

“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”

Luke 6:27-28

Story by Bob Makin

Steve Gaines smiled as the children of a poor Afghan village squealed gleefully over the clothing and school supplies donated to them by Calvary Chapel Okinawa. Just a week earlier, he had been patrolling the same village as rifles pointed at him from the rooftops.

A chief warrant officer with the U.S. Marine Corps, Steve was deployed to Afghanistan in July 2007. Previously, he had been stationed on the Japanese island of Okinawa. During his six years there, he and his wife Tiffany served in the youth ministry at the Calvary Chapel in Okinawa.

While in Afghanistan, Steve asked those from his church to collect clothes and school supplies for the many needy children he saw suffering each day due to the ravages of war. However, he never expected to build a fruitful relationship with a village that had wanted to kill him because of a firefight that had left one dead on each side.

A week earlier, Steve had joined ten Afghan nationals in walking to the village, the road being too narrow for their Humvees and Afghan Army vehicles. As they walked cautiously through the village to retrieve the body of a fellow Afghan soldier, Steve said that he felt the protective hand of God upon him.

“There had been a firefight [between the villagers and] Afghan Special Forces the night before,” he said. “One of the soldiers had



An Afghan boy tends to a herd of goats along a road as U.S. Marines search for improvised explosive devices. In Afghanistan, Marines often integrate combat

missions with the building of constructive relationships with the Afghan populace. Photo by Lance Cpl. Brian D. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps



Steve Gaines

been shot in the head, but they had to leave the body in order to escape further casualties. During the firefight, which had erupted because of rumors spread by someone sympathetic to Al-Qaeda, a woman in the village had also been killed,” Steve recalled.

“They had called [the U.S. Marines] in because they needed support,” Steve said. “It was a scary situation.” In a meeting with the village elder the next day, relations began to improve between the locals and the soldiers based nearby.

“Innocent people don’t need to die,” Steve told both sides. “When something like this happens and everyone grabs a gun and starts shooting, you run the risk of killing innocent people. If you think I’m your enemy, then you need to shoot at me, not at women and children. If you want to fight someone, come and fight me. But I will tell you this, God knows who you are and what you are doing. When you shoot weapons in the air and across the street and you kill someone, God knows it.” Steve later said that the village elder respected his words.

Inspired by Jesus’ commandment to love your enemies and bless those who curse

you, Steve blessed the village a week later with the supplies from CC Okinawa. In appreciation, the village elder began to provide the military base with intelligence about enemy activity.

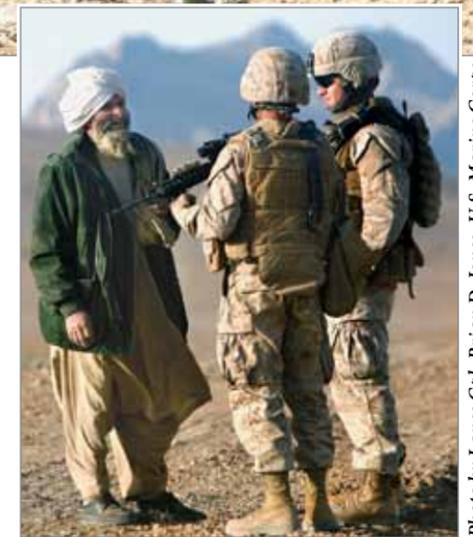
“It was so good to go into the community with the school supplies and clothing,” Steve said. “The last four months I was on the base, there were no firefights in the village. It all starts by loving your neighbor, loving your enemy, showing them Christ’s love.”

A Calling and a Close Call
“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to

do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, ... that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.”

Joshua 1:7-8

Steve’s next mission had him aboard the USS New Orleans in the Strait of Hormuz. During his mission and military training exercises aboard the USS New Orleans,



U.S. Marines speak with an Afghan man they met while on patrol.

Photo by Lance Cpl. Brian D. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps



Photo by Gy. Sgt. James A. Burks

U.S. Marines assigned to the Special Marine Air-Ground Task Force care for an injured Afghan by splinting and rewrapping his ankle. Marines often assist locals as part of their goal to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.



Photo by Cpl. Andrew J. Carlson

Two Marines greet a young child they meet on the road. After receiving school supplies and clothing from soldiers and their home communities, many Afghans responded with open hearts.

Steve developed a blockage in his large intestine and began bleeding internally. Miraculously, Steve was already close to medical assistance since his ship had to return to port for repairs. The USS New Orleans had collided with a nuclear submarine on March 20. Similar to his experience in Afghanistan when faced with a tough situation, the Lord brought to Steve's mind His words to Joshua.

"I could hear the Lord saying, 'I am with you, no matter what,'" he said. "I just needed to be calm and courageous, depend on Him, and let Him guide me. I didn't need to be afraid because the Lord had this in His hand. That's how I view everything. I let the Lord guide and direct me, and I rest in His care."

Steve knew that if it had not been for the accident with the submarine, his ship would have been in the middle of the ocean and his situation could have turned out worse. "The Navy would have had to evacuate me out, which would have been hard to do." Steve, who never even had broken a bone, prayed hard before surgeons from Bahrain removed half of his intestine.

He was sent home to San Diego, CA, for several months of medical leave. The unexpected reunion with Tiffany and their two children, Christian, 5, and Luke, 2, was an answer to prayer, he said. "God works in weird ways, but it's amazing to see," Steve added. "I take heart in that. The Lord has me, no matter what the situation."

Tiffany said she has mixed emotions about being a military wife. While she is extremely proud of her husband, she is equally sad every time he leaves, sometimes for an entire year. "I try to comfort our boys, who miss their daddy," she said. "I tell them, 'Daddy is protecting our rights and freedom and people who can't fight for themselves. He is defending children like you.' On the flip side, it's horrible and lonely," Tiffany continued. "It's so hard to be away from him for nine months or a year at a time. Only the Lord keeps us connected and grounded in Him. There are lonely times, but you grow in the Lord, good and bad."

Having worshiped at CC Costa Mesa before Steve's assignment to Okinawa eight years

ago, the Gaines family now worships at CC Vista as he is stationed in San Diego. Back on the USS New Orleans since May, Steve is in charge of all the cargo that comes on and off the ship as a chief warrant officer three. He is up for a promotion soon that would extend his time in the Marines for another two years.

As of July, he will have been in the service for 19 years; however, he is considering taking the promotion, which would provide a larger pension later on for ministry.

He talked about serving his country. "I believe that our nation was founded on biblical principles," Steve said. "I think those roots to live as a nation under God are worth it. Our nation has been blessed because of our history, how far we go back to biblical roots.

"The Bible tells us to let your light shine," he continued. "On the front lines, we're not only defenders of the United States but defenders of our roots, the freedom to worship God. That makes it all worthwhile."



Afghanistan

Steve was stationed at a forward operating base in the Khogyani district close to the Pakistani border.



Chief Warrant Officer Steve Gaines, left, with a comrade working in Afghanistan.



Photo by Cpl. Steve Cushman, U.S. Marine Corps

Major Mark DeVito, right, team leader of the 3rd Civil Affairs Group, talks to local village leaders at Patrol Base Nabi. These meetings help Marines to understand the local leaders and to cultivate community relationships as they strive to improve the quality of life for the Afghan people.