

## *Chaplain's service in Iraq abounds with faith, miracles*

NORFOLK, VA. — Sitting on the ramp of a military vehicle on the lawn of Saddam Hussein's presidential palace, Lance Cpl. Jeff Guthrie's eyes welled with tears that streamed down his muddy face.

He had just stormed the gates of the palace in a gruesome fight with his fellow Marines and claimed victory.

Lt. Carey Cash, a chaplain with his battalion, saw Guthrie's distraught face and walked up to him.

Cash, in a new book, "A Table in the Presence" released April 7, takes his readers onto the hot, dusty, Iraq battlefield to learn how God worked miracles and answered prayers in individual lives of Marines like Guthrie.

"Sitting down on the grass in front of him, I asked what was wrong," Cash writes in the book, recalling a few life-changing moments spent with Guthrie.

"'Sir ... I'm, I'm just so sorry,' he said, tears welling up in his tired eyes.

"'Sorry for what, Guthrie?' I had no idea what he was talking about.

"'It's just what I've done in my life. All I can think about is that I've just been through the worst experience of my life, and yet, God protected me through it all. But why did He do it? How could He do it after all the things—the bad things—I've done? I don't know what else to say, what else to feel. I'm just so sorry.'

Surrounded by 20 Marines, Cash, 33, led the young soldier to Christ.

The next day, April 13, 2003, Cash baptized Guthrie in the palace.

Cash wrote, "... I baptized Jeff Guthrie, a new creation, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As the waters of baptism poured over his head and onto the marble floors of the palace, the symbolism wasn't lost on anyone. Here we were in the inner chamber of a place known for oppression and tyranny, vice and unspeakable cruelty. Yet that Sacrament proclaimed to us all the greatest freedom and victory that a man can experience. There before our eyes, the courts of evil had become nothing less than the courts of the Lord. A place that had been known for the presence of darkness and treachery had become a place of the presence of God—a table in the presence."

### ***PURSUING THE PRESENCE***

Before his tour was over, Cash had the privilege of baptizing 59 men in his battalion.

"I watched God use that environment to behold His Son," Cash told Baptist Press. "It was awesome."

Cash's book is named "A Table in the Presence" after the fifth verse of the 23rd Psalm, written by King David, a warrior himself in the Old Testament. It was that Psalm that came to Cash's mind as his unit prepared to deploy into Iraq from Kuwait in March 2003.

"The 'table' that David spoke about, the 'table' that David longed for in the presence of his enemies, was the table of God's presence," Cash wrote in the book. "It amounted to a feast of spiritual strength and friendship that no degree of danger and no amount of evil could infringe upon."

Cash said he feels he was called by God to sit at this table. He was the older of two children who grew up as “Navy brats.” His father was a career Navy pilot who served in several wars and his father-in-law, an ordained Baptist minister and Navy chaplain, helped mold him into who he is today.

“I feel like trials in my life that strengthened my faith a few years prior to my entering the military really prepared me to be a chaplain,” Cash said in a telephone interview from Norfolk, Va., where he moved in April to serve as chaplain on the USS San Jacinto.

After graduating from Citadel College in South Carolina on a football scholarship, Cash was diagnosed with a brain tumor. He encountered God face to face during that time seeking to know Him better when he felt called to ministry. He entered seminary, served as pastor of a small church for two years and then with the help of a medical release from one of his doctors was accepted as a chaplain with the Navy. While serving at Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, Calif., Cash was called to overseas duty with the 1st Battalion 5th Marine Regiment.

When his battalion returned in June 2003 to Camp Pendleton, several trusted friends suggested that he write a book recounting the miracles he had witnessed in Iraq.

“I started thinking about what happened and it was like a fire in my bones,” Cash, who admits the writing was therapy for him, told Baptist Press. “It became an issue of stewardship and obedience to write this.

In the 230-page book, Cash details miracle after miracle experienced through the first days of fighting in Iraq. The first printing of 28,000 books sold out in the first two weeks.

### ***SPONTANEOUS WORSHIP***

Cash said that he learned that God does not need a sanctuary of religious “things” for worship.

With a portable pulpit containing a cross, a goblet and communion bread, he moved from Humvee to AAV using a tailgate, an ammunition box or meal ration box as platforms for worship services.

One worship service Cash will never forget was with a young soldier who said he hadn’t been to church in a while.

“I’m from a Christian tradition that worships on Saturdays rather than Sundays,” the soldier explained. “Since it’s Saturday night, I was wondering if you and me, just the two of us, could do church together?”

### ***CASH’S HEART MELTED***

“I quickly grabbed my Bible, pocket devotional, and red-lens flashlight, and the two of us, huddling together in the back of Dr. Trivedi’s combat ambulance, worshiped God,” Cash wrote. “As we bowed in prayer in that darkened and cramped compartment, my soul was flooded with the awareness that we might as well have been in the world’s most beautiful cathedral. It didn’t matter. There we were, only two of us, filthy; neither of us had taken a shower in at least two weeks. We were turning the torn pages of a mud-stained Bible. The only light we had to guide our reading was the dim red glow of a flashlight the size of a pen. But for us that ambulance was holy ground because we were in the presence of God.

“I worshiped with filthy, bloody, scared soldiers who sang Amazing Grace and Lord, I Lift Your Name on High a cappella. Danger magnifies the presence of God. God seemed to be using the very chaos of war to provide stark contrast with the peace and assurance that He brings through His Son Jesus.”