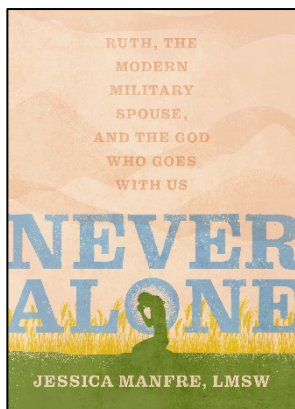


Never Alone

by Jessica Manfre, LMSW

A Military Wife Reflects on the Sacrifice, Loneliness, and Challenges of Military Life, While Reminded of the Assurance of an Ever-Present God



Chicago, IL: Military spouses live a unique lifestyle that comes with complicated circumstances—frequently relocating, feeling disconnected in new places, trying to make new friends or church home, longing to be near loved ones far away, and mitigating marital stress fueled by loss or isolation.

JESSICA MANFRE, a military spouse and licensed social worker and practicing therapist, understands the challenges of military life. Today she counsels military spouses and co-founded Inspire Up, a nonprofit foundation serving military and first responders. Her initiative, #GivingTuesdayMilitary, received national media attention for encouraging people to offer one million acts of intentional kindness.

In her book, **NEVER ALONE**, Jessica bravely shares the most challenging and lonely experiences she faced not only as a military spouse but also as a child of divorce with an alcoholic father. Jessica further reflects on how her faith and friendships guided her through the challenges of marrying young (she was 22 years old and he was 25 years old), starting an unknown military future, and the grief from the miscarriage of her second child.

Drawing parallels between the life of a military spouse and the story of Ruth, Jessica masterfully illustrates how Ruth's devotion, loneliness, unwavering faith, and loyalty were equal to those of a military spouse. She assures military wives that their lives, too, can exemplify strength, devotion, and blessings from God. Readers of **NEVER ALONE** will discover how God used the bond between two women and the empathy of a king to demonstrate His assurance of grace and salvation through the lineage of Jesus. Topics featured include:

- **Finding Connection:** Despite feeling lonely and disconnected, Naomi realized that between God and Ruth's devotion to her, she was never alone. Forced to relocate from place to place for years, military wives similarly fight loneliness and long for connection. Thankfully, God provides a constant, loving connection to remind us that we are never alone.
- **Wading through Military Life:** Ruth understood what was required to survive as a widow and waded through uncertainty, a defining characteristic of military life that draws out difficult emotions. Fortitude helps to endure the uncertainty, and we can heal from difficult emotions by confronting them, dissecting them, and replacing them with positive thoughts.
- **Treating Your Marriage as a Covenant:** Naomi demonstrated her covenant to her husband by following him on an unknown journey. When you treat your marriage as a covenant, you seek grace and love and exemplify humility, loyalty, and faithfulness. As you look to God as the anchor of your covenant, He will be your foundation for a strong, lifelong marriage.
- **Practicing Lovingkindness:** Boaz, rooted in empathy and moved by Ruth's demonstration of servanthood, chose to care for her. Practicing kindness like Boaz did produces a ripple effect, connecting all of us through beautiful acts of goodness. Lovingkindness bridges together friendships and entire communities.

Ruth's story offers us encouragement and strength as we witness the beauty of hope and share in the beauty of friendship. We discover that we are **Never Alone** and God is always with us, restoring the hardships and healing the wounds of despair while transforming our pain and building our trust—even when we find ourselves in a faraway, foreign land.



About the Author: Jessica Manfre is a licensed social worker and practicing therapist, author, and Chief Financial Officer and co-founder of Inspire Up, a nonprofit foundation that serves the military and first responders. She has also received national media attention for her initiative, #GivingTuesdayMilitary, which encourages people to offer one million acts of intentional kindness.

She holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Central Florida and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Northwestern State University. Jessica is the proud wife of U.S. Coast Guardsman Scott Manfre and mama to their two children, Anthony and Raegan and live near Norfolk, VA.

According to the [Department of Defense](#), 133 military spouses committed suicide in 2020. Military spouses are at an [elevated risk](#) for alcohol and substance abuse compared to their civilian peers. *Blue Star Families* reported that as of [2021](#), 17% of active duty families have children receiving mental health care.

The military community is constantly facing the hardships of the active-duty lifestyle. The deployments, separations, and isolation can cause military spouses to be overwhelmed and under cared for in a landscape of change. Often, they are searching for answers to hard questions. Moody Publishers Military is dedicated to equipping military spouses with resources that build their courage, refocus their faith, encourage community, and inspire them to push forward into whatever God calls them to next.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell us about your book, *Never Alone*, and your motivation to write it.
2. What struggles do military spouses experience that civilians may not understand?
3. Why did you choose the story of Ruth? How does her story connect us to the hope and lovingkindness of Jesus?
4. You share that your parents' divorce and your father's alcoholism made for a lonely childhood. How were you able to reconcile the hurt he caused? How do you encourage women who also have family members with alcohol addiction?
5. What led you to become a passionate advocate for the military community?
6. Describe how military spouses share a unique connection rooted in longing for community.
7. What do you mean when you say that a person needs to "wade through feelings" in order to pursue healing?
8. What challenges of military life would surprise most people?
9. How can lovingkindness serve as a restorative tool for military families to help combat isolation and poor mental health?
10. In what ways can the church be a home? What can they do to support military families?
11. Tell us about #GivingTuesdayMilitary, your initiative that captured national media attention.
12. How do we bring faith back into the conversation of supporting military families in deep, meaningful ways?
13. Where can we learn more about you and your books?

Notable Quotes from *Never Alone*:

The book of Ruth begins with Naomi following her husband, Elimelech, to a new land, a pagan one. Considering famine was often, though not always, a punishment from God, running away from it was probably a horrible idea on his part. He should have stayed and trusted God to provide. They fled their homeland and replanted roots in a place without their community of faith or support of any kind

Military spouses are often told that we knew what we signed up for. But that's an underinformed statement. It doesn't matter how many seasoned spouses share their experiences with you prior to your own military marriage or what you research to steel yourself for what's coming—you'll never know how deeply the military life will impact you until you start wading through it. And wade—barely above water—you will. (pg. 11)

You'll never know how deeply the military life will impact you until you start wading through it. No one mentions the way your heart will ache in devastation when you find yourself far from your loved ones or any familiar support. Instead, you've heard about the adventure of exploring the world as you move continually. People don't discuss the implications on the military marriage when loss and isolation are fueling everything, instead of what should be love leading the way. Let's also not forget church hunting in finding that spiritual home. Despite the scary and lonesome life, we charge on in faith and hope. Military spouses are just like Ruth in so many ways. (pg. 12)

Don't allow the temporary nature of our lives let you miss out on the good, though. It will hurt when you say goodbye. But the chapter of your story with these friends and places and experiences in it? So worth it. As military spouses we are built to be scrappy. But instead of getting ready for the end of the world, we'll prep for tackling icky feelings and ongoing unavoidable life stressors—guarding our hearts as we go along. We're built as humans for connection, belonging, and community. (pg. 43, 47)

Processing isn't always easy or pretty either. Bringing up things you'd previously buried means you are re-exposing yourself to them, which can hurt. A lot. But without unpacking everything to understand it, nothing changes. When you are sitting in the dark pit of loneliness, stagnancy is even more uncomfortable and damaging than trying something new. When you have a negative thought about yourself or the event/ issue you are processing, replace it with something positive. Thought reframing can be arduous work, but eventually we teach our brains (and our whole selves) to be healthier. (pg. 57)

Though we may find ourselves in faraway lands or lost in a sea of newness when we move, the church and its leaders should always be our home base to be closer to God. There we share a devotion to the Lord Jesus and His teachings. The church is its own community, one that I feel deeply we can always rely on for comfort in times of loneliness. The beauty of this modern society is we can find it anywhere, even virtually when necessary. Know that if you are struggling with loneliness, it is the one space you should always feel welcomed, included, and above all else, loved. (pg. 115)

It's easy to stay in feelings of inadequacy, negative self-worth, and the sense of not belonging, especially as a military spouse. With the constant shifts in how we live our lives, it can and does drain your energy. This constant "fight or flight" position can wreak havoc on us. I've been there. We are all human beings and even as we strive with all our might to lead good lives, bathed in kindness and the intent to serve His will, we still mess up. Remember, true failure can never really happen as long as you never stop trying to succeed. You are worthy of this life, good things happening within it, and above all, recognizing our God's love and wrapping yourself in it. (pg. 129)