

VOM Books
The publishing division of



Serving persecuted Christians since 1967

vom.org



VOM Books

A division of The Voice of the Martyrs
1815 SE Bison Road
Bartlesville, OK 74006

© 2001, 2015, 2022 The Voice of the Martyrs. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the NLT® Bible (The Holy Bible, New Living Translation®) copyright © 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Original edition produced with the assistance of The Livingstone Corporation. Project staff includes Mary Ann Lackland, Dave Veerman, Paige Drygas, Ashley Taylor, Greg Longbons, Katie Gieser, Carol Ochs, Jill Swanson, Rosalie Krusemark. Design by Mark Wainwright.

“Because He Lives.” Words by William J. and Gloria Gaither. Music by William J. Gaither. © 1971 William J. Gaither, Inc. Used by permission.

Mountain Breezes by Amy Carmichael. © 1999, The Dohnavur Fellowship. Published by Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, PA. Used by permission.

Paperback ISBN: 978-0-88264-214-7

Ebook ISBN: 978-0-88264-140-9

Audiobook ISBN: 978-0-88264-194-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022933290
202004p017a4

Printed in the United States of America

To those who chose death over denial,
who chose faith over fear, and
who chose to be a witness rather than walk away.

They were too good for this world.

HEBREWS 11:38

Introduction

The believers mentioned in this book are not victims; they are victors. Their stories stretch across history, from Jesus' own disciples to modern-day martyrs. The persecutors are of all stripes, from Romans to Romanians, mobsters to Muslims, and Confucians to Communists. But each of these believers is an example to us, an example of extreme devotion to Christ. The believers whose stories you will find inside these pages found a desire even deeper than the basic human will for self-preservation: the desire to serve Christ and be His witnesses.

* * * * *

It is our ultimate goal that this book be used to inspire us to live as biblical disciples when we ourselves face tremendous difficulties. For example, how do we respond to those who do evil to us? How did Christ respond? How did Christians in the past respond? What should our attitude be toward people of other faiths if they violently oppose us? Is it right to risk everything to share God's love with those who may kill us for doing so?

This book will not answer all these questions, but it is guaranteed to challenge your faith. As you read these stories of Christians who have suffered unspeakable atrocities for the cause of Christ, look beyond the tragedy and the hardships to discover the jewels that lie just beneath the surface.

Focus on the faith of these courageous brothers and sisters. Recognize that the same Spirit who dwells, or dwelt, in them also dwells in you, and *believe* that you have that same measure of faith available to you in any extreme circumstance.

As you read through these accounts, it is important to keep in mind that these stories are *not* hopeless accounts of torment. Nor are these believers "super" Christians. Certainly they are outstanding in their courage, tenacious beyond human reason, and devoted to Christ in a way that is sometimes difficult to understand. But in reality they are ordinary Christians (like us) who face extraordinary situations.

So what seemingly mysterious ingredient drives them to such "extreme devotion"?

Simply stated, their faithful witness for Christ, which resulted in their suffering.

Suffering by human hands can be unbearable. But when combined for the kingdom of Christ with faith, suffering strengthens the heart of the Christian who is open and willing to lose himself in order to gain more of Christ.

The martyrs in this book all share a common passion for God. It is this passion that prevailed over their fears of the severe consequences of being caught sharing God's love with others.

Perhaps part of their passion came from knowing the high price of what they possessed. When faith costs us something, it becomes infinitely more valuable. It is this very aspect of human nature that serves to strengthen Christians who live under repressive governments that don't allow religious freedom.

St. Augustine once stated, "The cause, not the suffering, makes a genuine martyr."

According to the original Greek, the word "martyr" actually means "witness." The martyrs in this book were able to personally testify to the truth and power of Jesus Christ and believed that they should take that witness to others, regardless of the cost.

Being a witness indeed comes with a price. However, choosing *not* to be a witness has an even higher price, as Sabina Wurmbbrand wrote: "But if it is dangerous to do God's work, how much more dangerous it is to leave it undone."

When some form of suffering does come to you for your Christian witness, our hope is that you, like those in this book, experience the glory and beauty of *Extreme Devotion*.

The Voice of the Martyrs

extreme question

TURKEY: ERCAN SENGUL

Day 1



And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador.

Ephesians 6:19,20

When Ercan Sengul committed his life to Christ in the Muslim nation of Turkey, some saw it as turning his back on his heritage and nation. When he said that he would do anything for God, he had meant it then. But what about now?

Ercan sat in a dark, dank prison cell surrounded by cellmates. He had been arrested by local police who said that he'd "insulted Islam" by distributing books for a Christian publisher.

Ercan cried out to God, begging to be rescued. He knew that he'd done nothing wrong and didn't deserve to be there. "You said you'd do anything for Me," God whispered to Ercan's heart. "Did you mean it?"

Broken before God, Ercan wept and worshiped. He told God in his heart, *I really meant it*. Ercan began to preach three hours each day in prison. He learned that God allowed him to be imprisoned to give him a new mission field! Ercan was in prison for thirty days until witnesses admitted that police had pressured them to sign statements, and the judge found no evidence of any crime.

The arrest has furthered Ercan's witness. Since his release, many who shared his cell have visited his church, asking about the God who gave him peace while locked in prison. Ercan still joyfully gives out Christian books, knowing he could be arrested again.



Most Christians would admit that suffering is not exactly what we have in mind when we say we want to be used by God. Sure, we want to live out our faith—but not to the point of persecution. We resent being overlooked for promotions at work or excluded from social events. We feel slighted. Cheated. Ripped off. However, we must be willing to prayerfully seek God in the midst of our desperation. The moment we do, we find prayer changes our perspective. We begin to see opportunities for growth. We receive hope. We find promise amid pain. Eventually we begin to discover our current situation, however unfair and undeserved, may be part of God's plan after all. When we pray for God's perspective on persecution, we find the courage to be obedient at all costs.

extreme unity

MAURITANIA: TIMOTHY

“Tell him, Timothy, please!” shouted Maura, pleading with her husband. “Tell the governor where the Scriptures are hidden and be free! I cannot bear to watch any more of this.” Timothy and Maura, residents of the Roman province of Mauritania, had been married only a few short weeks before their arrest.

Day 2



I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love.

Colossians 2:2

Maura had watched in horror as soldiers put out her husband’s eyes with hot irons, trying to break his will. Now, hanging upside down with a weight around his neck on the orders of Roman governor Arrianus, Timothy waited for his gag to be removed.

The fear he initially felt at his arrest had been replaced with a sense of divine calm.

Instead of renouncing his faith and disclosing the location of his church’s copies of the Scriptures, as the soldiers expected, Timothy scolded his young wife. “Do not let your love for me come before your love for Christ,” he urged Maura, affirming his willingness and determination to die for his Savior. Seeing her husband’s courage, Maura’s own resolve was strengthened.

Arrianus, already in a rage at Timothy’s refusal, set out to break Maura’s newfound courage. He sentenced her to the harshest tortures of the Roman world. Yet she would not break. She refused to deny Christ.

After each had endured unspeakable suffering, Timothy and Maura were crucified, side by side.



Jesus did not entrust His ministry to independent believers; He established a spiritual family. He used words like “brother” and “sister” to convey that He did not expect His disciples to be in this alone. Paul continued Christ’s mission by instructing new believers to gather together for fellowship and corporate worship. Christians need each other—especially in times of trial. When one believer falters, fellow believers rally in support and encouragement. This is why the New Testament regards living by example as a duty of the Christian faith. One person’s example of faith and courage can inspire and encourage one another. Conversely, when one believer cracks under the pressure of persecution, it is easier for others to give in as well. History holds high the camaraderie of Christian community—especially during persecution.

extreme readiness

CHINA: PASTOR LI DEXIAN

Just as Pastor Li Dexian began his sermon, the doors of the house church burst open. Armed officers of the Chinese Public Security Bureau poured into the room, threatening everyone present and grabbing Li to arrest him.

“Wait, please allow me to grab my bag.” As always, the pastor’s tone with the officers was polite yet firm.

Day 3

The officers were surprised at the request. “What’s in there?” they demanded, grabbing the black zippered bag Li held and ripping it open.



The bag contained a blanket and a spare change of clothes, Li told them, because he had been expecting to be arrested that day.

Pastor Li had been arrested many times. Twice police had beaten him to the point that he vomited blood, and one time Li’s face was beaten with his own Bible. Li was warned that police were watching the village where he held his Tuesday meetings. He knew if he showed up to preach, he would be imprisoned. Chinese citizens could be sent to labor camps for up to three years without a formal trial.

Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

1 Peter 4:12

The risks were great, but Li’s bag was packed. More than having a bag packed, though, he had his mind and heart prepared. He was willing to pay any cost to preach the gospel. He was convinced God would care for him—even in prison.



Readiness is a sign of commitment. Commitment that is unprepared to sacrifice is merely compromise in disguise. For example, consider the marriage commitment. It costs one’s selfishness and deals a heavy blow to one’s sense of independence. However, the result is a stronger marriage. Relationships that are not ready to sacrifice for the sake of commitment do not last. Compromise takes a steady toll and weakens our desire and ability to be committed. In the same way, the believer’s commitment to Christ must exact a price in order to maintain its value. We must prepare for the test of our commitment by daily affirming that Christianity is worth it. It’s worth spending our time in daily prayer. It’s worth gathering for worship at church. It’s worth enduring hardship and trial, abuse, and even arrest for the privilege of maintaining our commitment without compromise.

extreme light

COLORADO: RACHEL SCOTT

Day 4



You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:14

“I lost all my friends at school. Now that I’ve begun to ‘walk my talk,’ they make fun of me.” Rachel’s journal entries showed her disappointment that the very people to whom she wanted to show Christ’s love turned away from her. But she wouldn’t give in.

“I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I will take it. If my friends have to become my enemies for me to be with my best friend, Jesus, then that’s fine with me. I always knew being a Christian means having enemies, but I never thought that my ‘friends’ were going to be those enemies.”

Rachel was a student at Columbine High School on the day two students opened fire in the school. One gunman asked her if she still believed in God. She looked him in the eye and said yes, she still believed. He asked her why, but he didn’t let her answer before killing her.

Rachel Scott passed her test, and because she did, her light reached beyond her school to around the world. Long before the test came, Rachel expressed her willingness to give her all for Christ. The words from her journal, written exactly one year before her death, tell about her commitment: “I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will.”



Faith is the invisible expression of our personal relationship with Christ. The Bible characterizes people’s faith as a light—a diffusion of hope that affects everyone around them. Jesus chose this illustration because of light’s inability to be restrained. For example, as the average child discovers, reading by flashlight under the covers is hardly effective in terms of disguising late night activity! Light simply shines by its very nature, despite our attempts to restrain it. Likewise, tension arises in believers’ lives when they must choose to fully express their faith or attempt to muffle it some way. With the reliability of the daily sunrise, those who have affirmed their decision once and for all find shining their light to be second nature.

extreme prayer

CHINA: SISTER WONG

Day 5



The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now.”

Acts 9:11

When the Public Security Bureau officer entered the Chinese prison cell, Sister Wong backed away. This heartless man had arrested and persecuted many Christians, and only days earlier had beaten her as he interrogated her.

“Please, Sister Wong, my sister is very ill. She has lost all feeling in her legs. Will you come and pray for her?” Was this the same man who had confiscated hundreds of Bibles and Christian books from her? Now he was asking for prayer? Truly God must have gotten his attention.

Days earlier, as the officer had questioned and abused Sister Wong, he received a phone call that his mother had been hit by a car. When he told his mother what he’d been doing, she told him that his harassment of Christians caused her accident. The officer deemed the warning mere superstition.

The next day, he resumed questioning Sister Wong but got another message that his brother had been injured in an accident. The brother also blamed the officer’s attacks on Christians for the family’s misfortune.

But when his sister became ill, he asked Sister Wong for prayer. Sister Wong saw the opportunity she’d been praying for: the chance to witness to her persecutors. God healed the sister, and through Sister Wong’s actions, He changed the officer’s heart. The officer returned all the Bibles that were confiscated and now supports the church.



Most people are drawn to prayer—especially in times of hurt and pain. Barriers against religion are dismantled piece by piece when someone requests or receives prayer. Rare is the person who will refuse a no-strings-attached offer of prayer. “I’m praying for you” can be the most powerful words a believer speaks to someone. Why? Because prayer brings a need to the throne room of God, where He can graciously respond to us. Most often it changes those who are touched by prayer. The Bible says that the Lord told Ananias to go to Saul of Tarsus and to pray for him. Knowing Saul was persecuting followers of Christ, Ananias initially objected, but in the end, he obeyed. Who is God asking you to pray for today? That includes those who are opposed to the gospel. Will you obey?

extreme “guilt”

MADAGASCAR: RANAVALONA I

Ranavalona I, the queen of Madagascar, hated the Christians in her kingdom. Her complaints against them were many: they despised her idols, they were constantly praying, they always went to church, and their women were chaste. She sent officers to gather all those suspected of being Christians to bring them to trial.

Day 6



And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.

1 Peter 3:15

Sixteen hundred believers, when the charges were read, announced confidently, “Guilty.” They would not deny the charges, for to do so would be to deny Christ. The queen offered them a second chance to deny Christ and bow to her idols, but each refused. They were thrown into dark, dank dungeons, and many were executed. The queen was angered more, because for each Christian she had killed, twenty more rose up.

Later, the queen ordered that fifteen Christians be executed. They were to be thrown over a cliff into a rocky ravine 150 feet below. The queen’s idols were taken to the top of the cliff, and each Christian was lowered slightly over the edge, tied with ropes.

“Will you worship your Christ or the queen’s gods?” the soldiers asked each Christian hanging over the precipice.

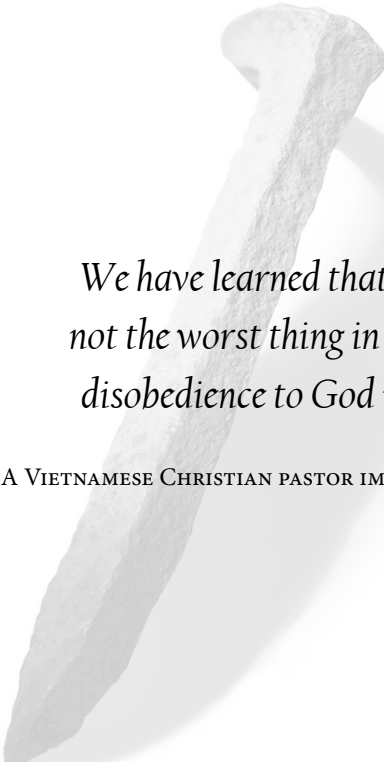
Each Christian answered simply, “Christ.” The ropes were cut, and they plunged to the rocks. Some sang as they fell to their deaths. One young girl was spared and declared insane. She later founded a large church.



In most countries, defendants are presumed innocent until they are proven guilty. The underlying principle is that there must be a substantial amount of evidence to convict a person of a crime. Expressing one’s faith in Christ is often a government offense in many countries where the roles of the justice system are reversed. Believers are guilty until proved otherwise. One would have to reject Christ in order to be innocent in a human, earthly courtroom. However in heaven’s courtroom, the guilty verdict is actually a victory. “Extreme guilt” means providing so much evidence of one’s faith in Christ that there is no way to be acquitted of the charge! The familiar adage is worth repeating: If you were on trial for being a Christian today, would there be enough evidence to convict you?



Day 7



*We have learned that suffering is
not the worst thing in the world—
disobedience to God is the worst.*

A VIETNAMESE CHRISTIAN PASTOR IMPRISONED FOR HIS FAITH

extreme scars

JERUSALEM: THOMAS

He'd heard the rumors. In fact, Thomas had heard it directly from other disciples who had seen the Master alive. At least that's what they had *said*. "When I see His hands and put my fingers into the nail holes, when I put my hand into the hole in His side made by that Roman spear, then I'll believe He is risen," Thomas had said.

Day 8



From now on, don't let anyone trouble me with these things. For I bear on my body the scars that show I belong to Jesus.

Galatians 6:17

It wasn't a miracle that Thomas wanted. It wasn't some great sign or wonder. He merely wanted to see the scars on Jesus' body, the symbols of His suffering. Though Jesus had conquered death and lived in a glorified body, He still had scars—reminders of the price He paid for our redemption.

Eight days later Jesus appeared again. How foolish Thomas must have felt when he came face to face with the Master. How silly his grandiose statement must have seemed when the other disciples reminded him of it. However, Jesus did not harshly rebuke Thomas. Looking Thomas in the eye, Jesus offered His hands, encouraging him to touch the scars and to believe.

Christ's scars remained after His resurrection as a reminder of His still-suffering body. For though He conquered death, His body on earth still suffers. And He can identify with those around the world who bear scars because of their faith in Christ.



Scars are our teachers—vivid reminders of painful lessons. They're often ugly to look at and not often pointed out for others to notice. Likewise, the scar of persecution in the church is not often the topic of conversation at many Christian gatherings. We consider it unnerving, a mystery. However, its purpose is to teach us. Persecution plays an important part in God's marvelous plan for the entire world to hear and respond to the gospel. Jesus bore His scars publicly. In fact, He encouraged Thomas to touch them in order to teach him. His scars are our teachers, reminding us of the price that was paid for our salvation. We must continue to learn from, not ignore, the price our persecuted Christian family has paid.

extreme choice

ENGLAND: JOHN LAMBERT

“Will you choose to live or die? What do you say?”

The questioner was Henry VIII, the king of England, who had unrestrained power in the land. The “criminal” who stood before him, charged with heresy, was John Lambert, a Greek and Latin tutor.

Day 9



Choose today whom you will serve... But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

Lambert audaciously challenged his pastor for delivering a sermon that didn't agree with Scripture. Lambert was brought before the archbishop of Canterbury and later before King Henry. Quoting from the Scriptures and explaining the original Greek, Lambert presented his case to an assembly of bishops, lawyers, justices, and peers. The two sides argued strenuously back and forth until Henry, bored with it, presented Lambert with a final choice: “After all the reasons and instructions of these knowledgeable men, are you now satisfied? Will you choose to live or die? What do you say?”

Lambert took a deep breath and answered confidently, “I commend my soul to the hands of God, but my body I give to your clemency.”

“You must die,” Henry answered scornfully, “for I will not be a patron to heretics.” Convicted of heresy, Lambert was burned at the stake. Lambert was unbowed in his slow, torturous death. He lifted up his hands in worship, declaring, “None but Christ! None but Christ!”



In the modern age of possibilities, our right to choose has grown nearly insatiable. We want options. Variety. Assortment. Even mundane decisions are delivered daily to our doorstep: what to wear, eat, drive, or do. However, our choices are no longer utilitarian—they are virtually limitless. In contrast, when life's greater questions come to us, we have only one answer to give: “None but Christ.” Is there another way to heaven? None but Christ—He is the Way. Is there another priority in life that deserves one's full devotion? None but Christ—He is supreme. Can someone else satisfy the longing of the human heart? None but Christ can satisfy. Truth has no alternative, you see. When life's greater questions come, and they will, are you prepared to testify that of all the possibilities, “none but Christ” will satisfy?

extreme betrayal

ROMANIA: RICHARD WURMBRAND

Day 10



And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

Matthew 6:12

In Communist Romania, churches were closed and pastors arrested as part of a seven-year drive to “eliminate the nations of all superstition.”

So when Richard Wurmbrand and his wife, Sabina, began holding more church meetings in their little home, they knew it would not escape the attention of the government forever. Every evening Richard prayed, “God, if you know of some prisoner who needs my help, send me back to jail.” Sabina shuddered while she mumbled a reluctant “amen.”

Then they learned that one of the church members’ homes had been raided and copies of Richard’s sermons had been confiscated. They also learned that the assistant pastor, their friend and coworker, became an informant and had denounced Richard.

It was 1:00 a.m. when the police raided the little apartment and placed Richard under arrest. As they handcuffed him, Richard said, “I won’t leave here peacefully unless you allow me a few minutes to embrace my wife.” The police reluctantly agreed. They would have their way soon enough.

The couple held each other, prayed, and sang with such emotion that even the captain was moved. Finally they escorted Richard out to a police van with his wife tearfully running after them.

Richard turned and called out his last words before disappearing for many years, “Give all my love to our son and the pastor who denounced me.”



Extreme betrayal requires extreme forgiveness. If our enemies come against us with such ferocity, should we not be just as generous with our act of forgiveness? When our enemy stoops low enough to denounce us, ought we not reach higher to find the willingness to forgive? Jesus taught us that forgiving evil is for our own good. Deep betrayal can cause us to close our hearts to our own experience of forgiveness. If you find yourself being stingy in the forgiveness department, you will experience a meager sense of release from your own sins. Being betrayed is bad enough. Becoming bitter is a defeat you cannot afford. To whom do you need to offer extravagant forgiveness today?

extreme gift

RUSSIA: CAPTAIN MARCO

Day 11



Love your enemies! Do good to them.

Luke 6:35

“What is it?” Soviet captain Marco snarled at the young boy. “What do you want?”

The boy, only twelve, swallowed his fear as he stood before the Communist officer. “Captain, you are the man who put my parents in prison. Today is my mother’s birthday, and I always buy her a flower for her birthday.

“Since my mother taught me to love my enemies and to reward evil with good, I have brought the flower instead for the mother of your children. Please take it home to your wife tonight, and tell her about my love and the love of Christ.”

Captain Marco, who had watched unmoved as Christians had been unmercifully beaten and tortured, was stunned at the act of love of this boy. His tears fell as he slowly walked around the desk and grabbed the boy in a fatherly embrace. Marco’s heart was changed by the gift of Christ’s love. He could no longer arrest and torture Christians, and soon he himself was arrested.

Only months after the boy’s visit to his office, Marco slumped in a filthy prison cell surrounded by some of the same Christians he had previously arrested and tortured. He tearfully told his cellmates of the young boy and the simple gift of a flower. He considered it an honor to share a cell with those he had previously hunted and attacked.



Generosity is second nature to the believer. Jesus taught that others would recognize real believers by their demonstration of love. And not just for those who love us in return. Oftentimes, generosity toward strangers and even enemies is the best application of Jesus’ teachings. Witnesses to our acts, if not the recipients themselves, are befuddled at the sight. Imagine a wounded Christian worker who prays for the boss who unjustly fired him. Picture the impact of grieving parents who give the gift of forgiveness to the one who has harmed their child. The world doesn’t understand generosity. However, it is affected by it all the same. We find we are never more like God Himself as when we give generously to others. God gave His only Son to demonstrate His love for the world and purchase our salvation. What could you give today that might open someone’s heart to God’s kingdom?

extreme difficulties

PAKISTAN: SALEEMA AND RAHEELA

Day 12



And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

Philemon 6

“If you promise to carry your cross, it will be a life full of thorns, mountains, and difficulties,” the Pakistani teenager said in a firm voice. Saleema, a Christian who lives in Muslim-dominated Pakistan, shared her faith with a schoolmate, Raheela, who later accepted Christ.

Raheela’s incensed family charged Saleema with “converting a Muslim,” a charge that can carry the death penalty in Pakistan. Saleema and her pastor were arrested, and her parents were questioned and beaten by police. Saleema was abused while in police custody, but she would not deny her faith. In fact, she softly sang Christian songs in jail, hoping to draw others to Christ.

Raheela fled her home, but her family hunted her down.

When they offered her a final chance to recant her faith and return to Mohammed, she refused. For her “crime,” her own family executed Raheela.

Saleema went through lengthy court hearings. Raheela’s family blamed her for their daughter’s death. Eventually the charges were dropped. But Saleema’s life will never be the same. She was forced to move to another part of Pakistan for fear of radical Muslims killing her. Yet the thorns, mountains, and difficulties have not dimmed her faith. In fact, she is preparing to serve as a missionary. She says, “No matter how big the mountain, Jesus will help you overcome!”



Missionaries are often mischaracterized as a sort of special forces—a unique troop in God’s army of faith which acts on our behalf. The truth is, every believer is called to be a missionary. Some of God’s most valuable work may take place around the kitchen table, having coffee in a next-door neighbor’s house. The heart of our mission remains the same wherever our mission may take us. We are bound to share the gospel of Christ. For some, sharing their faith with their closest friends would be a personal feat of heroic proportions. For others, sharing their faith in radically different cultures may form their mission field. The location of our mission is not what is important. It is our motivation that counts. To what extreme are you willing to go to share the Good News of Christ?

extreme costs

INDIA: PASTOR KANTHESWAR DIGAL

Day 13



So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.

Hebrews 13:13,14

“I am a strong believer in Christ,” Pastor Digal said as he looked at the eighteen men surrounding him. “You may kill me but I will never become Hindu.”

It was September 20, 2008, and Pastor Digal was traveling by bus back to his home village in Orissa state, India. A month before, hundreds of Hindu extremists—armed with sticks, axes, and knives—swept through multiple Christian villages in Orissa and five other Indian states, burning homes, destroying churches, and beating Christians. More than 100 Christians died during the month-long rampage and nearly 70,000 Orissa Christians, including Digal and his family, were forced from their homes.

Thinking the violence had subsided, Pastor Digal returned home to check on his family’s property and livestock. He was nearing his village when eighteen Hindu radicals stopped him. The radicals dragged Pastor Digal off the crowded, dusty bus. They demanded his conversion to Hinduism. When he refused they tied his hands and legs and beat him, ignoring the sickening crunch of bone as his legs shattered. They stripped him of his clothes leaving nothing but a shirt. They burned his face and tortured him in unspeakable ways. Then they dumped his limp body into a creek where it floated for days.

“My father dedicated his life for my village, for people who still did not know Christ,” says Rajendra, Pastor Digal’s son. “I think for my village, my father also was killed. And by the sacrifice of his own life, they may know Jesus Christ and accept Him as their only Lord and personal Savior.”



As Christians we must be willing to pay a price, even if we are never required to do so. This is the lesson of Abraham’s life. He was willing to sacrifice Isaac, through whom the blessing was going to come. Being willing to sacrifice for our commitment to Christ makes us stronger. The idea of sacrifice clarifies our goals and solidifies our character. Commitments that cost us something change our family, our neighborhood, and our world for Christ. We learn how strong we really can be. Although we don’t wish to lose what we hold dear, we strive to remain undeterred in our devotion, despite any circumstances.

Day 14

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so

Much seek to be consoled, as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

extreme smile

SIBERIA: PAULUS

Day 15



Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

Romans 8:35

It was getting late, and the Soviet officer had beaten and tortured Paulus for many hours. "We are not going to torture you anymore," he said, grinning cruelly when the Christian looked up. "We will send you instead to Siberia, where the snow never melts. It is a place of great suffering. You and your family will fit in well."

Paulus, instead of being depressed, smiled. "The whole earth belongs to my Father, captain. Wherever you send me I will be on my Father's earth."

The captain looked at him sharply. "We will take away all you own."

"You will need a high ladder, captain, for my treasures are stored up in heaven." Paulus still wore a beautiful smile.

"We will put a bullet between your eyes," shouted the captain, now angry.

"If you take away my life in this world, my real life of joy and beauty will begin," answered Paulus. "I am not afraid of being killed."

The captain grabbed Paulus by his tattered prison shirt and screamed into his face, "We will not kill you! We will keep you locked alone in a cell and allow no one to come see you!"

"You cannot do that, captain," said Paulus, still smiling. "I have a Friend who can pass through locked doors and iron bars. No one can separate me from the love of Christ."



Despite an uncertain future, we can be sure of one thing: Christ will face it with us. Whether we are going through a private trial or a public grieving, we are never alone. In contrast, every human companion will fail us at some point. There will be places in life's journey where they cannot walk with us—the water will be too deep and their understanding would be murky at best. Only Jesus has the ability to pass through the "iron bars" on our suffering hearts and share these difficult times. Although, in His wisdom, He may not choose to deliver us from our circumstances, His sure presence will see us through them. Smile, knowing you have a Friend from whom you can never be separated.