

## North to bikers: 'Walk the talk'

By Russ Rankin

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Retired Lt. Col. Oliver North served 22 years in the Marine Corps, receiving the Silver Star for combat service during the Vietnam War, along with the Bronze Star for valor and two Purple Hearts for combat wounds. President Ronald Reagan described him as "an American hero."

North, however, told motorcycle enthusiasts at the 2009 Rally to Ridgecrest that he met Jesus Christ in 1978 "after a life of self-centeredness, thinking I was God's gift to the Marine Corps and that all the medals and accolades made me a greater man."

North, now a best-selling author, syndicated columnist and host of "War Stories With Oliver North" on the Fox News Channel, recounted how, when he was a cocky Marine officer, his commanding officer, Lt. Col. John Southy Grinalds, modeled for him the servant leadership of Christ. And Grinalds challenged North to examine the Scriptures, which led to his conversion.

"I would not know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior if I hadn't had someone intentionally share with me," North told 600-plus attendees at the motorcycle rally held over Memorial Day weekend at LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center near Asheville, N.C.

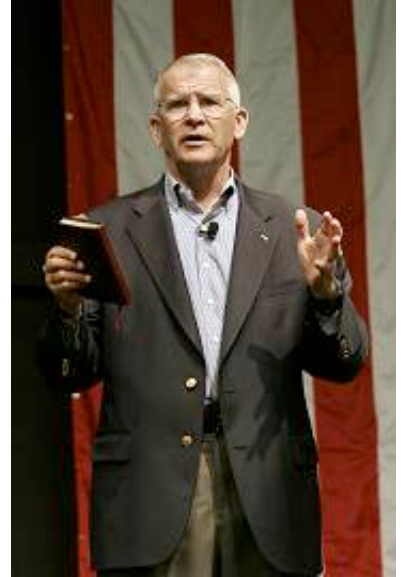
North encouraged the crowd to be intentional about sharing their faith and living like Christ.

Describing members of the military as heroes, North said what sets heroes apart as they face danger and uncertainty is that "they have a profound, focused sense of mission."

"Many people get up each day and don't have a sense of mission," he said, noting that Christians should daily be inspired to the mission of spreading the message of God's sacrifice and salvation.

Each person has the opportunity to inspire others through leadership, North said, explaining, "If you have an affinity and a passion for something -- such as motorcycles -- you can be a leader and have that sense of mission," he said.

To have a sense of mission as a Christian calls for proclaiming the truth "in a culture that doesn't know the truth" and often -- as North said is the case with his



Retired Lt. Col. Oliver North challenges motorcycle enthusiasts at the Rally to Ridgecrest during the Memorial Day weekend to be leaders in sharing their faith. *Photo by Russ Rankin*



Avid motorcycle rider David Burton, director of evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention, preaches on Saturday, May 23, to fellow bikers at the Rally to Ridgecrest near Asheville, N.C. *Photo by Russ Rankin*



colleagues in the media -- reject truth.

A true sense of mission requires believers to use the truth to encourage others who are struggling, just as the Apostle Paul encouraged believers to "put on the full armor of God" for spiritual battle, North said.

To have a sense of mission requires believers "to walk the talk," North said, adding that "faithfulness is a way of life" that the world should see.

"How are you representing Jesus to the world?" he asked. "For most people, the only Jesus they will ever see is the Jesus they see in you."

Christians have the confidence of "knowing where we're going and how we're getting there," North said. "Every prayer I utter, whether it's on the battlefield or a Senate hearing, I know He will be faithful to me. I know where I'm going and how I'm getting there.

"You could be the person who shows [Christ to the unbeliever] through your words and life," he challenged. "You don't have to be a great preacher; you just have to be faithful."

North said that had Grinalds "not been someone who walked the walk, I wouldn't have followed. I came to understand what was really important in life ... all because there was a person who was a leader in my life."

Earlier in the day on Sunday, May 24, North spoke at a wreath-laying ceremony at the nearby veterans' cemetery, an annual part of the motorcycle rally.

A true hero is not the fantasy personification often seen on television, he said, but one who is selfless.

"No nation has ever had a military force greater than the United States of America has today," North said. "They appreciate the prayers of a grateful people."

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Rally to Ridgecrest share in praise and worship, led by a worship team from Thompson Station (Tenn.) Baptist Church, after a day of biking through North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. *Photo by Russ Rankin*



Duane Murray, administrative pastor from Thompson Station (Tenn.) Baptist Church, leads an early morning devotional for motorcycle enthusiasts at the Rally to Ridgecrest held over Memorial Day weekend near Asheville, N.C. *Photo by Russ Rankin*



Motorcycle enthusiasts at the Rally to Ridgecrest gather for a wreath-laying ceremony at a veterans' cemetery, an annual part of the gathering of motorcycle enthusiasts in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. *Photo by Russ Rankin*