



THE Voice OF THE Martyrs

December 2021



ETHIOPIA: A COSTLY HARVEST

REFUSING
TO HATE

THANKING GOD
IN THE FLAMES



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"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Heb 13:3

Our Message to Those Who Steal, Kill and Destroy

We are pursued by two powerful beings. First, and most important, we are pursued by our Creator, who actively worked to “seek and save” us while we were still His enemies (Luke 19:10, Romans 5:10). What a wonderful truth about God’s grace and love toward us! But we are also pursued by an adversary, one of God’s fallen creatures, who pursues us “like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” with an agenda to “steal and kill and destroy” (1 Peter 5:8, John 10:10).

We must maintain a vigilant awareness that our adversary is real and that his malicious pursuit is guaranteed. We fail our young people as well as seekers and new Believers if we do not provide them with clear biblical teaching about this reality. The Apostle Paul’s instruction to his mentee Timothy provides a good example: “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul’s teaching echoes Christ’s repeated promises of the same (Matthew 10:22, John 15:20–21).

The New Testament Greek word transliterated dioko, which means “persecute,” connotes being chased and hunted by an adversary who intends harm. This is happening to each of us right now, regardless of where we live. While the enemy employs subtlety to execute his plan in places like South Africa, the U.S. and Western Europe, he simultaneously works through extreme violence in other nations. Tens of thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa have lost everything to Islamic extremists in recent years.

This month’s Newsletter presents a sobering chapter in the larger story of how our enemy is using Islamists and other violent radicals to attack — physically and spiritually — Believers in Ethiopia, a historically Christian-majority nation. But we have a message for those who do the enemy’s work by stealing, killing and destroying. The message is clearly stated in Scripture and is carried at great cost by our persecuted Christian family members around the world:

You are deceived by our shared enemy. We do not count you as our enemy because we know the identity of our true enemy (Ephesians 6:12).

Even when we must flee, we do not fear you. Both God and Satan pursue us, but God is infinitely more powerful. Because of our eternal hope in Christ, we do not fear what you can do to us in this world (Matthew 10:28).

We count it an honour to suffer for Christ. We go forth rejoicing (Acts 5:41), willing to suffer and even die, if necessary, to bring you His truth and love.



We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10



“Even if They Kill Me”

Growing up as a devout Muslim in Ethiopia, a country often thought of as a Christian-majority nation, Jemal despised followers of Jesus Christ.

He eagerly debated Christians, smugly pointing out what he considered biblical fallacies. And he trapped Christian students with controversial questions about the Scriptures, causing them to doubt their faith and pointing to the Quran as the source of ultimate truth. In eighth grade, he even taught other Muslim students how to draw Christian converts back to Islam.

But when Jemal was in high school, he met a former Muslim named Yonas who travelled throughout the area sharing the Gospel with Islamic leaders. Whenever Yonas was in town, Jemal would debate him and ask him questions about the Christian faith.

Over time, Yonas's answers began to make sense to Jemal. “I learned from Yonas and the Bible about Christ,” he said. “Also I was looking in the Quran. When I compared them, I started to leave the Quran and gradually started to love

the Bible.”

Tested Faith

Jemal shared what Yonas had taught him about Jesus and the Scriptures with local sheikhs and imams, hoping they could debunk Yonas's claims. But surprisingly, they had no answers. They merely warned him about the dangers of meeting with a Christian who was trying to “trap” him.

For several years, Jemal read his Bible and met with Yonas in secret. Then, when he turned 20, he decided it was time to place his faith in Christ. “It took many years to decide,” Jemal said. “I was afraid to come to church and talk about Christ because if Islamists heard and knew I converted to Christianity, immediately they would shoot me.”

Eventually, Jemal's family began to notice changes in his character. And when his father learned about his meetings with Yonas, he gathered the rest of the family to confront Jemal.

“Are you a *penti*?” one of his family members asked, using the derogatory term for a biblical Christian.

“I am,” Jemal replied.

With their father's approval, Jemal's brothers and some other men from the village beat and tortured Jemal in an attempt to persuade him to return to Islam. But Jemal's love for Jesus, which had been growing for years, sustained him through the persecution.

“I would rather die than deny Jesus,” he told his brothers.

Hunted by Radicals

Realizing his son wasn't going to return to Islam, Jemal's father called off the beatings. He told Jemal that he wanted to kill him but didn't want to be arrested for it. So instead, he ordered Jemal's brothers to gather his possessions and burn them. Then he told Jemal he never wanted to see him again.

“If I see you,” his father told him, “I will burn you alive.”

Jemal fled to another town, where Yonas had prepared a small room for him at his church. Yonas welcomed him as a

► Jemal enjoyed debating Christians and even taught Muslim students how to persuade Christian converts to return to Islam. Now, he is hunted and targeted because of his faith in Christ.



brother. "If I have something to eat, you can have it," Yonas told him. "If I don't, we can pray for something."

Eventually, Jemal entered a training program for Christian converts from Islam and soon began full-time ministry work. After completing his training, Jemal got married and returned to the town where he had previously lived. But the persecution wasn't over.

In 2017, Jemal's father sent a mob of young radical Muslims to hunt him down and kill him. Although the mob was unable to find Jemal and his wife, they found their house ... and burned it to the ground.

Following the arson attack, a Christian organization in Ethiopia petitioned to have a new home built for Jemal so that he could live and serve among them, and also so his father couldn't find him.

With help from VOM, Jemal and his wife received a new home. "Praise God for the support you have given me," he said.

Trusting in Jesus

Jemal said he has heard that his father and brothers are still trying to find him, but he hasn't talked to his family since

"Even though they were hating me and they are still trying to kill me, something in my inner being said, 'Love.'"

the attack. "They won't give me a chance just to sit together so I could tell them about Christ," said Jemal, now 27. "But they know that the Lord has helped me and has stood beside me."

Jemal said the Lord has helped him see his enemies in a new light; he refuses to hate them. "Even though they were hating me and they are still trying to kill me," he said, "something in my inner being said, 'Love.' God has another reward for me. My portion is just to love them and

reach out to these people."

Jemal said he takes special encouragement from 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, which he read to VOM workers from his Bible: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

Paraphrasing verse 10, he continued, "We always carry in our body the death of Jesus, so the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body."

Although Jemal lost his family, home, land and belongings, he said Jesus is worth it. And he said he hopes God will use his new life for His glory.

"The first thing that I've got is eternal life," Jemal said. "Even now, if they are coming to kill me, to behead me, I'll give myself for the sake of Christ. If Muslims — after they saw that I was beheaded for the sake of Christ — believe through that, it is worth it to give my life to Christ."

▼ These Christians are being trained as evangelists in Ethiopia.



When Terror Comes Home

Throughout their marriage, Faizah watched her husband, Nagawo, faithfully serve Christians in Ethiopia.

As outreach coordinator for the local district of a large denomination, Nagawo encouraged Believers to reach out to their Muslim neighbours. He also coordinated support for former Muslims who suffered persecution after leaving Islam to follow Christ.

Faizah and Nagawo had once been Muslims themselves, but for the past three decades they had worked to reach Muslims with the Gospel and help new Believers mature in faith. After those many years of serving persecuted Christians and the church in Ethiopia, the

couple became targets of persecution. And Nagawo paid the ultimate price for the sake of the Gospel.

Losing Everything

One night while Faizah was at home with her daughter and granddaughter, waiting for Nagawo to return from his ministry work, several nearby houses went up in flames.

Faizah said the attack was so sudden and violent that it "erupted like thunder." Before she knew what was happening, 16 houses were collapsing into the flames, which continued to spread to neighbouring homes.

When the mob of Islamists approached her house, Faizah and her family had

nowhere to run. "Lord, if my soul is yours, deliver us from this!" Faizah cried out.

The men dragged Faizah and her family outside, where they watched in horror as the attackers doused their home with gasoline and set it ablaze. "Lord, if this fire is from you," Faizah prayed, "let it continue; no one can stop it. But if this fire is from the devil, let it be extinguished."

Shortly after she prayed, a sudden rain extinguished the fire. Although about half of her home continued to smoulder and smoke, Faizah was grateful that the fire didn't consume everything. As the mob grew increasingly frustrated, however, they began to steal food and other belongings from Faizah's house,



destroying whatever remained.

Then Faizah heard a frightening shout from a celebrating Islamist: "We killed the main person! The leader is dead!"

As the attackers sang with joy, Faizah's heart sank. She followed the crowd until her worst fears were confirmed and she saw Nagawo's beheaded body lying on the ground. The men who killed him danced around his body as Faizah wept in horror.

Faizah and her daughter ran to Nagawo, picked up his head and dragged his body away from the attackers. With their home partly destroyed and nowhere to take Nagawo's body, they covered it up and sat beside it, weeping, until help arrived in the morning.

Still Grateful

Faizah later learned that the Islamists had killed her husband because he, a former Muslim, had led many others to leave Islam and place their faith in Christ.

When asked by a VOM worker how the loss of her husband, home and belongings had affected her faith, Faizah pointed at her questioner as if he should know the answer. "Even while the flames were shooting up, I was thanking God," she said. "And even when I saw that my husband had died, I maintained my relationship with Jesus. For the past 30 years, I have been intimately serving Jesus. He has helped me to pass through these difficulties, and I believe that He will help me even more."

Faizah said that with the Holy Spirit's

help, she has learned to forgive those who attacked her family and brutally murdered her husband. "When I saw that person who took the knife and beheaded my husband," she said, "as a Christian, I'm not going to do something against him. I forgive, but I don't forget."

Faizah asked for continued prayer for herself and her family. She takes comfort in knowing that others are praying for her and that she will one day meet her husband again.

"As I lost my beloved husband, we are now separated as human beings, and I feel sad about that," she said. "But he has gone to a better place, and I'm encouraged about that. And I'm thankful that God spared me and my daughter."

Finding Restoration

Following Nagawo's death, Faizah had no income to support herself and her children who were still dependent on her. Along with her daughter and seven grandchildren, she lived under a plastic tarp on her church's land for more than a year.

"I was reduced to begging for food," Faizah said sadly. Eventually, however, she was connected with VOM, who helped rebuild her home and continues to provide other forms of support. "The Lord took us through that painful and difficult

time until He used VOM and the church to help us," she said.

Grateful for the ways God has blessed her and her family, Faizah wants to continue reaching out to Muslims with the Gospel. "Even though I lost my husband," she explained, "when I saw the Muslims' lives and how they live, I know that I'm living in the right way. I want them to come to Christ."

Faizah said God's Word and her pastors were always there to comfort her following her husband's death. She cited Deuteronomy 31:8 as an especially important passage to her: *"And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed."*

Understanding that she is just one of many Christian widows who have lost their husbands to persecution, she encourages other widows to keep their eyes on Jesus. "God has comforted me when I lost my husband; God has blessed me," she said. "So please, trust in Him and be encouraged in Christ."

As she finds healing and restoration through her strong faith, Faizah said she will continue the work that she and her husband started three decades ago — sharing the Gospel with her Muslim neighbours.

► Islamists burned this Christian woman's home because she refused to renounce Christ and return to Islam. VOM helped rebuild her home.





FROM THE FIELD

LAOS: Three Families Face Jail Time for Following Jesus

In May of this year, three families in Giew Muang village accepted Christ. The three families, who are related, came to faith in Christ after one family member experienced a miraculous healing following prayer from a pastor. Since 40 of the village's 120 families were already Christian, village police told the head of the village about the new converts, fearing the entire village could become Christian. "They need to get permission from the Interior office before they can accept this Jesus religion," the police insisted.

Some in Laos, especially government authorities, view Christianity as a foreign religion and a tool used to undermine the Communist Laotian regime. The central government therefore restricts some Christian activities, and Christians are commonly persecuted by family members or village authorities like those in Giew Muang.

Authorities detained and interrogated the men from each of the three families, warning that if they continued following the foreign religion they would have to obtain official documentation from a government office or be jailed. "They threatened the three families to stop this religion, as they believed it is against the law of the country, though it is not," a Front-Line Worker said.

The Christian families' case is now with provincial authorities as they await their official documentation. Meanwhile, the district police have pressured a local Front-Line Worker to encourage the three families to abandon their Christian faith. "News is spreading, and the officials do not like it," the Front-Line Worker said. "Do pray for this situation."



Laotian authorities allow Christian worship only within the government-controlled Laos Evangelical Church, viewing unregulated worship as a threat to the Communist regime.

NORTH-EASTERN NIGERIA: "Nowhere Is Safe Anymore"

Ongoing attacks by Fulani Islamic militants have resulted in the deaths and abductions of thousands of Christians in northern Nigeria since the beginning of the year. "Nowhere in North-eastern Nigeria is safe anymore," a Front-Line Worker said. "People are being killed by militant Fulani Muslim men. They are not even safe in their own homes."

An attack on Haske Baptist Church in Kaduna state is just one example of the violence our Nigerian brothers and sisters in Christ are facing at the hands of Muslim extremists. Earlier this year, Fulani Islamic militants attacked the church and killed one Christian, wounding another and kidnapping several more. "They surrounded the church and started shooting," a survivor said. "They shot at us randomly and at anyone they sighted."



Since the beginning of the year, thousands of Nigerian Christians have been displaced, abducted and even killed in Islamist attacks on homes and churches throughout the country.

Nearly all Christians in north-eastern Nigeria have lost loved ones in attacks by terrorist groups or Fulani Islamic militants. Entire congregations have been displaced, and thousands of Christians remain in camps designated for internally displaced people. Christians also have difficulty finding food in some places, as the Islamist militias have taken control of many villages and farmlands.

In addition to the Islamist attacks, Nigerian Christians face opposition from government authorities rather than receiving the help they need. "The police and army, who are supposed to be protecting lives and property, disappear or refuse to come when Christians cry out for help," the Front-Line Worker said. "They are quick to arrest Christians who take it upon themselves to defend their people."

When Christians reach out for government assistance, years pass without a response. And any assistance that is provided through governmental entities rarely reaches Christians. "There are very few instances where Christians actually get the help they need," said a Front-Line Worker for the region. "Sometimes, the government sets Sunday morning as the only time for Christians to come and receive their aid. The process is made very difficult."



Front-Line Workers in Iran are finding that many Iranians are open to the Gospel after decades of Islamic rule.

IRAN: Sowing Gospel Seeds Through Street Ministry

Economic conditions in Iran have led to extremely high inflation and increased unemployment. But Christians there are using these difficulties as an opportunity to share the Gospel with those who are struggling.

With no support from the government or help from their communities, many people are living on the streets, and Front-Line Workers have seen children foraging for food in trash bins as a means of survival. Because of the great need, Christians have begun outreach work to children on the streets. "The Lord put it on the hearts of the pastors and workers of one of the house-church networks to seek to meet some of the physical needs and in this way show the love of Christ to those in need," a Front-Line Worker said.

Through intentional and careful efforts, these workers provide for the immediate needs of homeless children, giving out blankets and hot meals while also introducing them to the truth of the Gospel. As the children demonstrate a spiritual hunger to know more, the Front-Line Workers give them Bibles so they can gain a deeper understanding of Christ's love for them. "Their method of working is to make the truths of the Gospel very clear," the Front-Line Worker said. "They are very careful not to give the impression that the purpose of giving out food is to make them Christians. They want to give ample opportunity for the children themselves

to become curious and develop an interest so that it will completely be their decision to believe in Christ."

Working under the oppressive Iranian regime, which has criminalized leaving Islam and often imprisons Christians under false charges of "acting against national security," the Christian workers must carry out their ministry activities in secret to avoid detection. "At first, they do not say that they are Christians," the Front-Line Worker explained, "but they say that the Lord has sent them to provide food at this time. After three or four visits, the people come to realize that the food has been given to them by Christians. The evangelists then use this opportunity to talk about Christ. Of course it is all done quietly so that others cannot hear."

Over the course of a few months, hundreds of meals and blankets were distributed, and several children have expressed a desire to know more about Christ. Many others have also responded favourably to the ministry efforts, as they experience the kindness of Christians in contrast to their Muslim community. "It is now being spread around that these Christians are good people," the Front-Line Worker said. "They say, 'The Christians not only think about our physical needs, but as people, we are significant and respected by them with humility and love.'"

Prayer Diary

December 2021/January 2022

DECEMBER 2021

S 19	QATAR	Pray that culture and tradition will not hinder people from coming to Christ.
M 20	VIETNAM	Pray for ethnic-minority Believers who continue to face persecution from local authorities.
T 21	BANGLADESH	Pray for Christians continuing to work among the 1.3 million Rohingya refugees.
W 22	CAMEROON	Pray for perseverance of the church in areas where Boko Haram remains active.
T 23	SAUDI ARABIA	Pray for the protection and growth of the few indigenous Christians in the country.
F 24	COMOROS	Pray for new Believers who are persecuted and ostracized when they come to faith.
S 25	NORTH KOREA	Pray for North Korean defectors who are training to be missionaries.
S 26	AZERBAIJAN	Pray that all Believers will be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.
M 27	ERITREA	Pray for a VOM-sponsored radio ministry reaching out to Eritreans.
T 28	BRUNEI	Pray that secret Believers will wisely witness for Christ to their friends and family.
W 29	INDIA	Pray that Believers in India will have access to Bibles and grow in faith.
T 30	COLOMBIA	Pray for pastors in "red zones" that have been retaken by rebel groups.
F 31	BAHRAIN	Pray for the encouragement and strength of women who worship in secret.

JANUARY 2022

S 1	SRI LANKA	Pray that more Sri Lankan Front-Line Workers will choose to work in Muslim areas.
S 2	BANGLADESH	Pray for 14 Bengali Believers sharing the Gospel in the northern districts.
M 3	VIETNAM	Pray that new Believers will stand strong while facing family rejection, evictions and beatings.
T 4	IRAQ	Pray for the growth of house-churches and for Bible distributions in Kurdistan.
W 5	AFGHANISTAN	Pray for the peace, protection and provision of Believers and their families.
T 6	COMOROS	Pray that Malagasy Believers will reach out to Comorians.
F 7	SOMALIA	Pray that children of Somali Christians will grow strong and wise in faith.
S 8	MALAYSIA	Pray for Christian workers trying to return to the country.
S 9	MALI	Pray that new Believers will be discipled and rooted in their Christian faith.
M 10	BHUTAN	Pray that those reaching out to college students will be granted grace and favour.
T 11	IRAN	Pray that Supreme Leader Ali Hoseini-Khamenei will come to know Christ.
W 12	KUWAIT	Pray that those forced to leave the country after becoming Christians will grow in faith.
T 13	TAJIKISTAN	Pray for President Emomali Rahmon and the government.
F 14	JORDAN	Pray for two refugees who were badly beaten by relatives because of their faith.
S 15	LEBANON	Pray for Bachir who is persecuted by those to whom he preaches.

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