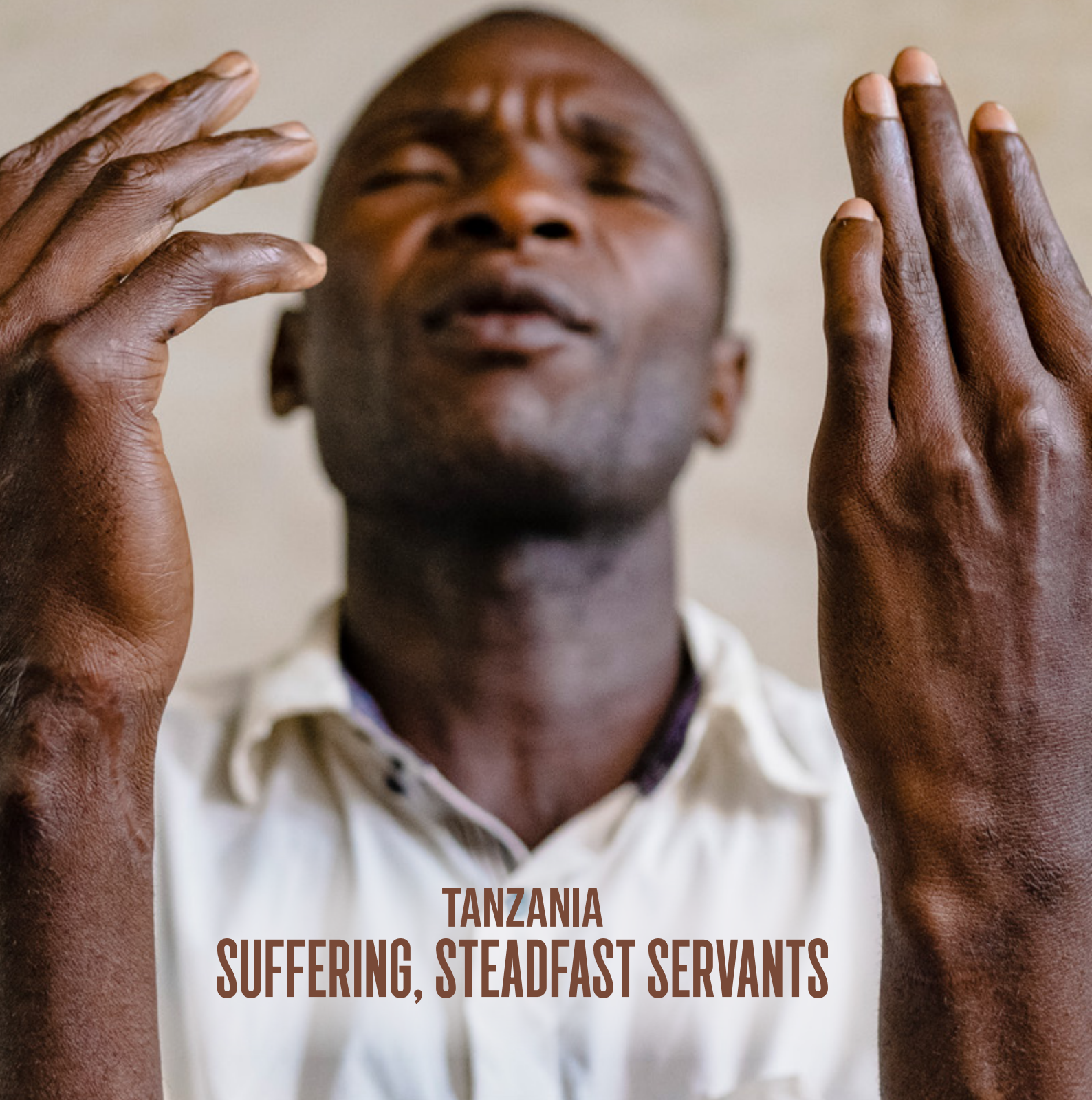




# VOM

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS  
DIE STEM VAN DIE MARTELARE

June 2023



## TANZANIA SUFFERING, STEADFAST SERVANTS



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





# COUNTING THE SCARS

After surviving a brutal attack at his church, a Tanzanian Christian expresses gratitude for God's provision.

“One, two, three, ...” began Temistocres Ngabona, counting the deep scars on his leg. “Four, five, six, seven, eight, ...” he continued, moving to his right arm and then to his severed thumb and mangled fingers. As he reached the ninth scar, he buried his face in his arms, overcome with emotion while recalling the attack that nearly ended his life.

## **Keeping Commitments**

Temistocres was a nominal Christian in 2011 when he married Deborah, a nominal Muslim, in a northern Tanzanian town that was a mixture of both faiths.

## “I USED MY ARMS TO BLOCK THE BLADE; THAT IS HOW THEY CUT ME.”

One day shortly after the couple's marriage, a pastor came to their door and invited them to visit his church the following Sunday. Temistocres agreed.

Sunday arrived with a downpour, but Temistocres told his wife they should keep their commitment. During the service, God touched their hearts and both Temistocres and Deborah became fully devoted followers of Christ.

Several years later, during another Sunday service, their pastor gave an impassioned sermon on the need for prayer. Convicted and compelled to respond, Temistocres decided to pray every night at the church, all night long, for six months. He and other church members would meet at the church at 9pm or 10pm for a prayer service, after which a few people would remain and take turns sleeping and praying through the night.

The prayer services had been going on for about two months when a school teacher named Dioniz decided to join the group. Though a follower of Christ, Dioniz had not been very active in his faith; his father was a Christian, but his mother was a strident Muslim. As the nightly prayers continued, Dioniz made a commitment to pray with the group. For Temistocres and his pastor, Dioniz's attendance affirmed the power of prayer.

With a mosque less than 2km away from the church, the local Muslim community took notice of the Christians' prayer meetings. Though Christians can practice their faith openly in majority-Christian Tanzania, Temistocres' town is near the Ugandan border, and radical Muslims in the area would occasionally exert their influence in the local mosque. Tanzanian

Believers, especially converts from Islam, sometimes experience persecution in predominantly Muslim areas. Attacks on homes and churches are possible, and intense pressure from family members is not uncommon.



▲ Islamists attacked Temistocres and a friend while they were praying all night at church.

One day during a meeting at the mosque, a swarm of bees filled the building and disrupted the service. Some of the Muslims blamed the praying Christians for the insect invasion, believing the Christ-followers had cursed the mosque.

Anger in the Muslim community toward the overnight prayer group was rising to a point of violence.

### Attacked

On 13 October 2014, Temistocres had a troubling dream in which he entered a house filled with Christians and Muslims singing worship songs together. In the middle of the house lay a body wrapped in a sheet with a bright light shining on it.

The following evening, Temistocres told his pastor about the dream as they walked to the prayer meeting together. Surprisingly, the pastor said he had experienced a similar dream the same night. "Perhaps some Muslims and some Christians will participate together in a funeral because it's a new Believer coming from different backgrounds," he suggested.

Though the men shared a similar dream, neither thought much more about it.

Later that evening, Temistocres and Dioniz were left alone to pray through the night. While Temistocres was sleeping and Dioniz was praying, Temistocres thought he was having another dream, in which this time he was fighting with someone and a light was flashing in his face.

Startled from his slumber, he realized the nightmare was real; a man wearing a headlamp was swinging a large machete at his head. A group of men from the mosque had come to attack whoever was at the church.

Temistocres struggled to defend himself in his half-asleep stupor as the headlamp flashed in his eyes and the attacker swung the machete wildly. "I used my arms to block the blade; that is how they cut me," he recalled. As his eyes adjusted to the light, Temistocres was shocked that he recognized many of the attackers.

Then he sensed the Lord speaking to him. "I heard a voice say, 'Take a stone!'" he said. "So I found a stone and threw it." The stone hit his assailant in the head, knocking him down.

Temistocres also collapsed and could not get back up. He realized his left leg was badly injured and was nearly severed just above his ankle. Another man struck him with a large knife three more times before the





▲ Above left: Temistocres with his wife, Deborah, and other family members. Above right: He now serves as a pastor and leads his wife and three daughters to grow in faith.

attackers ran off.

At that moment, Temistocres saw his friend Dioniz alive for the last time. The attackers had struck him in the head, and he was struggling to escape in the darkness. He stumbled into a wall, then collapsed near the front of the church and died.

### Surviving

Fearing the attackers might return, Temistocres slowly pulled himself, half crawling and half sliding, out the church door, across the ground, through a field and onto a path, where he hoped someone might find him. Believing he would die, he cried out to God: "God, forgive me! If there is any way I wronged you, forgive me and now receive my soul."

At about 2:30am, a woman found him and brought him some water. She also called authorities, who eventually took him to a hospital. Temistocres' wife, Deborah, learned later that morning that her husband was critically injured and Dioniz had been killed. When she reached the hospital, she was shocked by his appearance. "When we looked at each other, I started crying," she said, "and he also started crying."

Deborah was allowed to see Temistocres for only a short time, and the doctors did not give her

details about his condition. But when she left his room, she heard a voice say, "Fear not; I am with you."

Police later arrested one of the attackers that Temistocres had recognized, reportedly finding bloody clothes as evidence against him.

Shortly after the suspect was arrested, people whom Deborah didn't know brought food and drinks to the hospital for Temistocres. As she was about to give her husband some juice that one of the strangers brought, Deborah sensed the Holy Spirit telling her not to give it to him. When she asked who had brought the juice, a man ran from the room. She learned that the man was related to one of Temistocres' attackers, and police later confirmed that the juice bottle contained poison.

Later, someone offered to bring them money — likely a bribe to drop the charges — and another person offered food that they believed was tainted.

The man arrested for the assault and murder was released for unknown reasons, and Temistocres has seen his attackers in the city. But he still chooses to show them grace. "They are forgiven," he said. "I know that they did something that they didn't know, like Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what

they do.'"

### Giving Thanks

After hearing of the attack, a Front-Line Worker visited Temistocres at the hospital. VOM helped pay for his medical needs, including 10 surgeries, treatment for multiple infections and months of rehabilitation. "It's a miracle that he is here today," the Front-Line Worker said.

Very early in his hospitalization, Temistocres began to consider how he could thank God for preserving his life. While receiving treatment, he thought, "How can we thank God for all he has done for us?"

His answer was to make another significant commitment. He and Deborah decided to donate their land to the church as an offering of thanksgiving. Church members wept when they heard about the gift, but Temistocres' family members struggled to understand why a man with such severe injuries would give away his most valuable possession. "My father told me, 'I heard that you offered the plot to the pastor,'" Temistocres said. "I answered my father, 'I didn't give to the pastor. I gave my plot to the Lord.'"

Because Temistocres and Deborah continued to see the attackers in town, they decided to move to





▲ To express their gratitude to the Lord, Temistocres and Deborah used funds from a successful business to build a church.

another area for their safety. Front-Line Workers helped Temistocres launch a small poultry business since he could not return to his job as a stonemason. And the couple soon bought a plot of land with proceeds from their successful business and built a new church on the property.

The church has 71 members and 150 children who regularly attend. "Temistocres is our true pastor," said one of the church's leaders during a recent visit. "What you see here is because of his love and his heart. We love him, and he loves us."

In addition to his work at the church, Temistocres hopes to receive additional training in ministry to Muslims. He wants to show them the same kind of love that he received when a pastor first visited his home years ago.

Temistocres and Deborah are grateful for God's provision through the body of Christ. "I thank God for them," she said. "I ask God to bless them abundantly, because at the time I had lost hope, they came. They intervened in the situation which lifted me up again."

During a recent worship service, Temistocres tearfully thanked God directly from the pulpit. "Asante, Yesu," he said in Swahili. "Thank you, Jesus." ●





# A TREASURE MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

A pastor's family continues his ministry after his murder by local Islamists.

**T**he northern Tanzanian city of Geita is home to one of the largest gold mines in Africa. Its bustling main street is lined with hundreds of shops, whose proprietors stack various wares in front of their stores in hope of enticing passing miners to part with their earnings.

While competition between the shops is obvious and intense, less apparent is the friction between Muslims and Christians in the region. Religious tensions have at times turned violent, as they did on the day Pastor Mathayo Kibibi was killed.

## **Business, Marriage and Ministry**

Mathayo started his career in one of the area's many shops, selling grain by the kilo. And in 1988, he married one of his regular customers, a woman named Generosa Kachila.

Though both Mathayo and Generosa grew up in Christian homes, they held the same animistic beliefs of most others in their village, and several members of their families had exhibited signs of demonic possession. "Sometimes my sisters would become strangely confused," Generosa said, "and other voices would come out of them." She said her sisters thrashed around uncontrollably, even violently, at times. Then, in 1997, a visiting pastor led her sisters to faith in Christ. Generosa said they were completely



**"WE THANK GOD,  
ALTHOUGH IT HURTS."**

healed after praying with the pastor.

Seeing the dramatic change in their relatives, Mathayo and Generosa also placed their trust in Christ and joined a local church. Mathayo, gifted with natural organizational skills, was soon asked to be the church's administrator. He later attended a Bible school and, in 2005, became a pastor and taught Bible lessons in the church and at home.

"He was very close to the children," Generosa recalled. "Sometimes he would teach them the Word of God. He also taught them that if somebody has done you wrong, not to take revenge."

Pastor Mathayo's lessons were soon to be tested.

### The Riot

Animosity between the Muslim and Christian communities in Geita and nearby towns had been growing for years. In 2007, local Muslims tried to force Christians to have their animals slaughtered according to *halal* (sanctioned by Islamic law) processes. The Christian community refused.

On 13 February 2013, a Tanzanian politician reportedly said that in his opinion, everyone should follow the *halal* requirements. His comments incited violence in the community and, predictably, a local mosque soon announced that a Christian pastor had slaughtered a goat without paying for the *halal* process.

Generosa said she remembers hearing the loudspeaker announcement: "Christians are not allowed to slaughter their own animals, and today they have done it here!" A short time later, a mob formed to look for the pastor.

Rioters attacked Christian butcher shops on the main street of town, throwing meat onto the road while screaming that it was *haram*, or forbidden.

On his way to pick up some

marriage licenses, Mathayo walked directly into the chaos. Though he had not been involved in slaughtering the goat, one of the rioters recognized him and yelled, "There's the pastor!"



▲ Generosa with some of her children and one grandchild. Her youngest child (front row in blue) was 4 months old when her father was killed.

The mob grabbed him, beat him and attacked him with machetes.

Eventually a friend broke through the crowd to help Mathayo.

Generosa said that as her husband lay on the street dying, he told his friend the names of attackers that he recognized. And then he said, "I am not well and will soon depart. Please take care of my family." He never regained consciousness and died a few days later while being transported to a larger hospital.

Devastated by her husband's murder, Generosa worried that the attackers might return to kill her and her 11 children, who ranged in age from 4 months to 19 years old. A Front-Line Worker soon eased her concern by providing the family with emergency shelter.

### Starting Over

Since the attack, Front-Line Workers have helped the family with living expenses, including school fees for the children. Generosa works as a farmer to provide for her family,

but they have still struggled at times. When she becomes anxious about their situation, Generosa reminds herself to fast and pray. She said when she does that, God brings her comfort and relief.

Although losing their dad was very painful, the children said they are grateful that their earthly father first introduced them to their Heavenly Father. "The children stayed calm," Generosa said. "They didn't feel the need to seek revenge. They said, 'OK, perhaps God knows why this happened and will take care of us.'"

Generosa's oldest son, Valentine, attended a Bible school on scholarship. After graduating, he decided to live and work where he could help support his mother and siblings. He runs a carpentry stand down the road from where his father was killed, and he remains thankful for Mathayo's life and witness. Following his dad's example, Valentine looks for ways to use his Bible school training while doing his carpentry work. "I am witnessing on the streets," he said.

Generosa said that when she thinks of Mathayo now, she recalls how they served the Lord together. "The memories that I have are how we were praying for the sick people, people with problems," she said. "And that is a ministry that I am still doing."

Although one person was prosecuted for Mathayo's murder, Generosa and her family occasionally see others they believe were involved in the attack. Despite the risk, Generosa and her children are committed to continuing Mathayo's ministry — proclaiming Christ, a treasure more precious than gold, to everyone in the Geita region. ●





## *Everlasting Father,*

*Thank You for the ultimate victory we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*As our Tanzanian Christian brothers and sisters suffer under the blade of persecution, may they be sustained by Your righteous hand and may their scars declare Your goodness and mercy. We pray that as they demonstrate their unshakable faith in You, their persecutors will come to repentance through the work of Your Holy Spirit.*

*Thank You, Father, for providing for the orphans and widows among our persecuted Christian family. May their examples of forgiveness toward those who killed*

*their fathers and husbands spur us toward greater love and demonstrate to a watching world that Christ is more precious than gold.*

*We thank You for the example of these steadfast servants, Father, and pray that You will grant them courage and endurance for Christ's sake. Protect them from the evil one and empower them to stand firm in the faith, knowing their suffering is but for a little while. Restore, confirm, strengthen and establish each of them as they serve You.*

*Amen.*



# Prayer Diary<sup>®</sup>

June/July 2023

## JUNE 2023

S 18	COMOROS	Pray for the completion of Bible translations into native languages.
M 19	SUDAN	Pray for the endurance of pastors who are frequently harassed and arrested.
T 20	NIGERIA	Pray for the protection and peace of Christian women and children who fear kidnapping.
W 21	BRUNEI	Pray that Christians sharing the Gospel will remain undetected by the religious police.
T 22	TAJIKISTAN	Pray for Christians who are often ostracized by their families and neighbours for following Christ.
F 23	BANGLADESH	Pray that Christians will boldly share the Gospel as they serve the poor.
S 24	KYRGYZSTAN	Pray that Believers will unite in love as they work to advance the Gospel.
S 25	CUBA	Pray that Christian leaders will be allowed to travel outside the country to receive ministry resources.
M 26	CHINA	Pray that restrictions will be lifted so church leaders can meet with their congregations.
T 27	SYRIA	Pray for the strength of Pastor Zaki who serves those displaced by war and economic instability.
W 28	TURKEY	Pray for the perseverance of Christian leaders experiencing increased government pressure.
T 29	AZERBAIJAN	Pray that Believers will grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).
F 30	TUNISIA	Pray that unBelievers, especially young people, will thirst for the living water of Christ.

## JULY 2023

S 1	MOROCCO	Pray for a new generation of biblical disciples to lead churches in the country.
S 2	VIETNAM	Pray that authorities will stop asking recognized congregations to disclose their activities and teachings.
M 3	PHILIPPINES	Pray that Muslims will turn to faith in Christ in great numbers.
T 4	KUWAIT	Pray for Believers who are forced to leave their families because of their Christian faith.
W 5	UZBEKISTAN	Praise the Lord that the church has seen a slight degree of increased freedom.
T 6	YEMEN	Pray for creative ways to get ministry resources into the country.
F 7	TURKMENISTAN	Pray that Believers will maintain a courageous witness despite intimidation.
S 8	UAE*	Pray that Emirati Believers will have more opportunities to meet openly, without fear of opposition.
S 9	BRUNEI	Praise God that Christians are baptized despite government persecution.
M 10	IRAN	Pray that those conducting covert Bible studies will not be detected by authorities.
T 11	SYRIA	Pray that relaxed government restrictions will result in a great number of new Syrian Believers.
W 12	MOZAMBIQUE	Pray for the 16,000 displaced Christians receiving emergency food relief this year.
T 13	CAMEROON	Pray that Believers will bear one another's burdens as a witness of Christ's love.
F 14	LAOS	Pray that families will be delivered from worshiping false spirits to worshiping God.
S 15	ISRAEL	Pray for jobs for Ethiopian immigrants who embrace Jesus and experience discrimination.

\*UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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