

# OPERATION HOME FRONT

Calvary Chapel Mountain Home, ID

Story by Ellen Gaston  
Photos by Jordan Davis

The young airman hesitated at the door of the small church in southwestern Idaho. It was Easter Sunday 2005 and the first time in many years that he'd attended a service. For Christopher Hall, church was an intimidating endeavor. Accustomed to fire-and-brimstone teaching, Christopher was shocked by what he found that day at the Calvary Chapel near his base—love and grace.

***For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*** Romans 6:14

His first impression was that the sermon was flawed. *Grace?* He thought, *What is that? Doesn't God condemn sin and make you work for salvation?* Christopher, a technical sergeant in the 726th Air Control Squadron of the U.S. Air Force, didn't understand the Scriptures about God's grace. Invited to Calvary Chapel Mountain Home by Sandie, a young woman who would later become his wife, Christopher continued to attend services. Hoping to impress Sandie, he didn't realize that it was God's grace that would impress him.



**Tech. Sgt. Christopher Hall**

At the church, an older man in the congregation reached out to Christopher. Rich Cowman regularly invited him to men's prayer and outdoor church events. Rich would talk to him and encourage him to read

God's Word. Hearing the Word taught verse by verse, Christopher became aware of how a person believes in Jesus through faith and receives pardon for their sins because of God's unconditional love. He was soon deployed again to Iraq, but believers stayed in touch with him.

***But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Romans 5:8

As he prayed, read the Word, and received encouragement from other believers while at home and abroad, Christopher began to understand more about the salvation prompted by God's love. He came to realize that eternal life is found only through a personal relationship with Jesus. Late in 2005, Christopher committed his life to Christ; since then, he has taken an active part in serving at CC Mountain Home.

## Equipping Soldiers

Started by CC Boise in 2000, CC Mountain Home lies 40 miles southeast of Boise. More than 70 percent of the men and



Leaders at CC Mountain Home, ID, pray for service members who deployed overseas this past September. The church is in close proximity to Mountain Home Air Force Base. More than 70 percent of the congregation is connected to the military. Much of the ministry of the church focuses on serving the families of those deployed.

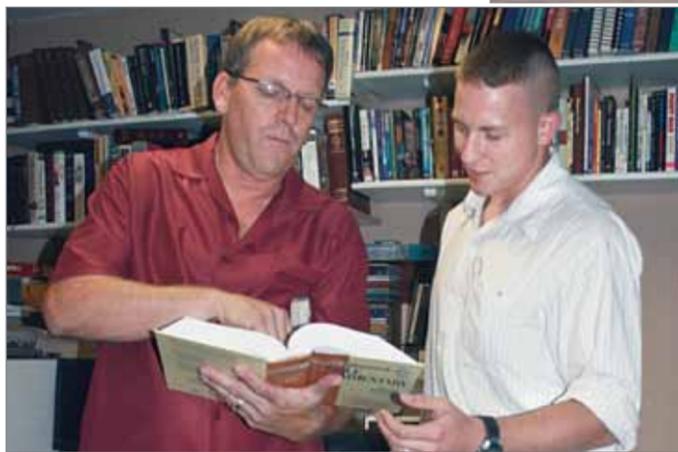


Pastor Dan Davis, right, embraces Senior Airman Kevin Mendoza before the serviceman's deployment.

women in the fellowship are service members. Out of the nearly 12,000 people who live in Mountain Home, more than 5,000 are stationed at the Air Force base along with their families.

Initially, Pastor Dan Davis was surprised to shepherd a predominantly military church. When he started the fellowship in a home nine years ago, Dan never expected soldiers to venture into the small church. "From initial observation," said Dan, "there isn't a difference from a military church and a 'regular church'—except maybe for the haircuts on the guys." But after pastoring the flock, Dan learned that service members encounter unique struggles.

After talking to several young airmen, Dan realized why God had strategically placed CC Mountain Home in the military community. "Many young soldiers grow up in the church but have no personal foundation. Once they get out of boot camp, many of them turn to the world," said Dan. "They need a personal relationship with Jesus Christ." The average age of a newly commissioned service member is 20 years old, according to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense.



Senior Airman Aaron Wimberly, right, receives Bible study aids from Dan before Aaron's recent deployment.

Dan believes another important ministry of the fellowship is being a sending church. "They come, we train them in Christ, and they go out," he said. At CC Mountain Home, service members study the Scriptures and are encouraged to share their faith as the military sends them around the world.

Both a difficulty and an advantage of being a sending church is that the congregation is constantly in flux. "Many people tend



Air Force and Navy aircraft assigned to the 366th Fighter Wing fly over Mountain Home Air Force Base, ID. In the foreground is an F-16CJ Fighting Falcon, an F-15E Eagle, an F-15C Eagle, and an EA-6B Prowler. Airmen are thankful that the church family provides support for their wives and children during their deployment.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Debbie Hernandez



The church family gathers to witness Dan baptize a young man this past summer. Knowing that church members are eager to assist their families in their absence allows the military personnel to focus on their missions.



Tech. Sgt. Lou Lanton

to naturally close off as members leave," Dan continued, "They want to guard their hearts from pain. But you can't do that." While it is hard to say goodbyes, the frequent transitions are part of the church's mission, said Dan, "to see people saved, to help them identify their calling, and to nurture that calling to go and do likewise. We have to understand that time is short."

### The Family of Christ

Operation Home Front, a ministry of CC Mountain Home, provides for families whose spouses are serving abroad. From mowing lawns, arranging potlucks, babysitting, and calling soldiers overseas, they act as a surrogate family to each other during the church members' deployments.

"When you move so much, you seek out a family to connect with to replace your blood family and close friends who are far away," said Courtney Bucks, whose husband serves in the Air Force.

Capt. Scott Crowell, an F-15E pilot with the 391st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, recently returned from Afghanistan and shared a similar sentiment. Being away from family is one of the hardest challenges for frequently deployed service members. "I missed my son's first birthday, his first steps, and his first words," said Scott. "I missed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. The church family helped my wife during these times while she was acting as a single parent. They provided child care, meals, women's Bible studies, and sent me care packages."

### Love in Action

Believers at CC Mountain Home see God's love in action in the fellowship.

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

1 John 3:18

"Our church has demonstrated love by actions," said Tech. Sgt. Lou Lanton of the 726th Air Control Squadron. Now a youth leader at the church, Lou recounted how the church has helped him and other service members. "They mow lawns, change car oil, repair homes, pray, and constantly reach out to my family while I'm deployed," Lou said. "My mind can rest at ease knowing that my family is looked after. I am able to concentrate on the mission: leading my troops, directing the air battle, and protecting my country." ☺

### CC Mountain Home

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