

BETH RUNKLE

ANOTHER

MOVE,

GOD?

30 Encouragements to Embrace Your Life as a


★ **MILITARY WIFE** ★

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This book is dedicated to the important people who
made my journey as a military wife possible:

To my warrior, Bryan, who invited me to stand by
his side through the adventures of military life and
patiently waited for me to embrace his calling.

and

To my favorite people—military wives who support
one another and serve as the home-front heroes
while our military men battle on the front lines.

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A Word from Beth

Have you often thought how different your life would be if you weren't moving so frequently and adjusting to fit into the military? Do you wish you could feel more settled? Yet in all the unpacking and packing, you've lost your heart somewhere along the way?

I am with you! I've often thought about what it would look like to have lived a "normal life" in which uncertainty and change were not the only constants in my life. My husband served on active duty for twenty-five years in the Air Force, during which we moved fourteen times. As a military wife, I see you trying to make the best of your moves and support your family, and I am with you in an uncertain and chaotic life.

While there are many books you could pick up to help you navigate military life from many different angles, I want to help you face military life's changes and unique opportunities from a spiritual perspective. This book will address ways to help you get a handle on this transient life with insights from women in the Bible who seem to have faced many of the same challenges military wives face.

I began my faith journey by studying the book of Genesis. God grabbed my attention as I saw the many parallels between the life of Sarah and my life. I was a new military spouse whose husband had just deployed three times in our first two and a half years of marriage. I identified with Sarah's life as I found frequent parallels between her seminomadic lifestyle and mine. As we glean from her story in the pages that follow, I hope this book will meet you where you are and address some of your feelings, insecurities, and weaknesses—especially those that come with being called by God to a military marriage.

As you read through this book, I encourage you to begin your day by reading the Scriptures referenced from the book of Genesis and selected New Testament verses. I pray that as you seek the Lord for whom he has called you to be as a military wife, and that you will see yourself in his kingdom army. God's assignment is for you and your husband to serve the Lord and his people where the military has assigned you. May this be a time of exponential growth for you!

Although you can work through this book on your own, a great way to engage more with the content is to grab a friend or group of friends who can work through the book with you. In that case, I'd recommend you seek to complete five days of the study each week and gather with a friend or friends each week for discussion. I have created a leader's guide to enhance your discussion and group meetings. You can access this free resource at <https://www.BethRunkle.com>.

I will be praying for you as you walk through this journey. I pray that God will speak to you and build your faith, I pray you will fall more in love with God and his Word. I would love to hear testimonies of what you are learning or even know how I can minister to you, so please visit me at <https://www.BethRunkle.com>.

Introduction

At times, it felt like brown moving boxes were my decorating scheme. With my husband's fourteen moves while on active duty, moving commotion became normal. In a world of constant change, I found that only faith in an unchanging God could anchor my soul. In the Bible, Sarah and Abraham's lives hold many parallels to the military lifestyle. Abraham and Sarah lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle, traveling from place to place with their livestock from one area of fertile land to another.¹ In the Westernized, modern world, this lifestyle contains several similarities with the military family.

In Genesis 11–12, God called Sarah* and Abraham to leave the land they knew and go to a land God would later identify. God recorded this historical event early in the first book of the

* Sarah was called Sarai before God changed her name to Sarah in Genesis 17. God sometimes changed a person's name in the Bible when he was calling that individual to a change in character. Her name change from Sarai to Sarah was when God was calling her to a new season in her relationship with God. For purposes of this study, Sarai will be called Sarah throughout the book.

Bible. This placement articulates for us how God understands and esteems the military spouse.

Sarah and Abraham's move to a location that God would later pinpoint approximates a military Permanent Change of Station (PCS), except they were transporting their household goods on livestock rather than moving trucks. I guess I can no longer complain about our PCSs! By looking at different aspects of Sarah's life, the Word of God will encourage you with the adjustments that come with living the military-wife life.

Your husband likely has a specific calling to serve in the military. The dictionary defines a calling as "a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action or work which usually involves helping people and may be accompanied by a conviction of divine influence."² Did you know that his calling to serve in the military goes beyond just a job or providing for you and any children you may have? It is something for which he feels a strong passion. As my husband's career progressed, I learned to support his calling and embrace the military lifestyle as a joint calling.

But I have my own occupation, unique goals, and giftings in this life, you may be saying to yourself. Do you sometimes feel like you sit in your husband's shadow as he pursues his military career? I've been there! But after twenty-five years in a military marriage, I can say this with certainty: just because your husband's career decides when and where you move, that doesn't mean you cannot embrace your man's military career and lifestyle as a joint venture—and you better believe God will use your unique wiring

just as much as he uses your husband's. Accepting your husband's passion as a dual calling will enable you to get behind your man and not just survive the military life but thrive in it!

God chose Sarah to be the mother of his people. In this book, you will see you are also a remarkable woman God sets apart. Your life isn't something that "just happened" to you. Nor is it something God called *only* your husband to. *You, too*, are chosen and called!

Whether you chose it or not, being married to a man serving in uniform has altered your life. Choosing to embrace it will not only bless you, but it will also bless others. Your involvement will also increase your husband's joy in serving and communicate a sincere level of respect.

Have you ever felt like it was a mistake you ended up with a husband who would move all over the world? It's not a misstep. In fact, I believe this is something that God specifically ordained for you. Yep, you're special! In fact, so unique that God chose not to just leave you in your hometown but to grow and mold you as you continually rely on him.

God looks at you and sees the potential of the person you can become as you depend on him more. He wants you to grow into the person he sees. So he selects you to be molded and shaped by the hardships of military life, where you cannot cling to things of this world—but cling only to Christ. God gives us the answers for any situation where we find ourselves. May we seek him before we seek anything else in our lives.



Lingering Loneliness

Genesis 12:1, 4–5; Deuteronomy 31:6

After long-distance dating my husband for two years, he swept me off my feet, but I felt dropped with a thud as we moved three times that first year of marriage. My husband needed to undergo military training en route to his next assignment. As a newlywed, I had no idea the turmoil being an armed forces wife would add to life, nor the extent of loneliness that I would feel. Upon arriving at the operational assignment, my husband deployed for the Middle East within two months. I drowned in emptiness, misery, and sorrow. Has this ever happened to you? I imagine you can relate.

At that time, I didn't know that I would be able to find myself in the pages of the Bible. Genesis 11–12 includes God's call to Abraham and Sarah's life to "go from your land, your relatives,

and your father's house to the land that I will show you." As I mentioned in the introduction, his call feels to me like a military Permanent Change of Station (PCS); how about you? Through Abraham, God led Sarah to leave her home and her family and travel to a new land where God reestablished her. Sarah's journey sounds quite similar to a military spouse's journey. Can you imagine her feeling some trepidation?

When it comes to a big move, Sarah may have physically faced even more challenges than a military spouse. Sarah's journey from Haran to Canaan was more than 400 miles and wound along the edge of the barren desert wilderness, traveling along rivers, and would have taken at least three full weeks of constant travel.¹ Sarah would have had to wait many months to begin reestablishing connections in Canaan.

As a military spouse, have you also felt the pain of loneliness when you have to PCS to a new location? You probably also have suffered isolation when your spouse was away on deployment or temporary duty (TDY) orders in another place. Sarah understood loneliness and likely clung to her faith in God for comfort. Sometimes we can be tempted to believe that our faith in God is not enough to sustain us through periods of loneliness, but let me encourage you that not only is it enough, it is also your lifeline!

The name of God used here in Genesis in the original Hebrew language is *El Shaddai*, which translates as the "God Almighty" or "the God who is all-sufficient."² If God is mighty and all-sufficient, then he is enough. He can sustain you through periods of isolation. And as strange as it sounds, the Lord may

even be ordaining a period of aloneness, so you will rely on him and cling to him more. God may want you to embrace an environment where you feel alone—not to punish you—but so he might prove to you that he is with you and will support you. Think about it: we all want proof that God is near, that God cares, that God will sustain us. But we often miss it because we spend all our energy looking at the people around us instead of upward toward him. Sometimes lonely seasons—seasons where there's not many people to look *around* at—force us to look *up*, where we can finally see God.

Did you know that God doesn't need you or me? He was perfectly happy and content in himself—Father, Son, and Spirit. Which means he created us not because he needed companionship or love (these things were already overflowing within him), but simply because he *wanted* to create us. Said another way, God simply created humanity to be in a relationship with him. If that's the case, he may be allowing a season of loneliness so you will grow in your connection with him. If you respond to him, your isolation can give you the extra time you need to invest in your personal relationship with the Lord. After all, each of us has a deep longing within us that only God can fill. Think of it like a loving parent clearing their child's calendar for the day, so that they can enjoy some needed parent-child time, away from all distractions. Is it unloving for a parent to clear their child's calendar for a short stint? Not at all. It's a sign of desire and love—if only the child will show up to the day with excitement and trust.

If God is all-sufficient, then he is enough, even in our loneliness. We may be magnifying the loneliness by focusing on the negative, isolated feelings more than the joy of the Lord. The key to changing your feelings is to reject this drift to isolation with prayer and an awareness that lingering in your loneliness will only breed more separation.

God's enemy, Satan, loves to feed us lies when we are down. Recognize that he may be serving you lies, which may increase the intensity of your isolation. Memorizing and meditating on Scripture can help you replace the lies that Satan may be feeding you with the truth. When we have Scripture committed to memory, it is easier for the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those previously memorized verses to combat false thoughts. It can also be helpful to turn on some worship music to remind you of the Lord and his presence. Force yourself to get out of your temporary lodging or new housing and engage with others or just go out for some personal exercise (or a stroll with the kids). Remember: being in a season of loneliness doesn't mean you intentionally cut yourself off from human connection. Rather, while you're focusing primarily on investing in your relationship with the Lord, you also make time to go out into the world and build healthy relationships with others.

God himself is with you and can bring comfort and hope to even your darkest days. God's Word says: "I will never leave you or abandon you" (Heb. 13:5). You are his beloved child; you are never alone. Jesus himself understands your loneliness. All his friends and family abandoned him when he stood trial before the

religious and Roman authorities. Do you realize he not only sees you in your loneliness, but *understands* it firsthand? Lean into the Lord in your despair and loneliness instead of leaning away from him. God is there, even when no one else is. And remember: he's a God who gets it.

REFLECTION

How can you focus more on the presence of God in times of loneliness?

How can you meet new people or form community with other Christians who can point you to God?

PRAYER

God Almighty, please empower me to lean into you in my loneliness. Help me to be satisfied with you and feel your presence here with me. As I focus on you in this season, bring the right people into my life to satisfy my need for human connection. Give me eyes to see someone else feeling isolated to whom I can connect.



Stick like Glue

Genesis 12:1–5; 2:24

In the old sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*, most episodes contain a scene in the kitchen where Raymond's overbearing and insulting mother, Marie, embarrassingly forces her views and opinions on Raymond's wife, Debra. The show provides excellent comic relief, but can you imagine living in that household? Well, if you are a military spouse, chances are you will never find yourself living across the street from your in-laws!

One of the most challenging parts of a military family's journey is that we must leave our family and hometown and start over in a new location, usually quite far from those we love. Sarah set an example of how to complete a PCS move successfully. I find it comforting to think that military wives are not the only ones God has called to leave their home and their family and resettle.

Do you often feel lonely and frustrated with the forced relocations during the first days or weeks after arriving at your new duty location? Amid the challenging parts of being a military wife, some unique blessings result from this lifestyle. God called us in Genesis 2:24 to leave our family—our father and mother—and be united or “cleave” to our spouse. God designed that a husband and wife find their primary human relationship with each other; this should be a priority over even a parent-child relationship. Can you see how a military marriage can have its blessings as well as its challenges? Our military marriage can also be a blessing as circumstances force us to cleave to our spouse because we live hundreds of miles away from our friends and family. The Hebrew word translated as “bonds” or “cleave” in Genesis 2:24 refers to “pursuing hard” after something or “being glued to” or “holding fast” to something.¹

The “holding fast” definition can be better understood through welding.² Holding fast describes the point where two pieces of steel are welded together. The iron or steel is heated and melted until the molecules are forced together into one continuous piece.³ Surprisingly, if the right metals are used and the appropriate heat is applied, the resulting material is actually stronger at the weld.⁴

So when we correctly cleave to our husbands, we become much stronger than either of us could be on our own. It may take some heat to develop the right level of strength, but the result is something stronger than the two separate pieces. The military lifestyle might be part of the heat being applied to your marriage

to make your weld, or bond, stronger. Don't let Satan trick you into thinking that the heat can weaken you instead of making you stronger.

Forced resettling comes with the military life, and it causes us to often find ourselves more drawn to our spouse as we brave a brand-new location with no one familiar but our husbands. The forced separation from family also causes military spouses to rely on one another more than if parents and in-laws were right down the street. With a fresh perspective, you can set up a house with your spouse in a new town. You can begin a family or new career with unique ideas and routines. You can establish new traditions. All without as much friction or pushback that typically comes with having family nearby!

Right after God made a woman from man, Scripture makes it clear that an important pattern for marriage is set forth: for the couple to leave their parents and stick like glue to one another (Gen. 2:21-24). God knows we will fail to be in harmony and genuinely united with our spouse if we don't "unglue" ourselves from our parents. Today, you and I need to mourn certain parts of being separated from family, no doubt, but we can simultaneously choose to be thankful for the excellent opportunity for unity that it can provide in marriage.

God also designed the leaving and cleaving in marriage to be a picture of the intimate relationship he wants with you. The same Hebrew word for "cleave" is used in Deuteronomy 13:4 and 30:20 when God commanded the Israelites to be faithful to him.

Although I'm challenging you to prioritize and bond to your spouse, I am not suggesting you should never talk to your family or in-laws. With your warrior away serving his country often, you may be the connection point to his family at times. Boundaries are important, but I am not advocating you completely cut anyone out of your lives unless there are exceptional reasons.

Some tips to help you and your husband "leave and cleave" better:

- Give your spouse priority over parents, siblings, and even children by reordering your priority list to be God, spouse, and then others.
- When facing a decision, determine to consult one another's counsel first before going to outside counsel.
- As much as possible, avoid involving the extended family in any marital conflict to prevent unintentionally tainting your spouse's reputation with your family. (This does not mean you should be facing conflicts alone when you truly need a third party; rather, choose a third party who is as unbiased as possible, like a Christian counselor.)
- Trust God to be the "cleaving glue." When there doesn't seem to be anything to cling to

in your marriage, cling to God himself and remain committed to your marriage and to the Lord.

- Recognize that cleaving is a choice. Don't give yourself any other option but to cleave. Take the word *divorce* off the table, and never use it as a threat during a fight, so that you aren't tempted to think it is a viable option (apart from abuse, which would make it prudent).

REFLECTION

Are you prioritizing your marriage relationship and sticking like glue to your spouse?

How can you better show unity to your spouse and separate from your parents?

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to prioritize my marriage above all other relationships. Help my husband and me to cling to one another. Give us a fresh perspective on the blessing of moving away from family.



Embrace the peace of God as you brave the everyday chaos of military life.

When you think of a husband deployed into combat, desperate prayers to God for his safety, long seasons of loneliness and solo parenting, starting new relationships all over again, and moving boxes that take over the house yet another time, chances are you immediately think of the life of a military wife.

But there's another life whose journey has many parallels to these things: the biblical character of Sarah. Join author and longtime military wife Beth Runkle as she dives into Scripture, offering **30 hope-filled and practical encouragements for military wives** gleaned from Sarah's story.

Navigating the military lifestyle is not easy—but Jesus has His eye on those who are called to it, especially wives. Whether you face a parenting struggle, a marriage frustration, or yet another move, take heart in these encouragements as they empower you to embrace God's peace and your unique role in His mission as a military wife.

Beth Runkle and her husband serve with Cru Military® and lead the Central U.S. Region. During her husband's 25-year career with the Air Force, Beth served as a military wife. Currently, Beth discipled and conducts Bible studies for female cadets and young military spouses. Having come to faith through Bible study, she has taught Bible study for 23 years and is a women's ministry speaker in various venues. She is currently completing a master's degree from Gateway Seminary.



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