Sue: I can’t imagine anything worse than having some Marine standing on our doorstep, at three o’clock in the morning, telling us the news. I often felt like Abraham, bringing Isaac to the altar. I think God calls us to do that with our children regardless. This is part of worshipping God—is to give Him control and to trust Him.

Bob: Sue Stokes is a mom whose son, Andrew, served two tours of duty in Iraq. Like any mom, she was concerned for her son’s safety. She says that concern stretched her faith.

Sue: I can’t imagine anything worse than having some Marine standing on our doorstep, at three o’clock in the morning, telling us the news. I often felt like Abraham, bringing Isaac to the altar. I think God calls us to do that with our children regardless. This is part of worshipping God—is to give Him control and to trust Him.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, May 26th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. On this Memorial Day, we want to honor those, both living and dead, who have sacrificed in serving our country in the Armed Forces.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. I want to welcome those of you who aren’t normally able to listen to FamilyLife Today; but here, on a holiday in the U.S. on Memorial Day, you’re able to tune in. We’re glad to have you along. Our focus today is on this very day and the fact that we ought to take some time to do some remembering today.

Dennis: I can always remember this day with my mom. She would always have flowers and she would go visit cemeteries. We would visit three or four cemeteries because her parents, and my dad’s parents, and my father are all buried in different cemeteries throughout southwest Missouri.

I would go with her on some of those visits. I have a real warm feeling about Memorial Day, wanting to really honor those who have died in the past; but also, Bob, it’s also, a time, I think, to honor our military for their service for our country and what they’ve done on behalf of our freedom.

Bob: Did you have relatives / family members who served in World War I or II?

Dennis: I did. I had some. That was not a big part of what we did as we visited the cemetery. Really, Memorial Day took on a greater meaning for us as we’ve had our own family and have grown in our appreciation for, really, the cost of war on families and on
marriages. It’s painful. It’s tough. People give their lives on behalf of their country. We wanted to do something special to honor our veterans and those who have given their lives but also the families that continue to sacrifice because we still are at war.

**Bob:** We wanted to call attention to the fact that there is a price that is paid, not only with those who leave a family and go overseas and defend our freedom, but there’s a price that’s paid on the home front. That cost is very real.

**John G.:** There was a lot of loneliness, actually, in that time in my life.

**Dennis L.:** And of course there was a feeling of loneliness there and a feeling of emptiness.

**Carl:** But it was difficult—

**Andrew:** I could tell my dad was filled with anxiety, worry—you know.

**Bob:** John DalSanto served in the Army in World War II. His wife Olga remembers his being gone—his being in harm’s way. It was a trial for her.

**Olga:** He was inducted into the service ten days before Sandy was born—my oldest. He went overseas when she was four months old. That was hard, I'll tell you. My sister and I lived together after her husband went just about the same time he did to Japan.

**John D:** Yes, about three months before I did.

**Olga:** It was hard on us because we got $50 a month to live on and rations. At the time, it was very hard.

**Bob:** Military service can be challenging from a financial standpoint, but it is also obviously challenging from an emotional standpoint. Dennis Leake is a Vietnam veteran. He understands the emotional pain men and woman in the service face.

**Dennis L.:** My mother’s reaction to me getting inducted into the service was probably just a kind of numbness. I think we were all scared in a certain way but really didn't know what of. I remember very well the morning my mother dropped me off, downtown in Memphis. I got out of the car to walk in and be in the Army. She wrote me a letter later and talked about how she just sat there in the car and cried for a long time before she could even drive home.

[Song: Excerpt from *Leaving on a Jet Plane*]

Communication with folks back home was a lot different then, of course, than it is now. So I regularly wrote letters to my mother. In fact, I had a little reel-to-reel tape recorder that had quarter-inch tape on three-inch plastic reels: [Actual recording from reels]
“Well, here it is again, Friday night, in Vietnam.” I recorded audiotapes of my voice just describing what life was like and sent those to my mother. “Try to give you some kind of accurate report on what’s been going on here the last few days. I haven’t had a chance to write. We’ve been so busy on alert and all.”

Bob: It is not uncommon for folks back home to wrestle with anxiety as a loved one—a husband or a wife / a son or a daughter—is serving in the military. That was certainly the case for John and Sue Stokes whose son, Andrew, was deployed two times to the Middle East.

[Song: Excerpt from Be Like That]

Sue: He went in October 9th of 2001, right after 9/11.

Andrew: I remember the night that my recruiter came to get me to take me away to boot camp. It was probably the first time I’d seen sheer terror on the face of my mom. I could tell my dad was filled with anxiety, worry—you know. That was definitely different because he’s always the big strong dad.

John S.: Well, I knew that the Marine Corps was very much different than the Navy. So I initially spoke to Andrew about what was it that was really interesting him in the Marine Corps and so on. After speaking to him for a while, realized that he was very, very committed. I remember telling Sue that we either needed to get behind him or get out of his way.

Bob: With Andrew fighting in Iraq, his mother, Sue Stokes, had to learn how to do what the Bible calls all of us to do—to cast her cares on the Lord.

Sue: I can’t imagine anything worse than having some Marine standing on our doorstep, at three o’clock in the morning, telling us the news. I pray that doesn’t happen; but I often felt like Abraham, bringing Isaac to the altar.

But I think God calls us to do that with our children regardless. This is part of worshipping God—is to give Him control and to trust Him. God has him right where He wants him. We talked about “Keep your eyes open—how He wants to use you.” We just trust the Lord that he has a reason for him to be there, and He’s going to use him in a mighty way.

Bob: Whether it’s Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, or even back to World Wars I and II, soldiers facing deployment all share some common themes. They all share some common temptations. Dr. Carl Wenger served in World War II. Before his recent death, he talked about some of the temptations he faced.

Carl: There was a period of time—being oversees in the military for two years without—I was gone for a two-year period of time—it was difficult.
Bob: With two years’ separation in Iran, were you ever tempted to be unfaithful?

Carl: There’s no question that I saw women that were attractive. But I don’t honestly believe I would call it a temptation because, as quickly as the recognition that I’d spoken of occurred, why, I’d remember who I was. The Lord continued to remind me of the commitments that I had made, and that I was her husband, and that I was committed to her.

[Song: Excerpt from *Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree*]

When I was in Iran, one of the guys stationed there with me had a portrait painted by a local artist. Lib knew his wife. She called and said that he had sent a portrait. Lib wrote and said, “I want you to have one done.” With some encouragement, I had one done. I sent it home ahead of time and Lib had it hanging in the living room.

I got home. Our daughter, who, at that time, was a little over two years old—she became restless after the sun went down because no man had ever spent the night at her house. She wanted me to go! [Laughter] Well that sort of tugged at me a little bit.

The next morning, I got up early. When she got up, she went into the kitchen. I was sitting in the living room on the couch. She watched me from a safe distance. Gradually, she got sort of desensitized. She moved progressively closer and finally sat down at the far end of a long couch. She pointed to the portrait on the wall. She said, “That’s my daddy.” That sort of—[Emotion in voice] that was hard for me. Then, I’ll never forget the look on a two-year-old’s face when she looked at the portrait and she looked at me. She said, “That’s you!” And she came over and climbed up on my lap. I cherish that memory. She and I have had a good thing going ever since. [Laughter]

Bob: That was the late Dr. Carl Wenger, together with his wife Lib, recounting some of the cost that there is for families when a daddy goes off—separates himself from his family and defends his country and their freedom.

Dennis: Dr. Wenger and Lib were married for 60—almost 65 years—as I recall. Carl Wenger was a faithful man to Jesus Christ. He served his country well. He was faithful to his wife and his family. He was a man who understood the grace of God in his life. This Memorial Day, Bob, Carl Wenger’s life is worthy—worthy of remembrance. He loved Jesus Christ.

Bob: I think we should also keep in mind those who are at war—those who are deployed. Whether it’s a Skype call that you can do with them today—you stop and think—that when Carl was in a war, it was maybe a telegram. Today, you can maybe get a phone call or a Skype call. Whether it’s a package sent from home—even churches can get involved in people sending notes or thank-yous to deployed service
men and women—it helps us cultivate a heart of gratitude to do that. It certainly honors those who are serving.

You stop and think about it—military service is, for a lot of young men, a time when they step up. You’ve just written a book about men stepping up and embracing God’s design for manhood. The time in military service is a time when a lot of young men make the transition from boyhood into fully embracing God’s design for what it means to be a man.

Dennis L.: The experience of landing after that long, long plane flight—landing in South Vietnam—was really kind of surreal.

Bob: Again, this is Dennis Leake reflecting on how God used his time in the Army to help him re-clarify / reexamine his own values.

Dennis L.: You know, a plane full of GI’s just joking and talking about things that guys that age talk about—and I guess trying to ignore the reality of where we were going—but as we touched down, the plane got very quiet. We didn’t know what to expect. We knew we were going to step out of that plane onto soil that was in the midst of a combat zone. That was an experience that, over the next couple of years in the military, helped me to focus on: “There must be something more important in life than the guitars, and cars, and dating relationships, and careers, and things that people normally chase after.”

Bob: John Hammond also looks back on his military service as a time that had a transforming effect in his life as well.

John H.: After I got into the military, that’s when I really started to really look at the honor that includes being a part of the services—being a soldier representing your country. The camaraderie that we had, almost as if we were brothers—people from all different races—from all walks of life. As immature as I was, I didn’t have any ideas about death or life. It really truly didn’t matter to me. Now, I see God moving me in that area because he knew how foolish I was.

Bob: There is something about being face to face with life and death every day that causes any soldier to have to consider eternity—consider what life is all about. Marine Andrew Stokes remembers how the heat of battle can have that kind of impact on a young man or woman.

Andrew: I remember a buddy of mine, Jimmy. His Humvee was blown off the road. It flipped over off a cliff. He could not get off the machine gun in time, and his gear got caught up on it. It landed on him. My squad had to perform the Medevac for him. I remember, when I finally realized it was Jimmy, it just hit me like a rock that he was not a believer. I think he died just as we were hitting the base. It really makes you real
conscious of the short amount of time that you have—period—not even in war, but everywhere.

[Song: Excerpt from The Mansions of the Lord]

**Bob:** Every soldier who signs up knows he may be called on to make the ultimate sacrifice. It’s one thing to realize that’s a possibility. It’s another thing to come face to face with that as a reality. Stu Weber served as a Green Beret during Vietnam. A number of years ago, he shared this story with the congregation at Good Shepherd Community Church in suburban Portland, Oregon.

**Stu:** I grew up in a little coal mining town on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains in the state of Washington. It was a strong little town. I remember, one time, my dad took me down to the City Hall. I was probably six or seven years old. The City Hall was all of a one-car garage for our one fire engine that the town owned. There was a little bell on top.

Out in front of City Hall was a monument—a memorial. There were two World War II vintage anti-aircraft artillery pieces there. There was a memorial between them with the names on it, on little pieces of slate. The names were the guys from our little community who had gone to high school with my father. They were people who had given the last full measure.

I remember I was particularly struck with the Prokopovich brothers. Mike Prokopovich died on June 6, 1944, at a place called Omaha. Steve Prokopovich died in November of 1944, just a few months after his brother, with the Sixth Ranger Battalion in the Philippines. I felt, as I looked at that monument with my dad, “I owe these guys.” As a little six or seven year old, I began to think, as my dad had told me: “We’re able to walk around here free because these guys left this little tiny town and did what they did.” It was very moving to me.

That little memorial is located just—well, it’s right between the graves of two very special people—well, two families—the Prokopovich brothers and right over here the grave of Doug Munro. It was Doug Munro—one of my dad’s high school mates, a couple years ahead of dad—who made September 27th a red letter day in Cle Elum history.

Doug found himself in the United States Coast Guard as a youngster, just barely out of high school. By the time World War II hit in 1942, Doug had been in a couple of years. He was 22 years old perhaps. He found himself at a place called Guadalcanal. Doug’s mission, just barely out of high school, was almost an impossible one. They told him to take five Higgins boats and rescue a battalion of 500 Marines—dug in very low in the ground on the beach—who were outnumbered totally by superior Japanese forces that had all the strafing positions on them and were firing down into these Marines, just slaughtering them.
Doug took his five boats, and he sent the four to go directly to the beach to take the guys off. He took his boat in between the other four and the beach and the high ground where the enemy fire was coming from. They just ran that little boat back and forth—of course, drawing all the fire. Of course, they had two little tiny barrels on that thing. They did the best they could to keep the enemy fire suppressed. Of course, because they drew the fire, the odds to which Doug had exposed himself eventually caught up with him. Several bullets passed through his torso. As he fell to the bottom of the boat, one of his mates, also wounded, grabbed him, and cushioned his head. Doug’s last words were: “Did we get them all off? Did we get them all off?” His mate said, “We got them all off, Doug.” And Doug broke into a small smile and died.

Doug’s grave is unmistakably there in the little cemetery in Cle Elum. It bears the unbelievable image of the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation, among other things, says this: “At great risk of his life and by his outstanding leadership, expert planning, and dauntless devotion to duty, he undoubtedly saved the lives of many who otherwise would have perished. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

Now I ask you this: “Why in the world would a 22-year-old throw his life away like that? I mean, the odds were totally against him. He knew he would probably go down, undoubtedly. Why would a kid throw his life away like that?” Some, in my schizophrenic generation, decided there was no reason. I remember one guy, at the back of a crowd, protesting—holding a sign that said, “There is nothing worth dying for.” Of course, he’s right if he thinks his life is about himself, if he thinks his life centers upon him, if he thinks the world revolves around him—then he is right—there is nothing worth dying for.

But you see—Doug knew something. Doug had what we would call transcendent cause. Doug knew that his life was not about him. He knew that he was not the center of the universe, and he knew so because he had fallen in love with Jesus Christ. His life was about Someone Else, as all of our lives, as Christians, are. Our lives really don’t belong to us. Our marriages don’t belong to us. Nothing about us is ours. We have been bought with a price. So Doug happily gave himself away on September 27, 1942.

Bob: That is retired Green Beret Stu Weber.

Dennis: What a story.

Bob: A powerful reminder of sacrifice / courage. These are noble things. Today is a day to say, “Thank you,” for those who have paid the price and those who are paying the price even now.

Dennis: I think, here on Memorial Day, we would do well to close this broadcast with prayer. I just want to pray for our service men and women—and their families that are back here—that God will be near and that God will protect.
Heavenly Father, thank You for the men and woman who defend freedom—who represent what really has been a God-fearing nation, that really has been the greatest nation on earth. Thank You, Father, for these men and women who risk their lives for their families, who stand firm back home, guarding the home and hearth. I pray, Father, for grace for both—for Your protection to cover both those in the field, on the front lines of war, and those back here who are also in need of protection as well.

Father, may Jesus Christ be preeminent. As they return from war, I pray that You would preserve their marriages and families for them to move into the future and leave a legacy of godly children for future generations. We pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.”

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Title: Leaving on a Jet Plane  
Artist: Peter, Paul & Mary  
Album: The Very Best of Peter, Paul and Mary (p) 2005 Warner Bros. Records, Manufactured and Marketed by Rhino Entertainment Co.

Title: Be Like That  
Artist: 3 Doors Down  
Album: The Better Life (p) 1999 Universal Motown Records, a division of UMG Recordings, Inc.

Title: Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree  
Artist: Glenn Miller Orchestra  
Album: Glenn Miller Orchestra (2 CD Set) (p) 2006 Air

Title: The Mansions of the Lord  
Artist: United States Military Academy Glee Club  
Album: We Were Soldiers (Music from and Inspired By) (p) 2002 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

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