

WHY DO MISSIONARIES GO TO DANGEROUS PLACES?

It's not often that I'm awakened by a phone call in the middle of the night. It was 1:30 on the morning of December 30, 2002, when the shrill ringing of the telephone at my bedside startled me into a groggy semi-consciousness. Immediately the thoughts were of family. Something had happened. Something was wrong. Maybe it was my ninety-three-year-old mother who had been in the hospital recently. Both of our children and their families were serving on the other side of the world in Asia and often forgot the radical time change that separated us, calling at strange hours to tell about the baby walking or learning new words. Our son had been detained by authorities and encountered dangerous situations numerous times in his itinerant assignment. But this wasn't a call from family.

It was the call I knew to be inevitable someday, but one I hoped would never come. A missionary had been killed; no, not one but three. Gerry Volkart, the International Mission Board's Associate Regional Leader for Northern Africa and the Middle East, informed me she had just received word that Martha Myers, Bill Koehn and Kathy Gariety had been murdered. Serving at the Jibla Baptist Hospital in Yemen, the three had been shot by an assailant as the clinic opened Monday morning. A fourth victim, a missionary pharmacist, had been wounded. Bill, the hospital's administrator, had been conferring with Kathy in his office; Martha had come in to use the phone when a gunman stepped into the doorway and opened fire, killing all three.

I fell to the floor and wept uncontrollably. The grief would have been just as severe, regardless who among our fifty-four hundred missionary personnel had been killed. But I knew each of these personally. My mind flashed back to conversations with Martha during the previous year when she was on stateside assignment and with Kathy, who had been in the States purchasing supplies for the hospital. It had not been many years since I had visited the hospital, and my mind recalled images of the tranquil compound, the congested clinic entrance as crowds of Yemeni Arabs sought treatment in the context of a compassionate, Christian ministry from medical staff who quietly exuded a love beyond what their patients had ever experienced.

Just two weeks earlier I had been speaking at a conference, sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA), for personnel staff from 120 member organizations. The assigned topic was "Sending Missionaries into a Dangerous and Chaotic World," an issue that was quite relevant in the aftermath of the tragedy that had occurred on September 11, 2001. These agency leaders, responsible for enlisting and training missionary personnel, were encountering a new dimension of reticence on the part of candidates to go into a dangerous world where they would be vulnerable, not because of their Christian witness but simply because they were Americans. We all were being confronted with the challenge of equipping both new and current missionary personnel to be sensitive to matters of safety and security. The previous week Bonnie Witherall, an American missionary serving with Operation Mobilization, had been murdered in Lebanon.

A reporter attending the EFMA conference had already requested

an interview following my presentation. Referencing the death of Witherall, she asked how this incident would affect our training and protection for our Southern Baptist missionaries. I elaborated on our training and the precautions our missionaries were taught to take, but in the course of my reply I was later quoted as saying, "It is not unlikely that we (the IMB) will experience such a tragedy, for no other organization has as many missionary personnel so extensively deployed and pushing to the edge of lostness." Little did I realize that two weeks later we would, indeed, experience such a tragedy.

During the previous few months a large group of our staff had been meeting for workshops on risk management and crisis response. What would we do in response to a call that someone serving with the International Mission Board was killed or kidnapped? What would be the role and responsibility of each office, and how would our response be coordinated and managed? We had dated crisis contingency plans hidden away somewhere in the files, but ever since 9/11 a renewed interest and attention had been given to these issues. The hypothetical exercises in the workshops did not fully prepare us for this early morning call and the realities we now were facing.

I thought of my first experience with this kind of news after becoming president of the IMB. From time to time missionaries have died suddenly in traffic accidents or plane crashes. It is not infrequent that illness takes the life of beloved colleagues prematurely. But on March 28, 1995, Dr. Chu Hon Yi and his wife, Kei Wol, were found strangled in their apartment in Khabarovsk, Russia. Serving

an extended International Service Corps term, these Korean-Americans from Virginia Beach, Virginia, had established an effective ministry among the medical community in this far eastern city soon after the doors began to open to the former Soviet Union. I recalled the difficulty in trying to console and minister to their family and church fellowship; the answers were elusive as we tried to explain any rationale for their brutal murders.

Now, as I got dressed on the morning of December 30, CNN was already broadcasting news of unnamed American missionaries being killed by assumed terrorists in Yemen. I knew it would just be a short time until the IMB would be connected with the hospital,

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and the calls would come. Our crisis network had already been activated. Within an hour our building was opened, security staff were in place, and overseas leadership were convening. A cadre of communications staff had arrived and was already taking calls from the media. The regional office had established direct contact with personnel in Yemen and determined official spokespersons on the scene to deal with the embassy and local investigators. Counselors and member-care staff were immediately deployed to minister to the large contingent of hospital colleagues and international staff and to assess subsequent security measures. Stateside families of

the victims were notified, arrangements made for pastoral care, and families of other personnel serving in the region were called to assure them that their loved ones were safe. Meanwhile a crisis center was set up, a press conference scheduled, a phone bank manned and hourly briefings coordinated.

There was an outpouring of support and consolation. But it did not take long for the questions to come, initially from the media, but surprisingly from missions-minded churches as well. “Why do missionaries go to dangerous places?” “How can the IMB be so irresponsible to send missionaries to places where their lives will be endangered?” There were demands to bring the missionaries home. Others reflected that this loss of life was such a waste and could have been avoided. Apparently the top priority in the minds of many was the safety of missionaries.

A little more than two months later, in March 2003, Bill Hyde, a veteran missionary who had served in the Philippines for twenty years, was killed in a terrorist bombing at the airport in Davao City. Then on March 15, 2004, five IMB personnel in Iraq were assaulted by gunmen as they drove near the city of Mosul. David McDonnell, Karen Watson, and Larry and Jean Elliott all were killed; only Carrie McDonnell survived.

It is amazing when we consider the more than eighteen thousand missionaries who have served with the International Mission Board throughout its almost one-hundred-sixty-year history, that so few have met unnatural and violent deaths. Fewer than ninety have been killed, mostly in accidents. Only twenty-nine have been murdered, many in the course of a robbery or shooting that had nothing to do with their Christian witness.

Those who give their lives in the course of service for Christ overseas are readily recognized as martyrs. Those who shed their blood do so as a witness to their faith and as a testimony to their obedience and devotion to their Lord Jesus Christ. However, some would argue with the qualifications of a martyr, insisting that only a violent and unnatural death would apply. Others would say that a martyr is only one who dies an untimely death as the direct consequence of preaching the gospel and sharing his or her faith, usually in a hostile environment.

However, most of those who hold on to the safety, comforts and security of their American lifestyle would readily acknowledge that those who die on foreign soil because they have given of their lives as the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of Christ are martyrs. They died because of their willingness to be in a place where their lives were vulnerable; they were there because of a commitment to a higher calling than life itself. We would not quibble over the circumstances, the means of death, or the motives of those who took their lives. I am confident a martyr's crown awaits those who "did not love their life, even when faced with death" (Rev. 12:11).

Why would these missionaries and others go to places where their lives would be endangered? Why would they go to a place such as Iraq where Americans are at war and being targeted by insurgents and Muslim radicals? Why would others offer to go to places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, the Sudan, Chechnya and serve among people who are at war and where Americans are not appreciated no matter how valued and needed their humanitarian aid? The answer is rather simple. It is because of God's call and a decision made long before to be obedient wherever He would lead. But that willingness to be

obedient, even when it means risk and sacrifice, is because of the passionate conviction that Jesus is the answer for a hurting world. Missionaries in the nineteenth century did not expect to return to enjoy retirement years at home. They carried caskets as a standard part of their shipment to the field. Most of the missionaries going to West Africa died of malaria, other diseases or violence within a few years of arrival, but they kept coming. There was a passion for their calling to take Christ to a lost world. Francis Rose, a missionary interred by the Japanese in the Philippines in 1943, reflected on colleagues who had lost their lives and believers who had died for Christ throughout the centuries with these lines:

*Ten thousand saints come thronging home
From lion's den and catacomb;
The fire and sword and beasts defied;
For Christ, their king, they gladly died.*

It is strange that the media do not question journalists going into war zones, traveling with troops in the midst of mortar attacks, in order to get a story, a gripping photo or video footage for their newspaper or television network. Yet they think it foolish for others to risk their lives to bring life to those whose very existence is threatened, to give hope to those in darkness and despair, and to proclaim news of salvation to those in bondage to sin! No matter one's attitude toward war or military intervention, few would question the appropriateness, and even obligation, of troops to respond when orders come to be deployed into a war zone. An important aspect of military training for all soldiers is absolute compliance and un-

questioning obedience to their commanding officer. They don't have the option of obeying orders only if it is safe to do so. They put their lives in harm's way and are willing to die for a patriotic devotion to their country and the cause of freedom. How much more should those who claim to be followers of Christ be willing to obey the orders of our supreme Commander-in-Chief who told us to go into all the world and disciple all nations?

If there is any verse of Scripture familiar to every conscientious Christian, next to John 3:16 or Psalm 23, it would be the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. This command was preceded by a reminder that "all authority (had) been given to (Him) in heaven and on earth" (verse 18). Jesus had the position of authority and every right to lay claim to our lives and instruct us according to His plan and purpose. "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations," He said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus did not qualify this mandate to go only where one could witness in safety and without risk. There was no contingency clause to disciple the nations only where one is welcomed and it is safe to do so. His passion was for the "*panta ta ethne*" — all the peoples of the world — to know Him and become His followers. He died for the whole world, but has committed the task of telling them, of proclaiming the gospel, to us, His followers.

We are reminded in Romans 10:13 that, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But subsequently we are confronted with the question, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they

have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (NKJV™). Why is it that two thousand years after our Lord told us to disciple the nations, more than four thousand ethnic-linguistic people groups, or "nations," are still identified as unreached? They have no witnessing church that is spreading the gospel in their midst, and many of them still have no Scripture in their own language.

Why is it that almost one-fourth of the world's population, approximately 1.6 billion people, have not yet heard the name of Jesus and know that He died for them? Why do missionaries go to dangerous places, take the risk and put their lives in harm's way? Because they believe that Jesus is the answer to the world's needs, and the only way for them to know is for someone to be willing to go and to share His love. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

To insist that missionaries avoid the dangerous and risky places is to belittle the lostness of a world without Christ, to demean the responsibility of obedience to God's call and to succumb to a convoluted system of values that says one's own safety and comfort is a higher priority than sharing the gospel.

The world is rather critical of those who would presume to plant their lives in a cross-cultural witness as missionaries. It is seen as being arrogant and narrow-minded to seek to convert others to one's own faith. According to contemporary detractors, missionaries are neo-colonists, infringing on traditional cultures and, out of intolerance to others' worldviews, seeking to proselytize them to embrace the

Christian faith. Such shallow understanding fails to take into consideration that there is no merit whatsoever in getting someone to change from one religion to another. Counting converts or adding notches on a statistical belt would not motivate one to confront animosity and adversity for the cause of Christ. Individuals are willing to place their own lives on the line because of a conviction that Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation and because of an awareness that those who fail to respond in repentance and faith in Him are bound for an eternal destiny in hell.

This is not just the biased opinion of narrow-minded Christians. Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." His early followers reminded both Jews and Gentiles in their testimony in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." Jesus is the only, exclusive, unique way of salvation. It is not available through good works or religious ritual, regardless of the sincerity of devotion to one's cultural traditions. Only the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection atone for the penalty of sin. There is no other way to remove the blot of sin and provide assurance of eternal life and reconciliation with a holy and righteous God. Just as Jesus was motivated by love to give His own life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, those who go to share that good news in a lost world go, motivated by their love for God and for the people He died to save. They don't take risks out of foolish disregard for their own lives or just to get people to change their religious affiliation, but because "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV™). There is a desperation to do whatever it takes

to share Christ and His love with those who are bound for hell.

A missionary strategy coordinator was giving orientation to some new short-term personnel who had just arrived and were to be dispersed throughout a rather hostile area to witness and plant

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seeds of the gospel. He told them that they could be arrested for preaching the gospel. Then in an exhortation for boldness added, "If that happens, just be sure it's true." He explained that they would probably get deported, but it was more important for the gospel to be there than for them. Their efforts would be futile if they neglected to plant the gospel in order to guarantee their own presence and safety. This seems to be Paul's sentiments as expressed in 1 Corinthians 15:32, "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?" If you're going to get arrested and maybe lose your life, it might as well be for sharing the gospel! Self-preservation and personal concerns that inhibit us from proclaiming the gospel to all peoples reflect a callous disregard for those who are lost.

Those who go to places of danger do not do so reluctantly, heels

dug in, conscripted into service contrary to their will. It is not a matter of the International Mission Board imposing an assignment that they are obligated to fill. Their personal relationship with Jesus Christ demands hearts of obedience in response to His redemptive grace. It is a willingness to respond to the needs of others that supersedes their own ambitions and desires. Their willingness to go is driven by a conviction that the need can be met only by going and living out their faith among the people to whom God called them.

They responded much like Isaiah in his call to go to a people in darkness. It was not so much a personal call to Isaiah as it was a generic call of God for someone to go and meet this desperate need of a rebellious people separated from Him. In Isaiah 6:8, the prophet says that he heard the voice of God saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? ...” Isaiah did not wait for God to tap him on the shoulder and say, “You are the one!” He took initiative and asked God to send him. In essence he said, “Well, if you need someone to go to a people in darkness, let me be the one to go; I am available.” “Here am I. Send me!” Why was Isaiah the one to hear God’s call and respond? In the earlier verses we read that Isaiah had a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted. He had come into a personal relationship with God and recognized that He had every right and claim on his life.

That is the motivation and calling of every missionary. They have a personal relationship with God and commitment to His Lordship that enables them to hear His call and feel the passion of His heart for a world that does not know Him. They can hear Him saying, “I have opened a door for the gospel in the communist strongholds of China, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe;

now, whom shall I send? I am accelerating the harvest throughout Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia; now, who will go for Me? I am breaking down that last formidable barrier to global evangelization across the Muslim world of Northern Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia; now, whom shall I send? Who will go for Me?”

Many, such as those you will read about in this book, have said, “Here am I, Lord; send me.” Was it without risk? No. Was there a possibility it would cost them their lives to answer that call? Yes. Did they know that sacrifice and suffering would be the cost? There was no question. But they went joyfully and willingly, rejoicing in the privilege of being among those chosen to bring salvation to those who had not known and were deprived of knowing Jesus. Like their Savior, who, “... for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame ...” (Heb. 12:2), they were willing to die for the sake of salvation being extended to a people and nation.

Those whose lives we honor and celebrate in this volume knew the risk involved. They had been thoroughly trained in matters related to security and safety, but there was something more important, more compelling, than self-preservation. They had discovered that there was something worth living for, something worth giving their lives for, and, yes, something worth dying for. Paul described it as the high calling of God. Obedience to God’s call and the opportunity to minister to the needs of people who were hopeless and in despair was worth the risk.

After Bill, Martha and Kathy were killed in Yemen, it often was said that the gunman did not take their lives on that morning, for he could not take from them what they had already given. Jesus had made His call clear to His disciples in Matthew 16:24. He said, “If

anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” The call to follow Christ was a call to die. The call to discipleship and obedience always has been one to deny self, to die to one’s own ambitions and forgo self-preservation. Jesus has never changed the missionary call and conditions for following Him. Indeed, the calling to anyone who would be His disciple is one of sacrifice and a willingness to lay down one’s life.

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So Bill Koehn, Martha Myers, Kathy Gariety and others did not die when their lives were suddenly ended by an assassin’s bullet or a terrorist bomb; they had died to self when they trusted Jesus as their Savior years ago. When all of them left promising business and medical careers in the States to go as missionaries to Yemen, they gave their lives and died. Each day they served the Lord in Yemen, healing the sick, ministering to orphans, widows and prisoners, they had to lay their lives on the altar and die. They knew the risk. As hospital administrator, Bill had been threatened many times. Martha had already been kidnapped. They knew they might not live to retirement and had made arrangements for their bodies to be buried in Yemen.

As I knelt and wept at their graves on the backside of the hos-

pital compound a few weeks after their deaths, I thought of the testimony of Bill’s son-in-law at his memorial service in Texas. He put this tragedy into a kingdom perspective as he reflected on the twenty-eight years Bill and his wife, Marty, had given themselves to the people of Yemen. He said, “Sometime in the future, a Yemeni Arab man will be walking hand-in-hand with his son up a hillside in Jibla and will come across a crude grave marker. After a pause, the man will say, ‘Son, this is the man that brought Jesus to our people.’”

Tertullian was the ancient church father who said, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.” Rather than a defeat for the kingdom, blood that is spilled as a life witness has the power to give authenticity to the gospel. Already there is evidence that many in the community who were benefactors of the compassionate medical care they found at Jibla Baptist Hospital have begun to consider the claims of Christ. Those who silently observed and evaluated the faith that motivated these American missionaries to come to such a remote location have begun to consider the validity of their witness. Once they saw it was something these missionaries considered worth giving their lives for, they, too, began to embrace the truth of the gospel. The faithful obedience and witness through the lives of Bill, Martha, Kathy and others, were simply preparation for what God will do through their deaths.

One day there will be a multitude from every tribe, people, tongue and nation represented around the throne of God. There will be Yemeni Arabs, Iraqis, Kurds and Filipinos among that multitude because of many who were willing to give their lives in faithful obedience. Reaching all peoples for Christ will not be accomplished without the blood of martyrs. That is not our strategy, and it is never

intentional. We give high priority to providing security for missionary personnel and their families. But Jesus sent His disciples into a hostile environment to share the gospel and demonstrated the cost by giving His own life on the cross. We must not think that the call to take up our cross and die was only for those in the first century. It will always be the cost for reaching our world for Christ.

In His final instructions to His disciples, Jesus reminded them that they would be hated and persecuted just as He had been, because a slave was not greater than his master. They were not to be of this world, and therefore the world would hate them. In fact, Jesus added, "... An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do, because they have not known the Father or Me" (John 16:2-3). The answer to why people are killed and missionaries are martyred is very simple. It is not because of lack of security, flaws in international relations or insensitivity to diverse and conflicting worldviews. It is because of a sinful and fallen world that does not know God. It is the reason suicide bombers can believe they are serving God by destroying themselves and innocent lives. Terrorists can be deluded into thinking they gain eternal merit by acts of hatred and destruction because they do not know God and His redemptive love through Jesus Christ. Rather than threats and dangers causing us to withdraw and cower in fear, they should compel us to go and confront a sinful world with the life-changing power of the gospel.

Following 9/11, about a hundred missionary families were temporarily relocated from their place of assignment. This normally would be a decision made by overseas personnel since they are on the scene and in the best position to assess the need for evacuation.

However, knowing that there likely would be an immediate American military response to this terrorist attack, realizing the potential backlash from Muslim populations anywhere in the world and knowing that we were not dealing with a local threat or conflict, the decision was made for those in the most vulnerable places to move

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to a safer environment. The negative reaction on the part of these missionaries was overwhelming; they were not concerned for their own safety, but for the needs of "their people" whom they were having to leave behind.

More recently, in a volatile area of the world that was experiencing an attempt to overthrow the government, the State Department issued an advisory that all non-essential U.S. citizens should evacuate. There were demonstrations in the streets and anarchy prevailed. Parents of missionaries serving in that country were monitoring the situation and expected their children to come home in response to this notice. But the missionaries replied that they would not be leaving for three reasons: (1) We are "essential" personnel! (2) God has called us to this country, and we cannot be disobedient to His call out of regard for our own safety. (3) It is times such as this when the chaos and uncertainties in society create the greatest openness to spiritual answers. We cannot abandon the people at what may be our greatest opportunity for witness!

The appeal to bring missionaries home from places of danger is usually based on an egocentric perspective in which one's own comfort and security is the highest value and priority. The relativism of post-modern thinking would deny that there is a truth worth living and dying for. Both attitudes are blatant contradictions of the call to discipleship.

In the 1980s when Muslim radicals had thrown Lebanon into chaos and a protracted civil war, and Americans, such as Terry Waite, were being kidnapped, there was a mandate that all U.S. citizens withdraw. Those who refused had their passports canceled and were considered in contempt of law. Reluctantly, missionaries evacuated to Cyprus.

The following summer one of those missionaries, Frances Fuller, gave a testimony at Missions Week at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in North Carolina and thanked Southern Baptists for their prayers. She said, "Because of your prayers I am here tonight." There was a massive, standing ovation in response. Then Frances continued, "But you don't understand. I am here because you prayed the wrong prayer. You were praying that we would be safe and could get out of Lebanon. The missionaries were praying that we would be permitted to stay and continue our ministries. The people to whom God called us were not able to leave; they remain behind and suffer alone. But because there are more of you than there were of us, your prayers prevailed."

I don't know about the theological validity of the volume of prayer affecting the outcome, but Frances was correct in acknowledging our misdirected prayers. Certainly we should be concerned about our own safety and that of our missionaries around the world,

but our greater concern should be that the gospel would be made known and God would be glorified, whether by life or by death.

An unwillingness to suffer or entail risk implies a conditional commitment that definitely inhibits what God is able to do through us. Even missionaries draw a bottom line that is short of total surrender because they come out of an American culture of entitlement that views safety, health and security as fundamental rights. One missionary, speaking to colleagues, reminded them that they were to view life through the lens of eternity in which they, like Paul, view suffering as "momentary light affliction," and that "suffering is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed." He challenged the assumption that we have a right to be comfortable. Acknowledging the dangers of life on the mission field, he reminded his audience that the call to the ministry is not a call to comfort, safety and self-indulgence, as our American culture would have us believe. Most of the world knows this, and we need to recognize that any comfort or safety we happen to enjoy is a blessing, not a right.

Americans were indignant when terrorists flew planes into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, but the reality is that we were now subjected to what most of the world has always experienced. It is right that we should grieve when missionaries are killed, but the reality is that thousands of Christians die for their faith throughout the world every year. They do not have an American passport that will allow them to escape the threats and dangers in which they live every day. No international agency stands poised to rush to their defense. So Christian believers are massacred in villages across Indonesia, arrested in China and Vietnam, and countless numbers disappear throughout the Muslim world. Is not

our faith worth dying for as much as that of those of national Christians who live every day with the possibility it may be their last? We are challenged by the second verse of the hymn, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," which says:

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?*

We are reminded in 1 Peter 2:21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." In Chapter 4, verses 12 and 13 the thought continues, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at

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the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation." James 1:2 echoes the same theme, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." That doesn't reflect the typical American mindset that would say to avoid suffering, eschew potential trials and choose the easy and comfortable lifestyle. Most of the world

knows suffering and deprivation, but sadly they never know of the hope eternity can offer because we are unwilling to risk our lives and identify with their suffering. To consider one's physical existence to be of supreme value fits the thinking of an atheist or communist who embraces materialism and earthly existence as the ultimate good in life. But it makes no sense whatsoever to a Christian who is committed to the kingdom of God and eternal values.

If safety is to be the criterion for missionary service, where does one serve? It would certainly not be anywhere in the Muslim world where antagonistic fanatics and suicide bombers are a threat. Anti-Christian sentiments are still rampant in communist countries and extremism is growing daily among Hindu radicals in India. Conditions are unhealthy in Africa, and Latin America teems with drug gangs and guerrilla groups who kidnap foreigners for ransom. That leaves Europe, Australia and North America, but all have been victims of terrorist bombings in recent years. If self-concerns for comfort and security are the determining factors for whether or not the gospel is shared, then we can forget the Great Commission, cease our involvement in international missions and bring the missionaries home!

We readily forget that the sacrifice of one's life is one of the most powerful tools in God's spiritual armament for extending the kingdom to the ends of the earth. Immediately after the death of our missionaries in Yemen, another organization lost personnel in Somalia. A short time later Martin Burnham was killed in the Philippines after being held hostage by the Abu Shaaf guerrillas with his wife, Gracia, for more than a year. Confirmation of the deaths of three missionaries with New Tribes Mission, kidnapped years earlier

in Panama and killed in the jungles of Colombia, had come only the year before. Colombia was where IMB missionary Charlie Hood was gunned down in the driveway of his home a few years earlier.

Every day there are national believers who are martyred, and the cost of following Christ is their lives. Why is the gospel flourishing in China? Before new believers are baptized they are asked if they will faithfully follow Christ even when the authorities drag them out of their homes, confiscate their belongings, threaten their

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families and throw them in jail. They are taught to say when possibly sentenced to death, "You do not take my life from me, but I offer it freely to you as a testimony of faith in Jesus Christ who loved me and gave His life for me." How can the witness of the church be deterred by threats and suffering in the face of that kind of attitude? The possibility of death is inconsequential for believers who already dealt with it when they came to faith and chose to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Joseph Tson, a Baptist leader in Romania during the communist rule of the 1970s, told of being arrested. When he refused to cooperate and comply with the request of the authorities to cease preaching, they threatened to kill him. The officer said, "Don't you realize I have the power to take your life?" Joseph Tson replied, "I am more

powerful than you, for I have the power to lay down my life for what I believe; you cannot take it from me!" He smiled and continued, "If you kill me, you send me to glory; that's no threat, in fact, that is my ultimate desire. The more I suffer here, the greater the glory up there." He discovered the secret expressed by the Apostle Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Dietrich Bonhoffer, before he died in a Nazi concentration camp, expressed his understanding of the call of Christ, "The call to discipleship is a call to die."

The stories and testimonies you will read in the following chapters are of those who answered that call. They did not anticipate their lives being ended prematurely as we would consider it from our perspective. They still had goals and plans for their work and ministry in the days to follow; they had dreams and visions of reaching the people to whom God had called them. But they could say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ... there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will award to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Their lives were not taken from them, for they had already given them!

YEMEN PROLOGUE

It was Southern Baptists' 9/11.

Not just in its deadliness and its harsh message that the world had become more dangerous — but in its terrible quickness and finality.

It came in a single burst of violence on the morning of December 30, 2002. A Muslim militant in Yemen — enraged by the influence of Christian ministry in his land, and in his own family — shot and killed Southern Baptist medical missionaries Bill Koehn, Martha Myers and Kathy Gariety, seriously wounding pharmacist Don Caswell.

Ironically, it was the last day of Jibla Baptist Hospital's regular operation before a long-negotiated transfer to Yemeni administration. Abed Abdul Razak Kamel arrived early that morning. He held a "pink slip" pass for return patients, which allowed him past hospital security guards into the outpatient waiting area.

He sat there, quietly — and waited.

At 8:15, Martha Myers walked past him into Bill Koehn's office, where Kathy Gariety was already sitting. Kamel followed her, pulled out a pistol hidden under his coat — and opened fire on the three workers at point-blank range.

As hospital workers screamed and scattered, Kamel emerged from the office, walked to the pharmacy and shot Don Caswell three times. Two Yemeni soldiers at the front gate heard the shots and commotion, ran into the courtyard and confronted Kamel. He calmly laid his gun on the ground and raised his hands.

Bill Koehn had led the hospital as administrator for twenty-eight years, guiding hundreds of employees and medical staff through count-

less crises. "Dr. Martha" had treated and befriended thousands of Yemenis — including Kamel's wife — for more than twenty years. Kathy Gariety had expertly managed the hospital's supply operation for ten years, ministering in her free time to hospital staff and local families.

All those years. All those relationships. Three remarkable lives — ended, snuffed out in a few moments.

Or so the killer thought ...

BILL KOEHN

quiet giant

