



FOR THE WELS SERVICE MEMBER:

Sharing your faith in the military

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15b

“Always be prepared” seems like a fundamental piece of wisdom that applies to just about anyone in life. Whether you are getting ready for a day of school, a day of work, or a day of fun and relaxation, being prepared is good advice.

That certainly is the case for service members in the US military. You will need to be prepared for your next task, your next test, your next deployment.

Always being prepared applies to living our faith too. Peter essentially says, “Be ready. Be ready when you have the opportunity to share your faith with someone.”

But doing that in the military can be an extra challenge. With a policy of “no proselytizing,” how does a Christian service member both adhere to military guidelines and also witness their faith in their Savior?

Peter’s advice is helpful. He said, “Always be prepared to give an answer *to everyone who asks you* to give the reason for the hope that you have.” For someone to ask you about your faith—that implies something has happened. They will have to see you *live your faith*. Faith is invisible. It can only be comprehended if someone lives it, whether in “regular life” out in the world or in the United States military.

You will spend extended amounts of time with some people at certain points during your time in the military. It is inevitable that conversations and situations will come up that touch on topics of religion, spirituality, and faith. For example, due to COVID-19, a soldier spent almost five weeks in quarantine in a barracks with the same group of people day after day before he even began his basic training. On Sunday mornings, he got out his Bible and read a few verses. It didn’t take long before people were *asking him* about what he was doing and why.

Peter singles out one other important word. “Always be prepared to give an answer ... for the *hope* that you have.” A Christian always has ... *hope*! Whether you are being torn down and rebuilt by your drill sergeants in basic training, under the danger of gunfire in a foreign country, clearing IEDs from roadsides, or just relaxing in your barracks, you have hope. No matter what happens to our bodies, what will happen to our souls does not change. We live in the peace and forgiveness that only Jesus can bring. That makes a difference in how we live our lives.

You will certainly want to be aware and respectful of the beliefs of others. The military is a melting pot of nationalities, religions, and cultures. You can expect to be exposed to new beliefs and viewpoints. Don’t get into

arguments. There is no need to prove that you are right and others are wrong. Restraining from arguing is the gentleness and respect that Peter was talking about.

Give a clear testimony to your faith when the time and place are appropriate. As people get to know you, you will be able to have spiritual conversations. There are many who know nothing of Jesus Christ other than what they have seen on TV or heard from others. Be alert to each opportunity that God may place before you.

Based on conversations with WELS service members and others, here are some do's and don'ts for living and sharing your faith in the military.

Do:

- As soon as you can, sign yourself up at wels.net/refer, and encourage others to do so. When you sign up, you will receive weekly military-minded devotions by email from our national civilian chaplain. Through the referral process you can also request your free copy of the *Christian Service Members Handbook*. It's a great resource that contains prayers, devotions, Scriptures, and hymns chosen for you in a compact format.
- Reach out to your home church and let your pastor know your current phone number and email. Ask them to pray for you and include you in church communications.
- When you arrive at your permanent duty station, find the nearest WELS congregation. Attend services and introduce yourself to the pastor. They will be glad to serve you with the Word of God and encourage you in your work.
- Live your faith! People will notice when you get up and go to church on a Sunday morning. They will notice when you speak respectfully of the opposite sex, of your leaders, of your work. And they may ask what sets you apart.
- Be ready to invite someone to join you if you are driving to church or to a Bible Study. We once had a member whose wife FaceTimed our Sunday service, and he would watch live from somewhere in Afghanistan in the middle of the night. He was asked many times what he was doing and why he was doing it. It was a great way for him to witness his faith.
- Feed your faith. It's hard living your faith when you are not in the Word. Besides your Bible, use your *Christian Service Members' Handbook* as your prayer and personal devotional resource.

Some cautions to consider:

- Don't proselytize. This is defined as forcing someone to agree with your faith. It can be considered spiritual harassment.
- Don't argue about faith issues. Tell what Jesus has done for you. Tell what Jesus means for you personally. It's hard to argue with that.
- Accept that there will be some who will not appreciate you because of your faith. Jesus said as much.

WELS Evangelism has created excellent resources to teach you how to share your faith. Review the witness training available at welscongregationalservices.net/evangelism-modules.