staying in the Word

Lisa encouraged other military wives: “Get in the Word. If you don’t make it a priority, it will be evident in how you deal with your husband and your kids. ... At times, when I thought I was too busy to read my Bible, it just made my day harder ... like there was an invisible barrier to everything I tried to do.”

Lisa added that her husband loves God’s Word and is praying about the family serving on the mission field one day. “God has given him a gift: If someone has a question, he can find a verse to answer it. He has an awesome knowledge of the Word and an



Top right: Michael, mom Lisa, and Lizzy Kervin of CC Bangor often pray together for daddy. Bottom left: Staff Sgt. Matt Kervin stands beside the Medevac helicopter aboard which he serves in Iraq.

ability to remember verses, to point you right to where things are in the Bible.”

She also reads the Bible with her children at bedtime—including a psalm and a reading from the Gospels. “It’s awesome to see God comfort them through His Word. They can be all wound up, and then they’ll just mellow out when we read together,” she said. “Sometimes I’ll read them a Christian book—something to spark their interest, to make them want to read the Bible. The last book we read was by Chuck Smith, about all the different names of God in the Scriptures.”

Michael said he likes to read his Bible: “It’s kind of relaxing, and it reminds me of my dad. ... We went hunting one day ... and on our way home we started reading Proverbs together.”

To other children whose fathers are deployed, 5-year-old Lizzy said, “Whenever you want, you can just pray for your dad and ask God to keep him safe.”

Coming Home: the Transition

Lisa noted that military families often face new challenges when dad or mom returns home. “They come back changed,” she said. “You worry about their moods—if they are okay after seeing such hard stuff.” Plus, everyone’s routine has to shift. She added, “We [wives at home] are used to having control, so it’s a balancing act when husbands return—they are the head of the house again. When Matt gets home, he tells me what responsibilities he’s going to take over, and that’s helpful for me.” Matt is due to return home in January. ☺

***“Dear Lord, I pray
You would lift my daddy up
and help him a lot,
and I ask You in my heart that
You would bring him back safe.
In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”***

Lizzy Kervin, age 5