



“Welcome Home” By: Doug Warren

What should I do to welcome home our soldiers?

It is wonderful to have so many of our sons and daughters back home. Many of us have rejoiced, cried, and been overwhelmed at the immensity of relief to have the 133rd and others in our armed services back in Maine. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your protection for these dear ones. We also continue to grieve for those who were lost and our hearts break for those families who have sacrificed so much. Amidst all of the homecomings several people have asked me, “What should I do to welcome home our soldiers?”

It is good and right to express appreciation. Our service men and women truly have served us and it is appropriate to give them thanks. Showing our gratitude can be as spontaneous as thanking a service person you see at the grocery store to as elaborate as organizing a celebration banquet.

As with any type of communication, expressing thanks works best when we not only consider what we are trying to say, but also how that message is being received. We face the same kind of dynamic in gift giving. Most people tend to give gifts that they would like, whereas what is most effective is to give something the recipient would actually want, need, or enjoy. The point after all is not to make us feel better for having given thanks, but for those who have served us to hear and see that appreciation.

So an important part of being able to communicate our indebtedness is to learn about the individual or group we are trying to thank. Now this brings up an initial obstacle. Most of the folks returning from Iraq when asked what they would like as thanks, say, “No thanks are necessary. I’m just glad to be home.” I would suggest the same intrigue we employ in buying a gift for other recalcitrant recipients—ask those who know them best and are not so “aw shucks” about showering them with praise. Spouses, brothers, sisters, parents, children, and best friends are all good informants.

If you don’t know any returning service personnel, a great resource is the armory. They know of specific needs and can match your sign of thanks with someone who can best use it. Whether it is a card, a picture drawn by the kids, a gift certificate, or a free service, these tokens of our gratitude go a long way in communicating to our returning heroes.

Another challenging thing that I find many struggling with is a nagging sense of guilt. Now that these service men and women have returned home you may be confronted with shame. While they were serving overseas you may have meant to do more. You may be feeling that it is too late and that you have failed. Do you know why most of us feel guilty? Because we are guilty. The uncomfortable truth is that we could have done more. What we need to do is refrain from covering our neglect with excessive gratitude, and to admit it.

Giving thanks doesn’t make up for things left undone. Giving thanks does not pay them back for what they have been through. Expressing appreciation is recognizing someone has done something for us that we don’t deserve. The funny thing is that so much of how we tend to convey gratitude really is much more about us trying to be worthy of their sacrifice.

At the end of the movie *Saving Private Ryan* we see Ryan as a much older man surrounded by his family at a graveyard in France. With tears streaming down his face he asks his wife, “Tell me that it was worth

it.” We have just witnessed the horrific cost in human lives that was exacted in saving this one young private. Is it enough that he has lived his life well as a father and husband? Would it have been more worth it if he had discovered a cure for cancer?

But that is the problem with trying to merit someone else’s sacrifice. You never know when enough is enough. You can’t know all of what these men and women have sacrificed for us in their career, family, and personal heartache. We can never know when we have done enough to be worthy of their sacrifice.

We have the same trouble with the ultimate hero. Jesus gave up everything for us. He sacrificed himself for us when we absolutely didn’t deserve it. How can we ever thank him? First, we must recognize that our thanks can never repay him. He wants our gratitude to flow from hearts willing to admit that we don’t deserve his mercy. Second, our appreciation is best expressed in terms that accord with what is true about him. It is only through getting to know him in his word, the Bible, that we can know what pleases him. The wonder of the gospel is that he delights in our thanksgiving not because we are so good at communicating it, but because he has perfectly made us worthy of his sacrifice through giving his followers his complete obedience. What an amazing turn of events! Recipients of grace made worthy of the sacrifice and freed to give grateful praise.

Welcome home, service men and women! We are grateful. If you know not only their sacrifice, but also Christ’s, then welcome him home too with a thankful heart.
