

## Message for March 15, 2015 Worship Service

Good Morning, I would like to open our message this morning with one of my infamous multiple-choice questions. So here goes; “What career is the following job description for? A. a military career; B. a law enforcement career; C. a firefighter career; D. a Christian missionary career; or E. all the above? So now let’s get to the job description so you can answer the question. Here it is; **You will end up in great shape. Others can see a change in you. The benefits will last a lifetime. Your self-confidence will improve; you will develop self-control of how you manage your life, your conduct, your body, and your thinking of those around you. It is a serious commitment. It requires a lot of work, especially in the beginning. You have no choice about where you will be called. You will learn new things. You may be asked to suffer and/or offer your life to help others.**

Well if you picked E. “all the above” you are correct. Isn’t it interesting that becoming a missionary or becoming a soldier shares similar job description traits? Well unfortunately, many of you may know of the helicopter crash that may have taken the lives of 11 military personnel during a training mission off the coast of Florida. When I first heard about this incident it was from a commanding officer being interviewed by the media and he said something in the interview that stayed with me. What stayed with me was when he said that being a member of the armed services is dangerous whether it is in combat or in training. What came to me about what he said was affirming to my thoughts that when a person takes the oath to enter the military they are showing great courage in doing so. You see when someone joins the military they are actually giving up some of their constitutional rights as a U.S. citizen and agree to live under the Uniform Code of Military Justice or UCMJ instead of the U.S. constitution. So when you join the military you’re really self-sacrificing some of the very freedoms that you will be fighting for. What is most significant about joining the military or becoming a first responder or even a Christian missionary is that your life will change and sacrifices will to be made that may even include your death. As we remember those eleven courageous crewmembers of the Blackhawk helicopter crash we might also remember the courageous disciples that responded to Jesus’ call to follow Him. You see all but one of the disciples lost their lives because they preached that Jesus was their savior and He had overcome his death on the cross and rose to life again after 3 days in the tomb. But before I begin to share about how the disciples were to become followers of Jesus I would like to tell of a courageous crewmember aboard the USS Iowa by the name of Ricky Peterson, who like the

disciples and the recent lost crew of the Blackhawk helicopter, lost his life while being called to serve others. Ricky's story is personal to me as I knew him while I was principal of Houston High School and a neighbor to his mom and dad who lived in Looney Valley. A moment that I remember most about Ricky was the day that I was in the grocery line and he was bagging my groceries. You see he asked me about my experience as a sailor in the U.S. Navy and if I enjoyed my experience. Of course, I told Ricky that it was a great experience and bragged it up a bit. Ricky asked me about my military experience because he was thinking about joining one of the branches of the military. It was just a short time later that I learned that Ricky had decided to join the U.S. Navy and become a sailor on the high seas. But on one day in the Caribbean Sea, Ricky and 46 of his fellow crewmembers lost their lives when there was an explosion in Gun Turret Two on the USS Iowa. Let me read a tribute article from the Chicago Tribune about the accident at sea. **Timothy J. McNulty, Chicago Tribune, April 25, 1989; President and Mrs. Bush embraced grieving mothers and Navy widows Monday as the mourners, many of them clutching photographs, showed the President and his wife the faces of those who had died aboard the battleship USS Iowa. Barely holding their own emotions in check, the Bushes joined in the sorrow of the Navy families at a memorial service for the 47 crew members lost in the fiery explosion of gun turret No. 2 last Wednesday. As the Atlantic Fleet band played the Navy Hymn, the couple walked along rows of sobbing family members, stopping to speak to each one, to shake hands or to hug them.** It was a year or so after the accident that I was invited to visit with the Peterson's at their farm in Looney Valley, Minnesota. As I entered their living room, there it was, a folded American flag, being proudly displayed. I knew right away that the flag was from Ricky's military funeral and soon after I sat down the subject of Ricky's death became a topic of our discussion. There are two things that I remember most of our visit; the first being the pride the family had about their son's contribution to his country by protecting our freedoms with his sacrifice and the second was the story of Mrs. Peterson learning of Ricky's death. You see it was very early in the morning that she went into the kitchen and looked out at the dawn sky getting ready for sunrise. It was then that she noticed a white limousine parked at the entrance to their farm. She knew at that moment that something was terribly wrong. Then as the sun rose the limousine drove into her farmyard and two high-ranking Navy Officers exited from the limousine. They walked up to her front door and delivered the news that she feared most; that her son Ricky had died in a Naval training

accident. She then learned of the story about the explosion on Ricky's ship that took his life. As she told us the story, she also explained that there was a tradition in the Navy to never deliver news of this kind at night. So that is why the officers delayed their notification until sunrise. I'm aware that many of you have received similar bad news about the death of a loved one and may relate to the feeling that the Peterson family experienced that morning in Looney Valley. As a chaplain I have been the bearer of such news and have witnessed a variety of responses from parents and loved ones who suddenly, out of nowhere, learn of their losses. In times like these it is sometimes difficult to feel God's presence but God has constantly told us that we are never alone and He is with us. However, there are many who react to accidental deaths of a loved one by asking this question, "How can God allow something like this to happen?" "What kind of God would do such a thing?" In many cases God is blamed for the accident and there is a period of time that people distant himself or herself from God. In my readings I came across a part of Capt. John H. Kaelberer's message that he delivered at the memorial for "Those Who Gave Their Lives Aboard USS Iowa". Here is a portion of what he presented. **"All that was familiar became unfamiliar, meaningless. Even the Scripture passages read moments ago may seem irrelevant. The Good Shepherd . . . 'Where is He?' . . . You ask as you find yourself deep in the valley of the shadow of death . . . a valley whose walls imprison you in grief. Then the words of the psalmist come to you again, words you have heard hundreds of time, but today they come as God's light, love, and peace to your heavy heart: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.' Then, perhaps, you feel yourself wrapped in helplessness, as you see yourself as a sheep that is trapped . . . in need of a shepherd. But you need not panic or feverishly search for the shepherd. He has been with you all the time and not for a split-second has He ceased to be the Good Shepherd. He is the only meaning, comfort, peace, and help that you can take hold of."** So for those of you that may have experienced the loss of a loved one it is my sincere hope that you find some comfort in the words of what Chaplain Kaelberer's offered to the families of the 47 sailors who died while serving their country. At the beginning of my message my goal was for us to reflect on how becoming a disciple of Jesus is similar to someone becoming part of the military and or emergency services. What they share in common is a commitment and dedication that will change their lives while helping and protecting others. But I have also told you that sometimes while writing our messages they will take a turn out of

know where and this is what has happened to our message today. It appears that the recent Blackhawk helicopter crash where eleven lives were lost or missing must have touched my soul more than I had thought and here we are. It appears that our message today has become a memorial for those who have lost their lives in accidents and how the families recover and find comfort from their grief. So, next Sunday our message will be a Part 2 of today's message where we will continue our focus on Jesus' Disciples and how Jesus told them that to be one of His Disciples "they would have to pick up their crosses and follow Him." Now let's continue with today's message focusing on those who have experienced the loss of someone to an accident that claimed the life of a loved one. What I would like to do now is for us to be mindful of the recent crash of a Blackhawk helicopter that may have claimed the lives of eleven of our servicemen. As many of you know this crash happened earlier in the week and that the Coast Guard is currently performing what they call a "search and rescue mission" because of the slight possibility that some may have survived the crash. Now, as we think back to the 47 lives lost on the USS Iowa and what their families had to endure I would like for us to take a moment of silent prayer and pray for the families and friends, of the eleven crash victims. Let us pray for them to feel God's presence during this extremely difficult time in their lives. Let us pray for them to find strength as they begin their healing from the grief that they may be feeling at this moment.

**Lets us pray, Amen.** I would like to close our message today with a reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Petty Officer Jeffery Bellows, of the USS Iowa that was read on that very day of the explosion at a memorial that took place on the deck of the ship. As I read what Jeffery wrote please think of the missing crew of that helicopter and their families and friends. Jeffery's reading is titled

### ***Far From Home***

***Lord have mercy on our comrades who'll be knockin at your door, They fell forever today, so look after them forever more. They were just men with dreams all their own, Doing the work of their country far from their home. Lord please bless their souls, for it was not their choice you see. Each had a job to do, but not one to take them to eternity. We are all simple men with dreams all of our own Doing the work of our country far away from home..... Amen***