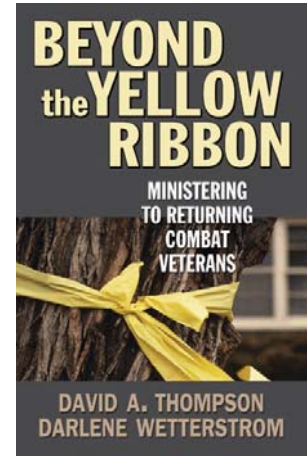


# **Beyond the Yellow Ribbon: *Ministering to Returning Combat Veterans*** by David A. Thompson and Darlene F. Wetterstrom

## **Summary**

**This book is for anyone serious about giving back to those who have given so much.** As combat veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands are still deployed and few communities escape the direct impact of soldiers returning from war. Yet their needs are often hidden in plain sight from our congregations and communities. This book identifies specific challenges veterans and their families face and gives practical ways churches can provide help to bring soldiers all the way home.

This book is designed to bring understanding to those who care about the challenges of military life, the impact of combat upon a returning veteran, and issues that stress military families. The authors paint vivid portraits and offer practical suggestions for soldiers and their families coping with deployment and reintegration.



## **Contents**

### *I. Soldiers and Their Families in Our Midst: Who Are These People?*

The authors debunk the myth that the military always takes care of its own, letting us off the hook. Who are these veterans? They are us, our neighbors, our friends, and family, people just doing their job. After discussing the different branches of the services, the authors talk about why deployments are difficult for both active duty families as well as families in the reserves and National Guard. All families struggle with deployment but how they struggle is directly related to the support they receive while their loved one is away. For active duty families can usually find built-in support through their bases. For guards and reserves it is harder to find and less likely to be effective. Churches can help bridge that gap. They can be an ongoing support system for all military families, but especially to the families who are community based and who are not sure where to turn for help.

### *II. The Soldier's Life: Why Is It So Hard to Come Home from War?*

There is a myth that the majority return home broken and struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or war wounds. That is not true. But one common issue for returning veterans is feeling they have lost their place in life. They struggle to find new purpose and motivation. Veterans may need help in reuniting with spouses, children and family after long absences. Communities of faith can value their experiences and recognize their service and sacrifice.

### *III. Military Family Challenges: Living in a Warrior Culture*

Military families always take second place. Military obligations come first. There is a deployment cycle, with each part having its own rituals, rewards, and difficulties. Maturity and stability helps, but these are often in short supply leading to infidelity, divorce, anger, and guilt. There are also issues related to separation from children. Church members can mentor and secure a safety net for families.

*IV. The Wounds of War: Unique Challenges for Wounded War Veterans and Their Families*  
Authors detail the types and treatment options of visible and invisible wounds.

*V. Comforting Those Who Mourn: Ministering to Families of Military Casualties*  
Understand the magnitude of the losses in war and the grief many family members suffer as a result of a service-connected death or disability. Churches can provide help and structure for grief. List of resources provided.

*VI. Onward Christian Soldiers: Moral and Spiritual Issues Facing Soldiers and Their Families*  
War is hard on the human spirit. Soldiers go into the service because they want to preserve and protect the country that they love. They have to be trained intensely to take someone's life. Either the soldier's anticipation of that life-taking act or the participation in killing can harm a person's spiritual health. Some veterans, anguish over what they have done in war; they need to experience forgiveness and grace. Pastors, chaplains, and church leaders can help veterans deal with these serious ethical and moral issues.

*VII. Putting Feet to Our Faith: Creating a Military Family Friendly Church*  
Sometimes church leaders observe the "coming and going" of active duty, reserve, and National Guard personnel. Churches can challenge veterans to do great tasks and find new meaning and vision for their lives. Getting veterans off the bench as spectators and getting them involved in ministry will ignite their hearts to do great things for God, just as they did great things for their country.

**About the Authors:**

**David A. Thompson** is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and a retired Navy Chaplain who assists deploying and returning soldiers and their families. He and his family have experienced several deployments with both the Navy and Marine Corps and know the challenges of coming home after war. David is an ordained minister with the Free Methodist Church of North America and, while active duty, was endorsed by the Free Methodist Church and The United Methodist Church.

**Darlene F. Wetterstrom** is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) with extensive experience working with children and families in a variety of settings, including the military. Darlene is a member of Woodbury United Methodist Church in Woodbury, Minnesota, where her husband serves as senior pastor.

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