

The Voice of Martyrs Conference

Saturday, January 17, 2015
Midvalley Bible Church, Bluffdale

*“By this we know and love, that he laid down his life for us,
and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”*
1 John 3:16, ESV

*“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them;
and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.”*
Hebrews 13:3

“BROTHER JOHN” from Syria

Damascus, Syria is the oldest inhabited city in the world. Most of the population is Muslim. Syria, having twenty-four million people, was considered the fourth safest country in the world. There was no fear of crime. One government official remarked that he would have no worries about his wife traveling from one end of the country to the other. However, there is persecution—for Christians. Christians are the troublemakers. Why? Because they go around converting Muslims, and the families of those converted Muslims get angry and upset. Every day you wondered if the church would still be open, if it had been seized or locked up. You might just go to church and find it closed by the government without warning. It would simply be shut down.

Now, in Syria, there is war. The news says about 100,000 deaths. That’s not accurate. There are about 400,000 deaths, and 150,000 missing, with more every day. What you don’t hear about on the news is those who are being converted to Christianity.

My father is a pastor. Our churches don’t keep track of names and numbers in Syria because of fear of interrogation. If someone is captured and tortured for information about other members, they can’t tell what they don’t know. But, we do know that in our church there were about three hundred members before the war. Now, we have fourteen services a week with not even standing room in our chapel because of the number of people. People reach for God in times of hardship.

Our biggest struggle is in discipling Muslims who convert because there are so many new converts that we don’t have the time or resources to teach them. It is very hard to preserve the purity of the doctrines of the church right now.

There was a young Muslim man who was part of a raid on a Christian village. They abducted many young men from this village and took them back to their own village. They then began to slaughter them with their guns “in the name of Allah!” They were celebrating their murder, and doing it in the name of God. The families of these boys could hear the gunshots ringing out from their homes. In Islam, you are not allowed to ask questions. However, this young man participating in this had the question come to his mind, “If this pleases God, what kind of God do we worship?” He was deeply disturbed. It was then that he walked into a church and heard, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) He was converted. It’s a big change for Muslims to convert—it’s a whole new mentality.

One example of this is a Muslim man who had been converted for two years. In an argument with his wife, he hit her. They said, “No, no! You can’t do that. What do the scriptures say? Is that how a Christian acts?” The man simply did not know any better because he had been raised Muslim, and in Islamic culture, that was normal.

We *love* the Muslims! What we *hate* is the spirit of Islam. We love the Muslims, and hate the spirit of Islam. The Muslims are the victims of Islam. It took God bringing us to our knees in war for us to learn to love our enemies. We are not the victims. The Muslims are the victims of Islam. Pray that God does not have to bring your country to its knees before you learn to love your enemies! There will be persecution for Christians in America, and when it happens, we will praying for you, just as you pray for us now in our persecution.

If you own a Bible in Syria, you treasure it. My dad has had the same Bible his whole life. It’s falling apart and he could try to replace it, but he loves it. We needed more scriptures for our expanding church, so we decided to make it a prayer request. We decided to pray for 5,000 New Testaments. One old man in our congregation is a prayer warrior, and he piped up and said, “Our God is a wealthy God—He owns the universe! Why not pray for 10,000 New Testaments?” So we did. The next day, my dad received a phone call from a printing company. They said they had a shipment of Bibles that was supposed to go to Iran, but for some reason Iran had rejected it. They had 17,000 Bibles. Would we take it? Phone calls are monitored by the government, but my dad was so grateful and exciting and he shouted “Hallelujah!” into the phone.

We are praying that God will make Syria Christian again. Muslims are like blank paper—they have never heard the good news of the gospel before. We are so selfish not to share the good news of Christ!

Samir is a young man who our family adopted in the faith. We call him “the crazy man” because he insists on going evangelizing in areas where they cut Christians to pieces. He came to my dad and said, “I am going to hand out Bibles near Damascus.” My dad tried to talk him out of it—it was too dangerous—but Samir is also stubborn. When he makes up his mind, there is not changing it. So, my dad gave him some Bibles and sent him on his way. Three days later, he went missing. We went to the secret police, and in order to get information on him we had to tell them what he had been doing. We told them he had been passing out Bibles. The police said that he was crazy! Even the secret police were afraid to go there. Samir was reported to have been out past curfew. We fasted and prayed for Samir for three days.

As I was walking in Damascus, I saw Samir walking towards me out of an alleyway. I was so surprised and excited to see that he was safe! I ran to him and hugged him. Then I started yelling at him. ☺ What was he thinking? How could he have been so stupid? Now, Samir is stubborn, but he is also humble. He is a man of great character. He started to tell me HIS side of the story. He said that on the second day of handing out Bibles, the secret police had approached him and said, “You have to stop this. Either you be gone, *or you will BE gone.*” If secret policemen come up and say that, you get out of there! But Samir, he is stubborn. He feels it is too selfish not to share the good news. The next day he goes right back to handing out Bibles. A black bag was thrown over his head, and he was taken to the prison. This prison was packed. There were so many people held there that there was only room to stand, and there was every type of person there, from government officials, to misbehaving soldiers, to beggars. The first question they ask you when you get there is, “So, what are *you* in here for?” ☺

A general later came in and was in a bad temper. He needed someone to yell at, so he started yelling at Samir. As soon as Samir could get a word in edgewise, he started to tell a story. He shared the entire gospel plan from the creation all the way down to Christ while the general stood there openmouthed. When Samir was finished, the general pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down his personal cell phone number on it. He handed it to Samir and said, “You go back out there and keep sharing that story, and if any of my boys give you trouble, you tell them to call me.” Samir was released. He went home to his wife and kids that night, and the next day he was back on the streets handing out Bibles.

Once, I had to go somewhere with my wife and father to get some documents for my wife. Our destination was only about an hour and a half away, but because of the war there are fifteen to twenty checkpoints along the way, making the trip much longer and more dangerous. As we pulled up to the first checkpoint, my father rolled down the window and I saw that he was holding a Bible in his hand. I thought, “Oh, no, Dad, not now! We can’t afford trouble right now.” When the guard asked for my father’s ID, my father held out the Bible and said, “I would like to share with you the best gift the world has ever experienced.” The guard was very interested and wanted to know what this “best gift” was. My father would not let go of the Bible until the guard had promised to read it. He did this at every checkpoint. “I want to share with you the best gift the world has ever experienced.”

When we reached the office my dad walked in with several Bibles and started doing the same thing—at the front desk, at the offices down the hall, all the way up to the head office. I had hung back because, well, I wanted those documents! I didn’t want to get kicked out. But by the time we left, my dad had shared this best gift with nearly everyone in that building, and they blessed us as we walked out.

A Christian man and his family came home one day to find that their house had been ransacked by the Muslims. Many things had been broken and stolen. On the wall was written, “In the name of Allah we came to slaughter you.”

A pastor who had been badly cut up and murdered by Muslims was being buried, and family and friends had gathered for the funeral. The Muslims set off a bomb to kill those who had gathered to mourn. This is the kind of persecution the Christians face in Syria.

When an Isis suicide terrorist sets off a bomb, killing himself along with all those surrounding him, often there is a second terrorist sent to set off a second bomb to kill those who gather at the first scene. A bus of children was driving past one of these suicide bombing sites. The children all knelt and prayed for the injured and the families of the injured when they saw the destruction. Even the children are helping us.

My brother recently returned to Syria. He was walking to a church meeting in the dark and it was icy. He slipped and hit his head on the ice. Blood was coming out of his ears and nose. He was rushed to the hospital, but there are so many wounded that you cannot depend on always having someone who can operate on you. The doctors looked at my brother and said he was going to die, and that they did not dare to operate on him. All of a sudden, another doctor walked in and said, “I will perform the operation.” The other doctors tried to talk him out of it, but he said he was going to do it anyway. My brother is now recovering. My parents are hunted by Isis and have received death threats from the terrorists, but they have decided to stay in Syria to save souls and help the suffering.

DR. HORMOZ SHARIAT from Iran

Christians being persecuted in Iran give us their firsthand stories; they give us a view of what God is doing, versus the news give us a story of what man or the enemy is doing.

My conversion to Christianity saved my marriage—before that I thought that the gospel was just a nice message. It wasn’t until then that I knew that it was not just a nice message—I discovered there was power in the gospel!

Obama doesn’t refer to the Isis terrorist group as Muslims. He just calls them “extremists.” He doesn’t want to label these terrorists as Muslims. Who are the true Muslims?—the terrorists, or your nice Muslim neighbors? Ask their Quran (Muslim bible). According to their Quran, the Isis Muslims are better Muslims than your nice neighbors. I tell the Muslims that they have need of the gospel. When you diagnose a patient with a disease, it’s not because you hate them. It’s because you love them! You want them to get better. It is so with the Muslims. They are diagnosed with Islam’s spirit. Their spirits need healing.

My brother was murdered by the Muslims. This taught me to love my enemies. I love the Muslims, and want to heal them of Islam.

What do the Muslims want from the world? (Shows a picture of thousands of Muslims crowding the streets with banners and signs. The banners say “ISLAM WILL DOMINATE THE WORLD. FREEDOM CAN GO TO HELL.”) Islam wants to rule the world. So, what will stop Islam? I will tell you what will NOT stop Islam.

What will not work:

- 1) Ignore it/passivity
- 2) Compromise
- 3) War/ violence

What will work? What will stop Islam?

What will work:

- 1) Spiritual warfare using truth + love
- 2) Right strategy—work with God

Did you know that Islam has ninety-nine names, and not one of them is love.

Iran right now poses the greatest threat to the world. They are building an atomic bomb; but, the greatest threat equals the greatest opportunity.

In Iran today, Islam is on the *defense*. Why? It is because Christianity is invading them—they are losing their people. The Muslim mosques are empty! People are waking up and abandoning Islam, so Islam is reacting with violence to fight back. I believe that Iran will be a Christian nation again. In Jeremiah 49:34-39 there is a prophecy that says that in Elam (modern Iran), “I will remove kings... scatter nations... there will be a horrible war... and I will set my throne in Elam” (modern Iran).

In the most recent evangelization encyclopedia, it lists Islam as the fastest growing in Christianity. The people in Iran are starting to wake up. They are saying, “Islam is the problem.” Millions are rejecting Islam.

Satellites are illegal in Iran. (Show a picture of a city in Iran, and the roofs and walls of all the building are literally plastered with satellites.) But everyone in Iran has a satellite. There was one man who had been out of a job for two months. His family was starving. He prayed to God for a job, and he got one. His first paycheck went to getting a satellite. I said, “What? Your family is starving and you’re buying a satellite?” He said, “My family needs hope first, bread second.” You see, the media is one of our ways of evangelization. It works because everyone watches the

TV over there. Even the families of government officials are being converted. I have had people call me who say, "I believe in Jesus, but I cannot tell you my name. If I did, you would recognize me as someone you hear of all the time in the news." Families gather in the houses of those who have satellite to have meeting by watching the TV. They are able to "go to church" by "meeting" with pastors over the television.

Persecution happens for two reasons:

- 1) The church fell asleep, and God uses persecution to wake them up
- 2) The church is growing, and so the enemy fights back

Make sure that you do not experience persecution because you have fallen asleep. We are being persecuted by the enemy in Iran because we are growing.

Right now I live in California, and I have a Christian TV station which I stream into Iran, and people over there can call directly into the station so that we can share the gospel with them. (Showed a video of his TV show where a sobbing woman called in to the station. We could not see her face, just hear her voice. She said that she had had financial problems health problems, had been without hope, and that she was Muslim. She was afraid to talk to God. She was afraid to talk to Jesus because she thought that God would be displeased with her. She had not known what to do, so she had tried to commit suicide. Dr. Hormoz had her pray and repeat after him, "I am Your daughter. I know You love me. I am thankful for what you did for me. I accept Your love for me," etc.—prayer of salvation. The woman was sobbing over the line because she was so affected by it. She had never been taught that God loved her. May be found on YouTube under "Roghiyeh's Redemption".)

(The following story was shown through a video on YouTube under "Padina".)

I am young woman known as Padina, and I had served Islam for seven years. I was very exact in my worship of Islam because I wanted to please him. I always washed and said my prayers just right, and if I thought she had washed wrong, I would start all over again. This would happen several times in one sitting. I hated the Christians. When I heard stories of Muslims who had killed Christians, I was happy, because in Islam, killing a Christian is a one-way ticket to heaven. But I started to get depressed. Allah felt too distant. I did not think he was pleased with me. I tried to kill myself several times.

One night I went to my mother and said, "I am going to kill myself tonight." My mom had MS. She could no longer walk and was going to die in three months. She said, "Then you will have to kill me too."

That night my mom was watching the TV and a Christian pastor (Dr. Hormoz) came on. He said, "If you are feeling hopeless and depressed, or if you are thinking of killing yourself, wait. We have a message for you that will change your life. Just call us now." My mom picked up the phone and started talking to the pastor. Pretty soon she started saying the salvation prayer. I was so angry. I started yelling at her. "Mom, why are you doing this? You are talking to an infidel right before you are about to die! Now you're going to go to hell!" My mother begged me to just talk to the man, and I said, "No, I will not defile myself by talking to an infidel!" Finally, I took the phone. I told the pastor that I was going to kill myself tonight and that there was nothing he could do to stop me. He tried to persuade me for an hour. Then he gave me a challenge. He said, "You yourself say that Allah has done nothing for you. Just try Jesus, for one week. If Jesus does not change your life, you can still kill yourself next week." I knew this was my chance. I was going to try Jesus and show that He didn't work. I was going to call this man's show next week and tell the whole world that Jesus didn't work, kill myself, and everyone would know it. That way, I could serve Allah even in death, and he might be pleased with me.

The next day I woke up and saw that my mom was walking down the hall. I was frightened. I said, "Mom, something is wrong! We have to get you to the hospital." They ran many tests on her for several hours. When the doctor finally came out, he said, "There has been a miracle. There's nothing wrong with you mom. Her MS is gone. Which Imam did you pray to?" I looked at him and said, "It wasn't an Imam. It was Jesus."

My mother and I now lead an underground mission for the Christians in Iran.

(End of video.)

There was a Christian man in Iran who was driving along with a vanload of Bibles. You can go to prison for months for smuggling just a few Bibles. If he were caught, he would receive a death sentence for having that many. A Muslim guard pulled him over on the side of the road. The man began to pray that God would blind the eyes of the guard. The guard came to his window and asked him, "what do you have in your van?" He said, "Books." The guard asked him to show him, so he slowly climbed out of the car and walked toward the rear of the van, all the while praying that God would blind the guard's eyes. He opened the back of the van and pulled up the lid of one of the boxes. The guard stared a second and then got angry. He said, "Why did you lie to me? These are not books! They are black papers." The man went free, thanking God that He had heard his prayers.

In Islam, you used to have the permission of the first wife in order to get a second wife. Not anymore. One man took a second wife that was fifteen years younger than his first. His first wife was angry and hurt. Her husband did not spend time with her anymore. He did not love her. During this time she found Christ and became Christian. She said found that "Christ is a better husband." She told her husband and his second wife, "I am not angry with you. I have a better husband. He loves me. You can have a relationship with Him too." ☺ (Isn't it amazing that even for people who are living polygamy without the fullness of the gospel, all of the jealous and angry feelings are gone once Christ is put into the picture?)

There was a young Iranian woman who we were teaching about Christ. The missionaries offered her her own Bible, and instead of taking just one, she took ten. She didn't know why she did that, but she took ten and put them in her bag. When she was walking down the street, she was stopped by a police who looked in her bag and found the Bibles. She was arrested and put into a car to be taken to the police station. She was terrified. She felt trapped in a prison of fear. What would they do to her? What about her family? She began to pray to God that He would help her. He said, "I will tell you what to do."

When she reached the police station and was brought to be questioned, she suddenly knew what God wanted her to do. She went on offense. She began yelling out, "Why did you arrest me? I am giving people hope! I am praying for people! I am helping and loving them! What is wrong with that?" The officials were shocked, and some of them were touched. A crowd had gathered to listen. The officials asked her to come back the next day because they said they "needed more for the case." She repeated her words the next day. This happened several days in a row, with the officials and crowds listening. They kept asking her to come back because they wanted to hear her message. She continued this before officials all the way until, one day, she was brought before the judge. She began the same argument. "What have I done to be arrested? I am giving people hope! I am loving people! If your daughter has cancer, and I pray for her to get better, is that bad?" The judge was speechless. Finally, he said, "How did you know my daughter had cancer?" She hadn't known. God had put those words in her mouth. The judge released her, saying, "You can go—just don't get arrested again."

People in Iran sway and dance instead of sing hymns so that they will not be heard by the neighbors in their worshipping Christ.

I was meeting with a group of young Iranians who had been converted from Islam. After we sang some hymns (they swayed and danced out of habit still), I wanted to bring it down and make sure they knew how serious the commitment they were making was. They needed to know that

this faith could very well cost them their lives. When I started to talk about the solemnity of their commitment, they said, “We were willing to die for a distant, harsh, and cruel god. How much more willing are we then to die for Christ, a loving God! *We know* what we are getting into.” They surprised me with their gravity. Muslims who are converted are ready to die for Christ, because their former faith in Islam required them to give their lives for Allah, and their determination turns into a ready willingness for Jesus. They know what they are getting into.

(The following story was from a YouTube video which may be found under “PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA”.)

A young Iranian mother and her husband are Christians in Iran. They have a little girl, about nine, and a little boy, about five. The mother prays to God, asking Him what she can do to serve Him. God replies with the question, “Will you give me your life?” She struggles with this question, then answers, “Yes.” The next day she again asks God what she can do. He replies with another question. “Will you give me your husband?” She struggles much more with this, and prays with her husband about it. They both tell God, “Yes.” On the third day, she approaches God again. God asks her, “Will you give me your children?” She and her husband pray all day, and are finally able to commit their entire family to God.

The mother feels obligated to tell her children, to prepare them for what God might one day require of them. They live in Iran, where Christian’s homes are invaded without warning by Muslim terrorists and the families forced to deny Christ or die. But how does she instill this in her children’s minds? She sits them down and tells them about how Christ loves them, and how the world hates Christ. She tells them about how they persecuted Him, and that those who follow Christ are sometimes called to share in His sufferings because the world persecutes them too. She said that, because they followed Christ, they might have to go through hard things, but that Jesus would help them, and they did not need to be afraid. She had to tell her children that one day, scary men might come banging on their door with guns and weapons. The men might hurt their parents if they did not deny Christ, and they might see blood. She said that if the men were to come to hurt them, that they should be brave and say, “We forgive you,” and hold on to Christ.

The mother felt her responsibility to train her children up to be followers of Christ in a hostile and severe time.

At the end of the video, the phrase appears: “THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN IN IRAN.” The phrase is then reworded to ask: “OR IS THIS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN?”

(Website given about persecuted Christians with children-appropriate material: kidsforcourage.com)

“BROTHER SHI” from China (English name is “John Stone”)

His daughter, LILY, translated for him. She is about fourteen. Both of them speak in extremely energetic, happy voices, almost to the point of startling the audience with their obvious joy and exuberance! They smile boldly. While Lily translates Brother Shi’s stories, Brother Shi often interjects “Praise the Lord!” making the audience smile and laugh.

I was sentenced to three years in prison for dealing in “illegal printed material” (Bibles). My brother was also arrested and tortured at the same time as I. His treatment in prison was so bad that he had to have his kidney’s replaced because they were so damaged. Cameras are not allowed in prisons, so Lily pretended to be playing a game on her phone and snuck a picture of my brother just before he went into surgery. We did not know if he would survive the surgery, but God blessed him and he recovered. (Showed us the picture of his brother, along with before and after pictures of himself in prison. He lost a lot of weight in prison. He calls his former self before going to prison “Big John” ☺).

I was a pastor in China, and when I was arrested, my wife carried on the meetings faithfully for the three years. She did this even though she knew there were often government spies in the audience. She’s my hero!

My sister was also arrested, and she was found to be pregnant at the time of her arrest. Back then, the Chinese government was very strict with their “one child policy.” This would be my sister’s second child. The government let her go to prison after this second baby was born and had turned one. Then they sent her to prison for her two year sentence.

I have to give you some history of the Chinese government. In 1949, the Chinese Communists had full control of China. They drove out or killed all foreign pastors and missionaries. Hudson Taylor was the last foreign missionary to leave China. If you were a Chinese missionary or pastor, you were also forced out of the country. Some pastors refused to leave because they wanted to continue to serve their people, so the government sentenced them to prison for twenty plus years.

President Mao and his wife said to the reporters, “You can no longer see Christianity in China because we have sent it to our history museum!” Ironically enough, twenty years ago there were twenty million Christians in China. There are even more now.

I was arrested in November of 2008. My first daughter was eleven years old, my second daughter (Lily) was seven. My littlest daughter did not understand criminals and prison. She thought her dad was gone because he did not want her anymore. She kept asking, “When will daddy come home?” One day when she was walking in the street with her mom, she asked, “If he won’t come home, then why don’t you just find me another dad?” Her mother hugged and they cried in the street and she told her that her dad loved her and he was still there.

My brother in America used his ministry to have many people send letters and cards to my family while I was in prison. When my daughters came home, their mom said, “I have a surprise for you.” There were two full suitcases of letters. It was the best Christmas present ever—even though none of them could read English. Later they had interpreters from their church read them to them. One card said, “Your dad is a hero to us. Love, Drew Allan.” (Still has many of the cards in a scrapbooked binder.)

My school teacher was one of the pastors who was sentenced to prison for refusing to leave China. He spent twenty-three and a half years in prison. The first thing he always taught his students was to pray for those in bonds. The second thing he taught them was to give help to families whose members had suffered for Christ. The third was to help the families of full-time missionaries so the missionaries would not worry so much about their families at home.

My arrest happened at 5:00 AM, on November 28th, 2008. Thirty policemen came to my house. They banged on the door and yelled at us. They arrested me as if I was a terrorist or something, like Osama Ben Laden! They could have just called me. ☺ They also searched my home and took many of our possessions. Many of my co-workers were arrested shortly after me. We were all interrogated and kept in separate cells from each other.

The first morning in my cell, I prayed, “God, if you could rescue Peter from prison, then you can rescue me.” I prayed this every morning. Every morning they would come in and interrogate or torture me, and then leave. It was very scary to be taken at night, because no one could see what they did to you. My cell was 190 square feet. We had thirty-five men in our cell, with three toothbrushes.

On the evening of December 31st, an officer came to my room and said, “Do you want to take a shower?” Yes, I did! I had not showered since my arrest. They took me to a room and said, “Take off your clothes.” I said, “But there are no showers in here.” The officer insisted so I did

what he asked. He handcuffed me. He then hooked another pair of handcuffs to those and led me outside. He hung the attached handcuffs on a hook so that my toes could barely touch the ground. He carried an electric baton in case I refused. Then he said, “Is there anything you want to say?” He wanted me to give him information about my ministry and co-workers. I said, “No,” so he splashed a bucket of icy water on me and left me, naked, wet, and cold in the December night. I prayed the same prayer I had every day, “God, I know that if you could free Peter from prison, then you can free me.” The guard came back and asked me if the was anything I wanted to say and I replied no. He again splashed the water on me and left. He repeated this over and over. I started to get angry with God. I said, “If you’re not going to rescue me, then why don’t you just kill me? Why don’t you just let me die?” God stopped me right there and said, “Child, my grace is sufficient for thee.” When the guard returned to splash water on me, the water felt warm, and I passed out. I woke up in an office with a big blanket over me, and they sent me back to my cell. Praise the Lord!

The prisoners in my cell had to take turns sleeping because there were not enough beds. On day thirty-seven, one of my cell mates who had become a friend to me woke me up and said, “Wake up! You’re going home!” I did not believe him at first, but then I saw an officer who confirmed what he said. I wasn’t given time to look for my possessions in the crowded room, so I grabbed two shoes and left in my pajamas. The shoes turned out to be different sizes. ☺ My phone had been left at the front desk, and it was almost dead. I called my wife to come pick me up, and she hung up because she thought that the government was calling her on my phone to get information from her. I had to call her back and make her believe that it was me, and that I was free to be picked up from the prison. She cried. I told her to pack clothes for me so that I could shower off the lice somewhere before going home.

But, I was not really free. I and my family were always followed by a government policeman. We lived close to the grocery store, and so we would walk to get there. Once my daughter was walking too slowly for the policeman following her in a car, so he honked at her to hurry up!

Soon I was rearrested to serve a three sentence. My family was very grateful because I was almost given a life sentence. Praise the Lord!

I was sent to a jail for “special” convicts, a “five star jail.” ☺ The cells there were the same size as the last jail—190 square feet. Eleven out of my thirteen cellmates were murderers, who would brag about the horrible things they had done. I prayed to love them, and I prayed for peace. I wanted to make it out alive to see my family.

There was not enough room for us to sleep all at once in our cell. We would take shifts of two people for two hours to make sure that no one committed suicide. I decided to exercise during my shifts. At first, I could only exercise for fifteen minutes before resting, but I worked up to the full two hours. I was healthier and stronger than the other prisoners, it was easy for me to fall asleep, and there was a light in my eyes. My fellow prisoners started to notice and ask me why. I told them it was because of Christ! The prisoners would also get very bored, so I would tell them stories—stories from the Bible of course. This is how my prison ministry began.

Sending letters to prisoners helps them not just to be encouraged, but it also lets the authorities know that people have not forgotten about them, so they are more cautious in how they treat the prisoners sometimes.

On August 8th, 2008, President Bush visited China, and he had my name on his list. On August 12th I was transferred to a new prison and was not given a life sentence.

I cannot go back to China because they will not let me in, so... I will go to a Muslim country instead! ☺ I will continue my mission work among the Muslims. Praise the Lord!

GRACIA BURNHAM from the United States

My husband and I served a mission in the Philippines for seventeen years. In May of 2001, we decided to take our eighteenth wedding anniversary at a resort in the Philippines. In the middle of the night, there was a loud banging on the door. Before my husband could reach the door, three men in masks barged in with guns. We were kidnapped at gunpoint from the resort along with twenty others. Our captors were the Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim Terrorist group associated with Osama ben Laden. We were marched through the jungle, mostly at night to escape the Philippine military who were looking for them.

Even though the Abu Sayyaf were our enemies, they were the men who we hiked with and lived with—you got to know their personalities. Some of them were like friends or brothers to us, while at the same time they were “the bad guys.” Some of the men you would get attached to, and then they would be killed in a gun battle or raid, or they would be transferred to a different group.

The story of our capture was kept in the headlines back home in America. Our three children moved in with relatives during our capture. We were held captive for a total of three hundred seventy six days. We lived through sixteen gun battles with the terrorists against the Philippines. In June of 2002, in the seventeenth gun battle, I was shot in the leg right off. I remember Martin and I hiding behind a log. There were bullets flying everywhere and shouts. I looked over and saw that my husband Martin was shot in the chest. I held him while ducking behind the log. At one point during all the confusion, I realized that he had slipped away. It was after this battle that we were rescued. I came home in a wheelchair, and Martin came home in a coffin. I was overwhelmed by the thousands who attended his funeral when I got home. There were so many who had been praying for us and who cared.

I tell my story to help others glean the lessons of life—to find grace. With God’s help we can fly again!

When my husband and I were in the jungle during our thirteen months of captivity, we would sometimes get what we called the “goony-goonies”—a bad feeling. Sometimes we would later find out that our group had been joined by more terrorists. Some of our guards were still boys in their teens. Once, Martin and I had the goony-goonies really bad, and many of our captors had headed out for another gun battle or a raid. When they returned with food and supplies, one of our guards told us what had happened. They had waited to ambush a bus that had food and other supplies tied to the top, passengers riding on the inside. When they prepared to attack, they saw that there was a man on the top of the bus, a guard with a gun. One of the men open fired on the man, and then all the other men began shooting too. When they were done, everyone on the bus was dead. They took the food and supplies from the bus. One of the men found out that he had unknowingly gunned his niece and sister-in-law had among the passengers on the bus. They also found out that the gun that the guard had been holding wasn’t even loaded—it had just been there to intimidate them.

If more joined our group, I sometimes resented their presence because it meant there would be less food. Most of the time, we didn’t know where our food and clothes came from. We would pray over our food, “Lord, we don’t know at what cost this food has come to us, but we pray that You will comfort the families who may have been harmed.” What do you do with food like that? Do you eat it? Do you starve instead? This time we knew where it came from. We knew people had been killed to get us this food, and the can of milk they warmed up and gave to me had been taken from a little girl’s backpack. It was heartbreaking.

Love your enemies. God uses us as part of His plan—we are His plan. We can be tools to work His solutions. *When we work, we work; but when we pray, God works!*

Martin would get into conversations with a few of our guards about Islam versus Christianity. The Muslims believe that if your good outweighs your bad, then you will go to Paradise. They also believe that at the end of the world, everyone will stand to be judged of Allah, naked, and they will stand around waiting for over a thousand years. It will be so awful for them to stand and wait for so long anticipating their judgment that many will start to go to their prophets. They will go to Abraham and say, “Abraham, go to Allah and ask him to come judge us.” He will say, “I am not worthy to approach Allah! I cannot go.” Some will go to Moses and say, “Moses, go to Allah and ask him to come judge us.” He will say the same thing. Many will go to Jesus. “Jesus, go ask Allah to come judge us,” and He will say, “I am not worthy to approach Allah! I cannot go.” Finally, they will go to Mohammed, and Mohammed will say, “Yes, I will go before Allah.”

They hadn’t given me time to find clothes when we were captured, and I had grabbed what was on my nightstand—a t-shirt and shorts. These men were Muslims! They believed in having their women almost completely covered! And I was in a t-shirt and shorts, walking through a mosquito-infested forest. They gave me a wrap that night. (Shows us the wrap). It’s like a big tube that women wrap around themselves, and it’s what most women in the Philippines wear. This became my skirt, my blanket, my changing room, bathroom, and towel. I would hold the wrap in my teeth and squat next to the trail to use the bathroom because I wasn’t allowed to go off alone to use the bathroom. I was never allowed to leave their sight, and I accidentally peed on the wrap the first few times. When Martin died they used my wrap as a stretcher to carry his body, and I used it as my Kleenex.

When clothing was brought to camp, the boys would get first pick and take most of the long-sleeved, dark clothing that would help them camouflage in the jungle. The prisoners were given the bright clothing. The Abu Sayyaf of course didn’t care if there prisoners were more obvious targets. I prayed for a long-sleeved shirt, and I did get one, but it was bright, and wore it until God gave me a better one.

My hair covering was the most important thing to our guards. It was humid and sweaty in the jungle, and my hair was always sneaking out from under my hair covering. They were always getting after me to tuck it back up under there. I found out later that, in Islam, for every hair that comes out from under your hair covering, that’s one thousand years in hell!

I was once talking to someone from one of these countries that has Christians under persecution. His name was Sabina. He was talking about the privilege of dying for Christ, and I asked him how they could give up their homes, their families, their safety, a normal life, any form of comfort. He looked at me and said, “*How curious to live in a world where we have to give up none of these things.*” We are so sheltered in America. We don’t realize how blessed we are and how much we take for granted.

There was a church back east that was broken into. The statue of Jesus on the cross had been hanging on the wall. The body of the statue had been bolted to the cross with several very long bolts, and the robbers had taken the time to unscrew the body of Christ from its cross rather than just unhooking the whole crucifix from the wall, which would have been much easier! Nobody knows why they did that—took the statue and left the cross.

Most of us here would say that we want Jesus. But, many of us want Jesus *without the cross*. Do you want Jesus *without* the cross? Christianity without sacrifice, trials, or pain?

Satan seeks to devour anyone—being involved in God’s work is vital. Remember those who are in prison as if you were in bonds with them. We are all part of the body of Christ, and when one member suffers, all the others suffer with it. Pray for them. Pray without ceasing and storm the gates of heaven! One man once gave me a wonderful way to remember to pray for our persecuted members. Paul said to pray in your closet. So when you get dressed in the morning, look at the tags on the clothes you’re putting on and pray for the people in the country that’s on the tag—it puts a whole new meaning on praying in your closet! ☺

When I would get discouraged, I would ask Martin, “Why are we still in the presence of our enemies? How long will this last?” Martin would say, “Maybe God is giving our enemies one more day of grace to repent.” We hear of all the pain, the killing, the torture that Christians are facing. It seems to go on and on. When will it stop? We ask, “How long, O Lord?” It will last until the last martyr has been killed and the last witness is sealed. God is going to give our enemies all the days of grace He can.

Christ told His disciples, “You will go where you would not”—you will experience things and go places where you would never wish to go. All of the disciples were martyred in horrible ways. In Fox’s Book of Martyrs, even Peter’s wife was martyred on a cross for refusing to deny Christ. Peter called to his wife on the cross, “Forget not Christ, thou Beloved!” It’s our turn. Lift up your eyes to heaven and be faithful in all that God will require of you.

Our guards would move us a lot in the night. They would get a report on their radio that the Philippine military was close, and they would up and move. I have horrible night vision, and could not see where we were going on the jungle trails in the dark. I was always tripping and falling behind. One young man was assigned to me to make sure that I would keep up. His name was Harira. (Hah RYE rah). He found some glow-in-the-dark leaves, and he put them under the shoulder straps on his backpack. Then he would walk ahead of me on the trail, and I could watch those leaves, whether they went up, or down, or around something. Once when we had been moved at night, I was physically, emotionally, mentally, and morally exhausted. I tripped in the trail, and I was too exhausted to get up. I could not understand why God let us stay there. I couldn’t see a reason for it. Martin was the strong one. He kept his faith. I was so discouraged. Sometimes we fall and cannot get up. We have to rely on Christ to pick us up when we can’t do it ourselves.

We became pretty close to Harira, and we would discuss religion with him sometimes, and Martin especially enjoyed talking to him. I asked Martin once, “What if, someday, we are at home and Harira knocks on our door. What would you do?” He said, “I would invite him in for a big chicken dinner... and while he was eating, I would call the police.” Good answer! ☺

Many of our captors are now in maximum security prisons serving life sentences. Many of them are being ministered to in prison, and they are being converted. If I had known, all those months in the jungle with a terrorist group, that even *one* of our captors would benefit from our kidnapping, it would have made it so much easier to bear. I had not learned to trust God with the days of my life. Now I kick myself *because it should have been enough just knowing that God is good*. Maybe the length of the captivity or all the dark days were what it took to plant a seed. We have today to take up the cross. We must not murmur, or leave it behind. You can’t be a true disciple of Jesus Christ without cross-bearing. Grace will be given equal to the weight of the cross. Carry it well!