

Spirit-Filled Prayers for America's Struggling Veterans

As we observe Veterans Day on Friday, November 10, let's pray for the safety of the almost 200,000 U.S. troops who are currently deployed overseas in 177 countries and for the countless veterans and civilians right here on our soil who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD affects an estimated 12 to 20 percent of non-injured veterans and 32 percent of veterans who have been in combat. It's a debilitating illness that can result when a person lives through a traumatic event such as war. Many civilians are also affected by PTSD; approximately 8 percent of the U.S. population experiences PTSD symptoms as the result of traumas such as rape, physical abuse, serious accidents and natural disasters.

The condition is often either undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, and people who have no experience with it often don't understand it. The slightest sound, smell, or movement can trigger flashbacks and cause a person with the condition to relive the trauma.

PTSD is associated with a high suicide risk and can be difficult to treat. Currently, only two FDA-approved medications are used to treat PTSD symptoms, and their effectiveness is limited. According to a 2017 RAND study, less than half of military service members receive an adequate amount of initial care when beginning treatment for PTSD or depression.

Veterans with PTSD often face additional difficulties that compound their suffering. For example, people who oppose the U.S. government's military involvement may criticize or even attack veterans who served in conflicts. And there is still a

stigma regarding behaviors that may be interpreted as mental illness. Soldiers on active duty often keep silent about their PTSD symptoms because they fear that they will be considered weak if they seek treatment.

A relatively new form of psychotherapy called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is showing promise as an effective treatment for PTSD. EMDR uses a patient's own rapid, rhythmic eye movements to dampen the power of emotionally charged memories of past traumatic events.

The American Psychiatric Association says EMDR is effective for treating symptoms of acute and chronic PTSD and may be particularly useful for people who have trouble talking about the traumatic events they've experienced. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense have jointly issued clinical practice guidelines that "strongly recommended" EMDR for the treatment of PTSD. You can find an EMDR specialist in your geographic area on the EMDR International Association's (EMDRIA's) website.

I believe God's grace, coupled with effective medical treatment, is the most powerful way to cure the invisible injuries that PTSD inflicts on survivors of traumatic events. Grace is an unmerited gift that God gives to us, often when we are desperate and in crisis. Those who cry out to God can be transformed by an outpouring of God's amazing grace, giving them the strength to seek treatment and support.

Bob Uber, whose story is featured in my second book, *Grace Revealed*, was diagnosed with PTSD decades after he returned home from Vietnam. He was 24 years old when he began his 13-month tour of duty. His unit came under attack just four hours after he arrived at his post.

He writes, "When a bomb or hand grenade went off in the midst of a group, there was carnage—absolute was most devastating, and became the core of my trauma, were the my nightmares and

flashbacks involve seeing children as carnage, as collateral damage to war. That will never go away.”

In 2011, Bob established Heal Our Heroes () in High Point, North Carolina, to provide support, camaraderie and outdoor retreats to help veterans heal. As debilitating as his wartime experience was, he sees that God is using it—and him—to support veterans in a way that only a fellow veteran of a foreign war can do.

Bob says it took him 30 years to realize that he had brought the war home with him. He writes, “It took over my life ... I didn’t want to hear sounds and smells that became emotional barrages that took me back to those images and places. But by God’s grace, and by His Word, God’s grace began to pull me through, and I began to regain my perspective.”

This Veterans Day, and every day, you can contribute to the healing process by praying for friends and loved ones suffering from PTSD and by encouraging them to seek treatment and to reach out to the Lord for help. Proclaim the Good News—no, the Great News—that God’s grace can enable veterans and civilians alike to conquer PTSD and rebuild their lives.
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Fred Sievert *is a retired president of New York Life Insurance Company, a Fortune 100 corporation and has a master’s degree from Yale Divinity School. His first book, God Revealed: Revisit Your Past to Enrich Your Future, was published in 2014. His second book, Grace Revealed: Finding God’s Strength in Any Crisis, is scheduled to be released on Jan. 1, 2018.*