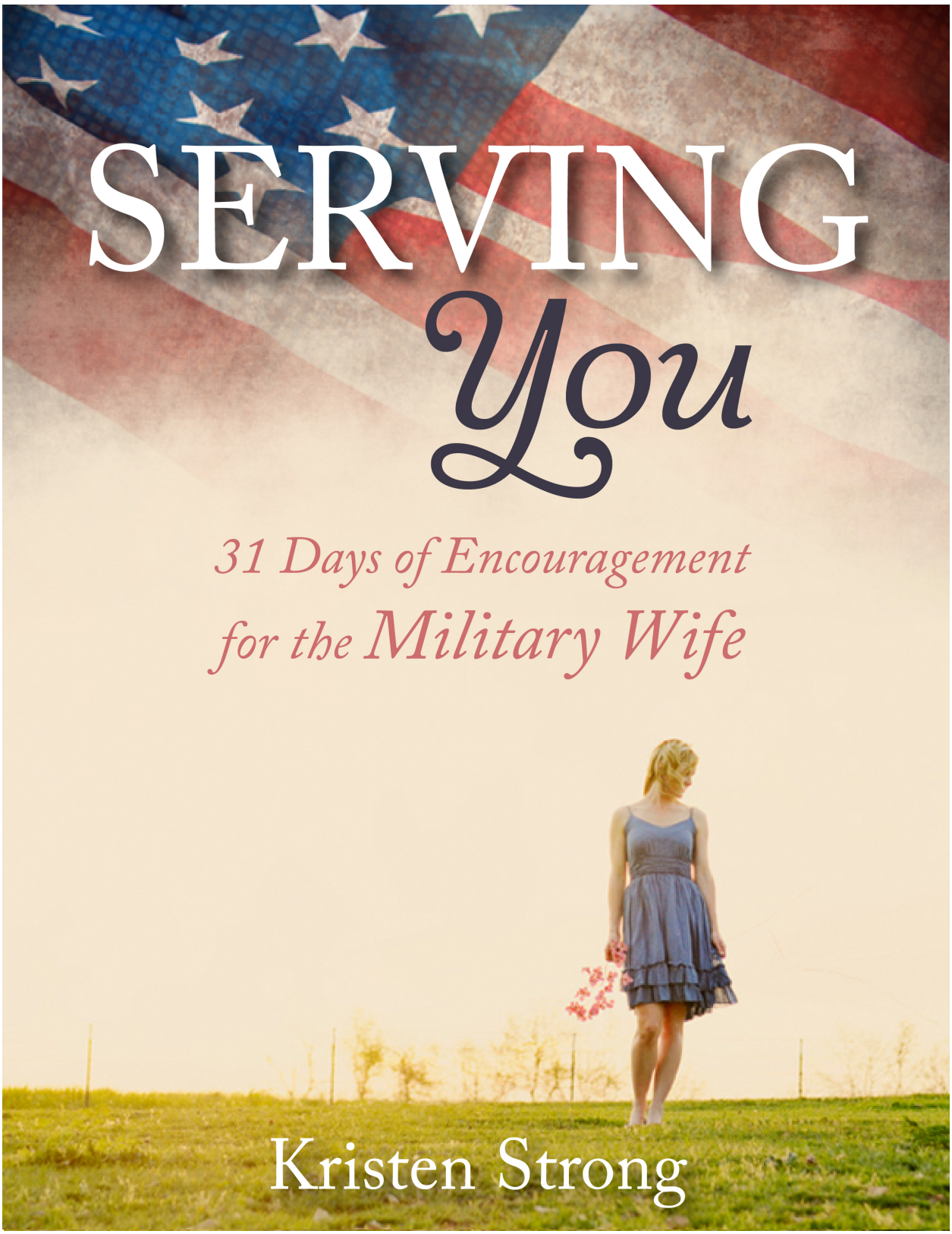
SERVING
You
31 Days of Encouragement
for the Military Wife
Kristen Strong

Serving You:

31 Days of Encouragement for the Military Wife

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This is for the military wife who keeps a stiff upper lip and the one who lets the tears fall.

This is for the military wife who craves the constant change and the one who wants to grow roots.

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This is for the military wife who easily steps into new community and the one who shyly peeks at it through a crack in the door.

This is for the military wife who stands with her spouse even when that means standing alone.

This devotional collection offers encouragement for handling the everyday realities of military life, told from the perspective of one Air Force wife. On occasion, I've had amazing help from fellow military spouses. While I cover several different aspects of military life, I couldn't cover them all. More extreme realities—such as rapid deployments, PTSD, and TBI—are beyond my scope of experience. However, I have included some spiritual resources for these topics and others at the end of the book.

While no two military wives' personal circumstances look identical, all military wives share common threads woven throughout this lifestyle. We all must figure out how to make friends, fit into new communities, adapt to constant change, and fill roles well beyond that of wife.

We battle frequent seasons of loneliness, fear, separations, and feelings of missing out. So whether a military wife has just walked down the aisle or driven through her tenth base, whether her husband has deployed a dozen times or not at all, I believe *Serving You* will speak to each woman in emotional, spiritual, and practical ways. It will *serve you*; assuring you that God—not Uncle Sam—has placed you where you are for a divine purpose. It will strengthen your identity in Jesus and help you see yourself the way He does.

This is for you, friend. May it bless and keep you where you are today and always.

Dedicated to all you beautiful and brave military wives, especially to some of my favorites: the Juniper Court gang. I couldn't love you more.

Cover Design by Erin Ulrich www.designbyinsight.com

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Military Acronyms

If you've been a military wife for more than five minutes, you know the military has its own kind of language. This list is far from exhaustive, but it does include many of the more common acronyms as well as some used in this devotional.

AAFES: Army and Air Force Exchange Service. Think tax-free Walmart or Target for active duty military, retirees, and their dependents.
AD: Active Duty
APO: Army Post Office. Works like a United States address but is used for overseas duty assignments.
AWOL: Absent Without Leave
BAH: Basic Allowance for Housing. Amount depends on location of assignment and number of dependents.
BDU: Battle Dress Uniform. In other words, camouflage.
CO: Commanding Officer
COLA: Cost of Living Allowance. Extra pay given to those stationed in expensive areas.
CONUS: Continental United States
DEERS: Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. All military and their dependents must be enrolled in this to receive benefits.
DITY: Do It Yourself Move
DOD: Department of Defense
DS: Drill Sergeant
EPR: Enlisted Performance Report
FRG: Family Readiness Group. Provides activities and support to Army spouses and their families.
IG: Inspector General
ITT: Information, Tickets, and Tours. A source available to military, dependents, and retirees that offers recreational activities at a discounted price.
JAG: Judge Advocate General. Lawyers for the military.
MP: Military Police
MWR: Morale, Welfare, and Recreation. An on-base support system dedicated to enhancing the lives of all active duty, dependent, and retiree military members.
NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer
NEX: Navy Exchange
OCONUS: Outside the Continental United States
OCS: Officer Candidate School (for Army)
OPR: Officer Performance Report
OPSEC: Operational Security
OTS: Officer Training School (for Air Force)
POA: Power of Attorney. You should have one of these!
PCS: Permanent Change of Station. In other words, *"You're moving!"*
TDY: Temporary Duty. In other words, business trip.
TAP: Transition Assistance Program. This program helps military members transition from military to civilian life.
TI: Training Instructor
USA: United States Army

USAF: United States Air Force
USCG: United States Coast Guard
USMC: United States Marine Corps
USN: United States Navy
XO: Executive Officer. Second in command.

1
Hello, Change, It's Nice to Meet You (Maybe)

I am a country girl who spent childhood surrounded by endless blue skies and wide open Oklahoma prairies. I grew up in the same house on a street aptly named O'Neill Lane—my last name and the last name of everyone who claimed that lane as their address. In my little corner of Osage County, I tirelessly played with sisters and explored with neighbor-cousins, always with imagination to spare. When I needed a break from roaming, climbing, or swimming with the family posse, I kept company with books and diaries under one of many sturdy oaks. Friday nights meant sleepovers with Grandma Rea and Sunday mornings meant church and pot roast with Grandma Mary. I found comfort in deep roots and familiar ways.

He is a city boy who, as a child, lived in more states than I'd visited. He loved anything and everything with definitive boundaries and straight lines, and his favorite way to spend a day was in his room lost in a book. A straight-up thinker all the way, his analytical mind reveled in knowing the reason behind everything and how everything had reason. He embraced change as one of the most exciting things ever, as well as a great excuse to learn new things.

Our paths converged in a college town when we both saw each other for the first time and couldn't help but look again. It took ten seconds flat for the analytical, thinker boy and the free-spirited, artsy girl to fall for each other.

So on a humid June evening in north central Oklahoma, David put a ring on my finger in the only church I'd ever known. And when we loaded up my grandmother's old orange and cream Chrysler Horizon to move to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, I was introduced to something that would be a part of my life from there on out: Change.

Goodbye, comfortable Familiar. Hello, Change. So nice to meet you.

Actually, it was nowhere near *"nice to meet you"* at first. For a long time, I resented Ms. Change for obstinately dipping her fingers into all aspects of my life. She took away the only home I'd ever known and by the time I started to feel settled in a new one, she up and took it away, too.

But ever so slowly, I began to warm up to Change. *And miraculously, I began to look forward to her arrival.*

So, what changed in me? A word from Genesis gave me soul-soothing perspective:

> *"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.' So Abram left, as the Lord had told him. . ." (Genesis 12: 1-4)*

When God sends people packing, He sends them with a promise. So when Abram and his wife Sarai moved away from the only home they'd known, they packed God's promise close to their hearts. And while their future years were not free of trials, they remained full because of the promise they received for their obedience to God.

To say it has always been easy for me to leave comfortable familiarity for brand new everything would be a crazy exaggeration. But I can't deny that every time the Lord brought our family to a new place, we were better off than in the old one. I wouldn't alter how God has used change to gift my family's history, bring us to amazing places and beautiful friendships, and ultimately minister to me. Oh, sometimes I still struggle with change and the difficulties it brings. But I rest knowing it's worth waiting them out because God's plans will outdo anything my own heart and mind fathom (Isaiah 55:8-9).

And this is one thing we can always count on staying the same.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, my mind knows all the good reasons you had me fall in love with this military man, but my heart sometimes struggles with pining away for familiar. When I am tempted to despair about my physical location, please help me to reorient my heart's location to You. Remind me that you have placed me here in this season for a purpose, and in your good timing it will be made known to me. I love you, Jesus. Thank You for meeting every single one of my needs. In Your precious Son's name,

Amen

2
One Woman, Many Roles

I walk into the warm, breezy cafeteria, eyes scanning the room for a glimpse of my girl amongst the sea of kindergarteners. Soon my daughter and I lock eyes and we both wave enthusiastically. I make my way to her table for the kindergarten graduation ceremony, an especially important tradition at her Hawaii school. Settling in next to her with shortbread cookies and mango punch, my eyes drift down our table toward the many others. I realize my daughter and I look quite different from the rest in attendance, and I'm not just talking skin complexion.

While most kindergartener graduates have mom, dad, aunts, uncles, and grandparents in attendance for the big day, Faith has only me. With her dad off-island for work and our family scattered across the mainland, she and I compose a party of two. Now, I certainly didn't expect anyone to fly in for her kindergarten graduation. It's a neat thing, but it's *kindergarten*, y'all.

Taking another bite of my cookie, I couldn't help but notice how the scene around us painted an accurate picture of life as a military wife. In that moment, I acutely felt the stab of doing many things solo—a lone cheerleader, one woman filling countless roles.

More often than not, we military wives possess see-through thin support. Perhaps like me you've been blessed to have friends—many of them fellow military wives—who fill the gaps. They invite your kids over for playdates, keep them when you're sick, pick up a gallon of milk for you at the commissary, and even bring over their prized enchiladas for dinner. While these folks are a mega-sized blessing, their presence isn't the same as having the support of those who cherish you and yours the way family does.

When this reality sinks into my soul, the load of being many things to many people weighs heavy. It's easy to transfer a thin physical support system to a thin mental one, too. If I'm not careful, I can adopt the *if it's meant to be it's up to me* mantra as I "soldier on" in my own strength. I might be able to pull it off for a little while, but eventually my limitations show up in the form of weakness, comparison, or plain ol' exhaustion. I drop this ball or lose that battle, and before long I throw my hands up, certain my grown-up report card reads *F, F, F.*

On my own I am limited, but I don't want to allow this fact to limit my view of our heavenly Helper.

Author Micca Campbell explains what happens when we do:

> *"What we end up with is a God who is only a little bigger, a little better, a little stronger, and a little wiser than we are. Basically, He becomes a super-sized version of us. The problem [with this] is that it makes God too small. And when we have a small God, we feel like He depends on us to do a good job, just like everyone else."*[i]

Thank heavens our Father God is bigger than anything we fathom.

> *"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?" (Isaiah 40:12 NIV)*

If our God measures the Earth's waters in his hand, holds the earth's dust in a basket, and throws planets into the atmosphere all while attending to small details like designing butterfly wings, then He can handle my responsibilities. Yours too. He isn't scared off or overwhelmed by them. He isn't too busy to care. He is just waiting on us to call on Him.

The moment we do is the moment He saves.

Each of us carries real responsibility on multiple fronts, and of course we are going to have tired, worn out days. But let's lose the internal dialogue that says we must get it all done on our own.

You are not alone. Exhale knowing you aren't one woman filling infinite roles, but one woman trusting an infinite God to fill our empty places in countless ways.

Prayer

Dear Father God, you know this military life carries countless responsibilities, and you know I get plumb worn out from the weight of them. Today, with my tired knees on the floor, I ask you to help me. Please stretch my time, my resources, my abilities, and my patience. May I worry less about doing things right and more about doing the right things. Help me to do only what I *can do and to trust You to fill in my gaps, to be what I cannot. Thank You for being my all in all. In the precious name of Jesus,*

Amen

3
When Days Overwhelm You

Slowly, I sank down the wall while tears slid down my face.

I glanced at the clock that read 9:10 am. The day was young, but I needed a serious do-over.

I rubbed my tired head and thought about the last few weeks. As the calendar wound down on my husband's deployment, my short fuse tightened up. My health struggles weren't helping, either. While I had finally turned the corner on my persistent case of pneumonia, I managed to get a sinus infection. The medication I received to treat it made me nauseous and too friendly with the bathroom. On top of all this, I had lifted too many stacks of heavy books and thrown my back out.

But these weren't the reasons behind my tears.

On this Tuesday morning, my daughter revisited an old argument with her brother and now both chose to exhaust their list of who-done-it-worse to each other. While I put out that fire, my other son saw an opportunity to sneak in extra computer time.

Stress flooding all possible fronts, I snapped under the pressure. The wheels of my mind spun out of control, and I moved like a locomotive downhill. I hollered. I waved arms wildly. My head all but spun off my shoulders. And after I sent them to their rooms like three puppies with tails between their legs, I cried.

Because crying is what I do when I feel out of control.

Lysa TerKeurst's book *Unglued: Making Wise Choices in the Midst of Raw Emotions* gives my floundering, out-of-control feelings stability:

> *"But it's hard to display self-control when someone else does things out of my control that yank my emotions into a bad place. So, here's one little tidbit I'm learning. When someone else's actions or statements threaten to pull me into a bad place, I have a choice. I do. It may not feel like it. In fact, it may feel like I am a slave to my feelings—but I'm not. Remember, feelings are indicators, not dictators. They can indicate there is a situation I need to deal with, but they shouldn't dictate how I react. I have a choice."*[ii]

I'm not gonna lie: It certainly does not always feel like I have much of a choice, but I do. And while we're on the topic, another choice I have is to not wait until I have nothing to give before calling on the One who gave it all to be what I cannot. God is with me when I'm handling everything graciously and He's the grace I need when I'm not.

God is also the One who gives me the power through the Holy Spirit to be my self-control so I might avoid verbally throwing up on my kids, no matter the circumstances.

One thing we girls must also do? Give ourselves grace for when our emotions get the better of us. Apologize when necessary, but lean into forgiveness for ourselves. If you are a mom, give your kids extra grace, too. We all feel the hardships of this military lifestyle in our own ways, and we all must leave breathing room for each other.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8

Think back to how your heavenly Father has faithfully stood by you during hard seasons in the past. Sister, He is standing by you now and will be with you in every second of your future. Know it, feel it, believe it.

Prayer

Lord, I am all too aware of my weaknesses. I know bad days will come and I'll answer them with a loss of self-control. Right here, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I ask you to help me make wise choices during the hard times. May I hunger for your Word and your ways every day. May I rely on you to be my first line of defense rather than my last resort. In stressed out, messy moments, help me choose actions that make the situation better, not worse. You have my back, Lord, I know this. And I thank You. In the precious name of Jesus,

Amen

To purchase all 31 chapters *of Serving You: 31 Days of Encouragement for the Military Wife*, please visit the book's Amazon page:

http://www.amazon.com/Serving-You-Encouragement-Military-ebook/dp/B00D0A9PH6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1369796781&sr=8-1&keywords=Serving+You%3A+31+days

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Notes

[i] Campbell, Micca. http://www.proverbs31.org/devotions/do-i-really-get-god-2012-09/
[ii] TerKeurst, Lysa *Unglued: Making Wise Choices in the Midst of Raw Emotions* (Michigan, Zondervan, 2012).

**Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version 2011.

About the Author

Kristen has been a writer-at-heart all her life and neck-deep in the military lifestyle since marrying her Air Force man in 1995. She is a joy hunter-downer who writes of looking upward at www.chasingblueskies.net. Originally an Oklahoma girl, she has since traveled far and wide with her husband David, zigzagging across this country (and one ocean!), calling ten different addresses home. She and David have twin sons (age 13) and a daughter (age 10). Kristen is also a contributing author to DaySpring's blog, www.incourage.me.