



*deployment*

**5 DAY  
DEVOTIONAL**

**YOU'RE NOT ALONE**

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LET'S WALK THROUGH  
THIS TOGETHER

Day 1

# The Dread: The Pre-Deployment Phase

I remember my husband's first deployment to a *bad place*. He was scheduled to leave a couple of days after Christmas, and all I remember about that holiday season is the overwhelming feeling of *dread, dread, dread*.

In fact, if I'm being honest (and I am), there was a part of me that wanted the goodbyes to be over with already so I could stop imagining the worst and get busy with the actual work of dealing with the deployment. Since that time, we've been through several more deployments, and the feelings haven't changed.

**Have you been there?** No matter how many times you've been through it, *deployment is difficult*. I've put together this short study for you to use however you'd like. Whether you simply skim it or dive more deeply into the suggested Scripture and journal prompts, I hope it's an encouragement to your heart!



**However you use it, I want you to know you're not alone.**

I and many others have been where you now find yourself and are here to uphold you during these hard days. But more importantly, *God is with you.*

I can picture exactly where I was when my husband informed me about his last deployment. Standing in the white-tiled kitchen of our home in Germany where we were stationed, a numb shock enveloped me as he informed me he'd be leaving for a year in Afghanistan...*in 3 weeks.*

We quickly began all the tasks involved with getting someone out the door for a year in a short time: making decisions about whether the kids and I would go back home or stay overseas (we stayed), dealing with paperwork like powers of attorney and vehicle information. *But the thing I most remember about that time is feeling as though I existed and functioned in a grey cloud of funk.*

We moved up our planned family vacation, talked to the kids and answered their questions, did all the things...but through much of it, I felt numb, as though I were observing someone else.



It's important to recognize that you will most likely walk through the classic stages of grief when receiving the news of your loved one's deployment: shock, denial, anger, and so on.

As Christians, we are not exempt from these feelings. As C.S Lewis said in *A Grief Observed* after the death of his beloved wife:

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.

The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me.

I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.



*The invisible blanket...are you feeling this? How are you coping with it? Are you overwhelmed by the news, task-oriented, in denial, or something else?*

The important thing to realize is that, just like grief, **there is no right way to feel about an impending deployment.** And don't believe anyone who tells you differently, no matter how well-intentioned they may be.

Give yourself permission to feel what you're feeling...and then take those feelings and bring them to Jesus.

Even if your heart can't believe it right now, remind yourself of the truths of God's providence and care for your life. *He is there.*

**On the next page are some of my favorite verses to hold onto when I'm overwhelmed.**





Today's  
Scripture

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (Isaiah 26:3).

I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13).

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:1-2).

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging (Psalm 46:1-3).



What is your biggest worry as you face this upcoming deployment? Be honest with God.

As Christians, though we may be overwhelmed with sadness and grief, we also have a hope. It's important to recognize that what we focus our minds on from day to day will become our truth.

Use the above verses or write out some of your own to create visual reminders of God's grace and help.





## Journal Prompts

Let's get practical. What is the situation where you live? Do you have a good support system?

Even if you don't think you'll need it, you may want to put together a list of emergency contacts, pencil in some activities to look forward to, or plan to get back to your regular schedule as soon as you can to maintain a semblance of normalcy.



Day 2

## The Goodbye

You may have a deployment ceremony with others to mark the leaving or you may whisper your goodbyes quietly at home.

If you're like me, you may have wished the farewell to be over with and done, but now that it's actually *here*, you're torn by the wild desire to make this stop, for it to all go away somehow, but you can't.

Promises of calls and letters, a pre-deployment argument (yep, been there), waving while the ship or plane pulls away...while the romantic send-off featured in movies is probably not your reality, the day of departure has arrived.

I would encourage you to allow yourself a quiet day or two to process what's just happened if you can. It's BIG.



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The reality that the one you love most in the world will now be in a place where others want to cause harm to him (or her) is chilling.

Knowing that your spouse is across the world and not easily reached is an isolating sensation. **I don't think I'd ever understood what true loneliness was until my husband was in Iraq while I tried to carry on with life back in the U.S.**

If you have children, you'll also be dealing with their fears and questions (we'll talk more about this later). After one deployment send-off, I found my 13-year-old son huddled up in a corner of his room, attempting to keep me from seeing him cry. He wanted to protect me! I brought my four children together and let them know it was ok to ask questions, to be upset together. As parents, we want to shield our children from our grief, but it is probably healthier if they realize we're struggling with the goodbye, too.

Corrie ten Boom is one of my heroes of the faith (Please read her book, *The Hiding Place*, if you haven't—I think it will strengthen and inspire you). Following are some wise words from Corrie.



**"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have."**

**"There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still."**

**"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."**

**-Corrie ten Boom**

The final goodbye is wrenching. Your heart is sore, and you wish you could curl up in a blanket and close your eyes until it's all over.

*Hey friend, here's my hand. I am thinking of you today. And even more than that, **God knows**. He won't leave you alone. This is a moment of blind faith, of trust...trusting that things will get better, even if it doesn't seem like it right now.*



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Today's  
Scripture

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5,6).

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze (Isaiah 43:2).

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18).



The first couple of days after the goodbye may be all about distraction and getting through. Order in food, watch a movie, take a nap. While we can't hide from our adult responsibilities, lower your expectations of what you're requiring of yourself right now. In what way will you be nice to yourself today?



Take a moment to write down your thoughts and feelings from today. Later on, this can be a record to look back and see how God has sustained you!

Psalm 91 is a passage of Scripture I've relied on during deployments. What is your special verse or quote?



Day 3

## Passing Time

"I miss you even more than I could have believed; and I was prepared to miss you a good deal." — Vita Sackville-West

"I believe in the immeasurable power of love; that true love can endure any circumstance and reach across any distance." — Steve Maraboli

"How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard?" — A.A. Milne

Once the flurry of the deployment goodbye has passed and the first difficult days gotten through, hopefully you'll find a new groove to settle into.

These can be the moments where time seems to stand still... *for you*. Everyone around you is going about their lives, while you may feel like you're just existing, passing time.



**The deployment ache is real and nearly impossible to describe to someone who hasn't been through it.**

Though you may be going to work as usual, dropping off and picking up kids, and otherwise going about your normal routine, there's a sadness that colors everything.

You may feel guilty having fun while your loved one is in harm's way. You may find yourself distracted and unable to concentrate on normal tasks or find activities that were once enjoyable to be frivolous and silly.

When separated from my husband, whether it's deployment or a regular military TDY ('temporary duty' in the Air Force), I find that what I miss most are the everyday conversations, the sharing little details and catching up on life. Perhaps you feel the same as the poet e.e. cummings so aptly worded:

**i carry your heart with me (i carry it in  
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is  
done by only me is your doing, my darling)**



The ache, the sadness, while not welcome, make sense in light of the *one flesh* that God designed for husbands and wives, described in Genesis 2.

Rather than just marking time, could you perhaps take this time apart to purposefully work on your marriage, even long distance?

### **Some ideas that have helped us feel more connected:**

- Choose a book of the Bible to study together long-distance.
- If it's feasible, go through a marriage book or devotional together and discuss over email or phone when you can.
- Take time each day to jot down special memories or little moments to show them on their return.
- Keep a family journal where each person writes notes for the deployed parent to read when they come home. Children may want their own journal if they need a private space to record their feelings. Perhaps you can all put notes in a jar during the months apart to read on homecoming.





## Today's Scripture

...May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other (Genesis 31:49).

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives (Colossians 1:9).

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called ‘woman,’

for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:22-24).



What is it you're missing most about married life? While you can't replace the person gone, in what other productive ways can you fill your time?



The moments your spouse comes to mind are a good time to remember them in prayer. Write your specific prayer for him or her today:

Whether your marriage is on solid footing or could use some work, take some time to think about all the ways you're thankful for your partner--then let them know.



Day 4

## Family Matters: Helping Your Kids Cope

“I want him h-h-home...right...now!”

Each word punctuated with a frustrated sob, my daughter threw herself facedown on her bed.

Then five years old, she simply didn't have the capacity to understand why her dad couldn't tuck her into bed...*again*. Though we'd explained where he was and how long it would be until he'd return, she was **done with it**. Frankly, so was I. Her clenched fists and angry face mirrored my own feelings, and I would have honestly thrown a tantrum right along with her if I'd felt it was acceptable.

Children cope with deployment in various ways; some become closed off and need drawing out, while others, like my daughter, let you know exactly how they're feeling. As a parent, you may feel helpless because the deployment



and separation from the other parent is not something you can change, and you are alone to deal with the fallout.

## **How to help our youngest family members cope?**

**Pray specifically.** Make each child's needs a matter of daily prayer. Pray for God's leading for resources and help if you need it. Ask for wisdom and sensitivity if your child has a need to talk to someone other than you, for counseling, or for other help.

**Trust.** One of the only thoughts that got me through some of the dark days of deployment was remembering that, no matter what, God is not surprised. He knew what our family would face and promised to walk through it with us. While it doesn't make it easy, there is great trust and confidence in knowing we are part of God's bigger plan.

**Connect.** There are some wonderful deployment resources out there (see next page for a quick list). Then, connect with other families going through the same thing, so your kids have someone who relates to their situation.



**Don't pin all your hopes on one day.** I'm not a big fan of keeping a visual deployment countdown. Homecoming dates often change, and small children will be disappointed that all the stones in a jar (or however you're marking it) are gone, but the parent hasn't made it home. I recommend discussing it in general time frames.

**Let them talk.** Often, we parents want to 'solve' whatever problem our kids are facing, and deployments are no exception. Build in casual time for your kids to vent or ask questions, whether it's a walk or trip to the grocery store, and then just listen. I've found the 'facing forward' time in the car to and from sports or music lessons to be a non-threatening time for kids to open up. However you do it, give kids your time and attention.

**Some recommended deployment resources for kids:**

Comfort Crew for Kids  
Military Kids Connect  
Operation Purple Camps  
United Through Reading





Today's  
Scripture

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:2).

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11).

In my distress I called to the Lord;  
I cried to my God for help.  
From his temple he heard my voice;  
my cry came before him, into his  
ears (Psalm 18:6).

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).



As a parent, there's nothing more difficult than seeing your child struggle. Start a list of specific prayer requests for each of your children, then note answers or ongoing prayer needs. Look back on these later to remind yourself of God's faithfulness.



Do you have a child who's not coping well with this deployment challenge? Trusting that God knows their needs even more than you do, pray for wisdom, then explore resources (chaplain, pastor, teacher, counselor familiar with military life) to partner with you to help your child walk through the coming days.



Day 5

# Preparing Your Heart for Homecoming

## **Reintegration.**

If you've been through deployment before, this word will probably stir a reaction in you. If this is your first homecoming, hold on!

Though you may be early in the deployment, it's never too early to start thinking about the time when you come back together with your spouse.

## **Perhaps you can relate:**

*When homecoming day arrives, emotions tend to run high. You will probably experience a honeymoon period at the gladness of being together again. I hope you do! But you may also have some struggles during the period known as reintegration--those days, weeks, and even months after a deployment or long separation.*



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*You've waited for this day...you missed each other so...you couldn't wait to feel his arms around you again. But after several days back together, everything seems a little..off. You didn't expect the growing pains that would go along with the post-deployment phase. You feel like a stranger is living with you. He's wondering about decisions you made while he's been away. You think he seems distant and wonder why something like socks left on the floor causes a disproportionate amount of irritation to rise up in you.*

*So then you question yourself. After all, what kind of person wouldn't be grateful that her spouse is back after months apart? Why are these little things so annoying? You wonder, what is wrong with me?*

*How do you rebuild a life after deployment?*

*(From my book, [You Are Not Alone: Encouragement for the Heart of a Military Spouse](#), copyright Jen McDonald)*

While you can't predict what will happen between now and the time your spouse returns or how either of you will react, you *can* begin to prepare mentally.



**Manage expectations.** In the days leading up to his last homecoming, my husband and I discussed at length the reintegration issues we'd dealt with in the past and what we could expect. By then, he'd been in the Air Force over 25 years, so we felt like we had a handle on it. *Surprise!* We still went through some tough times even though our eyes were wide open to what was coming. It helped for each of us to attempt to see things from the other's point of view. We also made the effort not to place unrealistic expectations on the other.

**Talk.** Communicate as homecoming draws near, as well as after. Be honest about how things are going, how you're feeling, but be wary of playing the "I had it tougher than you" game. No one wins. These forced separations are hard on everyone. Arguing over who had it worse only divides and causes resentment. Remember that you're on the same team.

**Grace.** This time apart will change you both; it's inevitable. Pray for patience and generosity as you move forward to the new chapter of your lives. Know that if you can work through these days, an even better and stronger marriage is just ahead.\*





## Today's Scripture

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9,10).

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Cor. 13: 4-7).



Start thinking of ways to reconnect when your spouse returns, including simple things like learning a new activity or game together.

Create a list together of date night ideas.

Prepare *now* for the reintegration period. For instance, when my husband returned from his last deployment, rather than being annoyed by his snoring, I reminded myself how much I'd missed knowing he was near while he was gone. Come up with your own list of things to focus on and be thankful for when tensions spring up.

\* If you are facing issues related to PTSD or other trauma, please seek professional help.



# Let's Connect

**Did you find this devotional helpful? I'd love to hear from you. You might also be interested in my book, [You Are Not Alone](#), a 30-day devotional for military spouses.**

For more content for military spouses, join me at my site, [Jen McDonald](#), and find me on social media.

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