



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS  
DIE STEM VAN DIE MARTELARE

# Nigeria

## Christ amid the Crisis

ONCE LIKE JONAH,  
NOW A PETER

WITNESS IN  
CAPTIVITY

September 2022



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

# Courage in the Battle for Nigeria



We are blessed to live in circumstances in which we are protected in many ways against those who might harm us. We have access to security measures which include police forces at various levels of government, security guards, protective fences, secure doors and locks, and even the availability of weapons for personal defence. In order to fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters in northern Nigeria, however, we must understand that they live under constant threat of abduction and murder at the hands of Islamist militants and enjoy none of the security measures we often take for granted.

Our Christian family members in northern Nigeria are completely outnumbered. Their government lacks both the power and the will to defend them. If this were not the case, a discussion about their courage would include their fight to defend their homes, families and churches. But what does courage look like when there is no means of defending family and property?

Living in an extremely dangerous and violent environment — utterly defenceless in this world — has freed our Christian brothers and sisters to focus on the singular pursuit of eternal objectives. Because of their special courage and inexplicable (and therefore truly supernatural) victory over fear, they are a powerful example of faith for us. They have gained this freedom by dying to the desires of this world. They are, as the Apostle Paul describes himself, crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14). This phrase follows Paul's explanation in Chapter 5 *"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts"*.

When we are tempted to cling too tightly to comfort, safety and security in this fallen world, we should remember that we can be truly free only when our desires are anchored in eternity. Otherwise, we are subject to intimidation and fear, which leads to the opposite of courage — cowardice. The enemy desires to incite and use cowardice to silence our faithful witness for Christ.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will use the stories in this newsletter to defeat any stronghold of fear in your life. We can be like Emmanuel (in our second story), who responded to a radical leader's threats by saying, "I have given myself over to God, and I am ready to die." When the battles of this world are unwinnable, we can joyfully pay any price to fight the eternal battle. Like our brother Elijah (on the next page), we can say, "We have made up our minds that it is better to die in battle for God than to die as a coward."

# Joyfully

## Serving in Hostile Territory

If missionaries could choose their own assignments, one of the last places anyone would be likely to go is the town of Gashua, in Yobe state, Nigeria. Temperatures hover around 120 degrees, clouds of mosquitoes hang in the air, the drinking water carries various diseases and a powdery dust causes chronic eye and respiratory problems. If that weren't enough, Yobe state is ravaged by ongoing violence from local Islamist groups.

"If I followed my own wish, I would not go to Gashua," Pastor Elijah Ogunyi said. Like Jonah, Elijah initially resisted God's call, but God had been leading him toward a particular work since childhood. "God had to cut my wings," Elijah said. "That is how I became a pastor."

### Future Witchdoctor

Elijah was an unlikely candidate for a

minister of the Gospel. He was born into a polygamous family that practiced idol worship, and his grandfather was the village witchdoctor.

Though in line to inherit his grandfather's priestly duties, Elijah injured his shoulder as a boy, preventing him from lifting the heavy stone idols. From then on, his half-brother was assigned the ritual of sacrificing to the family gods. Elijah now credits his shoulder injury with helping him leave the village, avoid polygamous marriages and stop worshiping idols.

After coming of age, Elijah left the village and travelled throughout Nigeria, using his training as an electrician to support himself. By the early 1990s, he had gotten married and settled in the central Nigerian city of Jos.

In 1995, he began to dream of a frightening, dark figure. The dreams

were so vivid that he feared going to sleep. Then, in one of his dreams, he received a Bible that he used to slay the dark figure, and he was never troubled by dreams of the frightening figure again. "That was when I discovered I was supposed to change my ways and totally surrender my life to Christ," Elijah said.

After finding a church, Elijah began to serve as a prayer group leader when he wasn't busy with his family or his work as an electrician. In 2006, he had to skip church meetings several days in a row while trying repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, to fix a faulty pump for a client. When Elijah finally prayed about it, he was convicted by the Holy Spirit that he had been too concerned about earning money instead of trusting God to take care of him. When Elijah fixed the pump afterward, it continued working.





▲ Elijah and Felicia have suffered health problems caused by the difficult environment where they minister.

“Since then,” he said, “I believed that whatever God wanted me to do, I would do it.”

Sometime later, he sensed God’s call to attend seminary. “I said to myself, ‘I have five children; how am I going to cope?’” Elijah recalled. “So I ignored it.”

That same year, he was offered a lucrative electrical contract. Every time the developer tried to contact him, however, the calls failed to go through, and Elijah lost the job. “I was so angry,” he said. “I went into my room to pray. I asked God, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘The door of blessing will not open for you any longer.’” That was how God led him to seminary.

When Elijah completed seminary training in May 2014, he expected to continue serving at his church. But once again, God had other plans.

### Sent into Danger

God sent Elijah straight into the heart of Boko Haram territory, a part of northern Nigeria where the militant Islamist group

has wreaked havoc for about 15 years. At the time Elijah served there, Boko Haram, which had pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS), carried out almost daily attacks on Christians and government entities.

The Lord directed Elijah to a town called Gashua, in the Sahara Desert near the border with Niger. It was 250 miles away from his family’s home in Jos, and the rough car ride took him at least six hours each way over potholed and dangerous roads.

In 2017, Elijah and his wife, Felicia, moved to Gashua with their 11-year-old son, leaving their other children with adult siblings in Jos so they could continue their studies. “When I told my children we were moving, it was a big challenge,” Elijah said tearfully. “Two days before we left, my second daughter said, ‘Daddy, are you leaving us?’ I said, ‘Yes, we will leave ... If God wants me to leave, I will.’”

The Ogunyi family served at a church that had been established years earlier and had once had 100 members. By the time Elijah arrived, however, there were only five men, three women and five young people in the church. The other

members had been frightened away by a large-scale 2011 Boko Haram attack and ongoing violence in Yobe state. “After the church was attacked, the people locked the place up and ran away,” Elijah said.

Elijah decided to focus his ministry work on young people, who are at risk because of the region’s extreme poverty and are targeted for recruitment by local Islamists. Christian youth in Gashua are so poor that many struggle to afford food and water. Elijah said boys are lured with gifts, and Christian girls are frequently kidnapped, drugged and forced to marry Muslim men. “Instead of us winning them, they are winning our children,” he said.

The area is 99 percent Muslim, and many people are hostile to Christians. Market vendors often shamelessly charge Felicia double what they charge others.

The *almajiri*, Muslim children who help sustain mosques through begging and are given to the mosque for education, used to throw stones at Elijah and his family and call them infidels, but Elijah learned to keep a pack of cookies with him to give to the



hungry children. During the Muslim fasting season, he gives them water, and he has brought small gifts to those at his neighbourhood mosque. Now, the children look out for Elijah and guard his house when he is gone. "They started loving us," Elijah said.

Elijah's church has been burglarized twice. After the second incident, the local Muslim leader chastised the offenders and promised Elijah it would not happen again. "I have forgiven all those who persecute me," Elijah said, "because God teaches us to forgive. If I see them, I will share the Gospel with them."

### Ongoing Threats

Though Elijah has won the friendship of many Muslim neighbours, he lives with the ever-present threat of a Boko Haram attack. A neighbouring village 12 miles away has suffered recurring attacks by the Islamists, but so far God has protected Elijah and his family from harm. "When we hear that Boko Haram is coming, we run," Elijah laughed. But beneath his good humour, the fear is real. "We are afraid ... because we know they will look for pastors first," he said. "Persecution is a part of Christian life. If truly we pastors

are called by God, we should expect persecution."

While Elijah fully expects to suffer persecution, his family's greatest challenge has come from Gashua's natural environment. They struggle with malaria, typhoid and kidney problems because of the poor water. Both Elijah and Felicia have chronic eye problems caused by the pervasive dust. And because of the desert heat and unreliability of electricity, it is difficult to keep medications at the required temperature.

"I have never seen a place that has as many mosquitoes as Gashua," Elijah said. "They fill your house ... when you open the windows. When you spray insecticide, they die and cover the ground like ants, but they come back again after three hours. Before you can get treatment for malaria, another mosquito bites you. It makes it difficult to be healthy. But we thank God that we are still alive until today."

After living in Gashua for more than four years, the couple decided they needed to be based in Jos because of the decline in Felicia's health. They remain committed to their work in

▲ Daily tasks like grocery shopping can be burdensome when Muslim vendors charge Christians double the normal price for basic goods.

Gashua, however, so Elijah travels back and forth to maintain his ministry. "We have made up our minds that it is better to die in battle for God than to die as a coward," Elijah said. "I thank God for my wife, who is always supportive. She would rather die than leave God's will."

Having experienced God's hand guiding him to Gashua, Elijah is committed to staying until God leads him elsewhere. In fact, he was asked to pastor another church but declined the offer because he did not sense God leading him to take it. "We will continue until we die," he said. "Unless I hear His voice saying it is time for us to leave, we will continue." ●

# Witness in Captivity

KADUNA

**P**astor Emmanuel Maigairi had just finished praying with his wife and mother-in-law on the evening of 27 February 2021, when the sound of gunfire erupted outside their home in Nigeria's Kaduna state. Within minutes, nearly three dozen Fulani Islamic militants had burst into the house.

The militants ripped the curtains from the windows and used them to bind and blindfold Emmanuel, his wife, Ladi, and his mother-in-law. The attackers then took their phones and grabbed a box containing money that belonged to the pastor's church.

"You are going to suffer in the bush," the group's leader said, "and if we like, we might kill you."

But Emmanuel was unfazed by the militant's threat. "I have given myself over to God," he said boldly, "and I am ready to die."

The men then led their captives into the forest.

## Unsafe at Home

The kidnapping of Emmanuel and his family is just one of many that have occurred in northern Nigeria in recent years. In Kaduna state, several thousand were kidnapped in 2021, and Front-Line Workers expect that number to be even higher this year.

"Nowhere in northern Nigeria is safe anymore," a Front-Line Worker said. "People can no longer move about freely because kidnapping is on the rise. People are not even safe in their own homes, and people are traumatized every day because of the incessant kidnappings." Just weeks before kidnapping Emmanuel and his family, the militants burned the pastor's previous house in an attack on his village.

As the militants led their captives deeper into the forest, Ladi's mother began to slow their progress. Emmanuel begged the men to let her go, but they refused. Becoming more frustrated with her slow pace, one of the captors hit her on the head with the butt of his gun and another cut her on the back of her neck with a machete, leaving her for dead.



About an hour and a half later, the militants decided Ladi was also expendable. Though they initially discussed killing her, they eventually released her and told her how to find her way home. Ladi's mother, who had been left behind earlier, also survived the ordeal.

Emmanuel walked on, unsure whether he would ever see his family again.

### In the Kidnappers' Camp

After walking for hours, Emmanuel finally arrived at the kidnappers' camp, where he began the most difficult month of his life. During the daytime, he was bound, blindfolded and guarded by armed militants. And at night, he and other kidnapping victims slept on the ground, where maggots crawled around their hands and feet.

"Our abductors used to go into town and buy cold drinks in plastic bottles," Emmanuel said. "We would beg for the empty bottles and use them as pillows so the worms would not be able to enter our ears."

Emmanuel's captors beat him frequently, sometimes so severely that others in the camp feared he had been killed. The militants broke his ribs on his right side, broke a finger on his left hand and cut him with a machete on his lower back.

"The beating was a compulsory thing," he said. "On Sundays, they beat me because I am a pastor. There was a day they saw me praying, and they almost beat me to death. I did not even know that I had fainted. After three days, I heard some of the other captives talking behind our shed. They said they thought I had died from the beating. They said the fact that I survived proves there is a God."

The militants demanded 5 million naira, or about \$12,000, from Emmanuel's family, threatening to kill him if they wouldn't pay. They took Emmanuel and the other captives to a bone yard to show them what would happen if their ransoms were not paid.

Amid the bones, the captives saw the skeleton of a 3-month-old baby. The militants boasted about having shot the infant while being carried on his mother's back. They claimed to have removed the child's eyes and sent them to his father.

Emmanuel's captors threatened similar atrocities against him if his family did not meet their demands. But Emmanuel was unmoved. "If God says

I will die here, then that will be my fate," he told them. "If God says I will live, then I will live."

Emmanuel trusted God to sustain him through whatever the militants had planned. "I had faith that God was there with me," he said. "I prayed constantly. If not for the help of God, I would have been beaten to death. If not for God's grace, I would have died."

After a month and a day in the militants' camp, Emmanuel was finally released and returned to his family. He wept with joy as his blindfold was removed and his eyes gradually adjusted to the light.

### Depending on God

Following his release, Emmanuel learned that his family's abduction had been arranged by the leader of his village. He still hoped to silence Emmanuel's Christian witness.

"He does not like hearing the Gospel," Emmanuel explained. "He thought that kidnapping a pastor would bring him good money."

The community leader was arrested, but he was detained for only two months. Emmanuel, meanwhile, resumed his pastoral duties in the same community where he and his family were attacked and abducted; he knows his community needs the Gospel.

"There was a day someone asked me to leave my station because of what happened," Emmanuel recalled. "I said, 'If I leave there, which pastor will want to serve in this community? If I can endure it, it will be an example to others.'"

Emmanuel has sometimes struggled with fear since his kidnapping and monthlong detention. But he takes encouragement from Psalm 23 and trusts that God will take care of him even if he is persecuted again.

"If I hear a gunshot, I get scared," he said. "It is as if that day is happening all over again. But when that happens, I pray. I depend on God. I know that persecution is a part of the Christian life. We who are Christians will suffer. If this doesn't happen to us, the Bible is not fulfilled."

Emmanuel was reassigned to a different church recently, but he still sees his kidnappers occasionally. Surprisingly, he does not feel fearful or angry when he sees them. "All I can do is pray that God touches them," he said. "Forgiving them is necessary because God has forgiven me. If I know God, if I know Jesus Christ, I must forgive them."

Emmanuel's message for his brothers and sisters in Christ around the world is the same truth that sustained him during those long days in the militants' camp: "Depend on God in every situation." ●

▼ Grateful to have survived their ordeal, Ladi and Emmanuel continue to serve the church in Nigeria.



# Prayer Diary

September/October 2022

## SEPTEMBER

- S 18 SRI LANKA** Pray for those training and equipping pastors.
- M 19 MALI Pray for Hadijatou who was persecuted by her family because of her faith in Christ.
- T 20 ETHIOPIA Pray for Christian leaders from Muslim backgrounds who risk their lives to share the Gospel.
- W 21 QATAR Pray for those who hear the Gospel preached on Arabic Christian networks and websites.
- T 22 BRUNEI Pray for Ivan, pastor of one of the few underground churches.
- F 23 BAHRAIN Pray for the success of Scripture distribution efforts to local seekers.
- S 24 UAE\*** Pray for the encouragement and courage of local Believers worshipping in secret.
- S 25 PAKISTAN** Pray that Believers will understand who they are in Christ and be unashamed of the Gospel.
- M 26 NIGERIA Pray that God will deliver Christians in Maiduguri state from the hands of Boko Haram mercenaries.
- T 27 SOMALIA Pray for Christians recently arrested in Somaliland and pray also for their families.
- W 28 LAOS Pray for the wisdom of Christian workers who are often at great risk.
- T 29 MOROCCO Pray for unity among Christians in Morocco.
- F 30 IRAQ Pray for Brother N., a Kurdish leader in his 60s who was severely beaten and continues his ministry.

## OCTOBER

- S 1 CUBA** Pray for successful Bible distributions, which are difficult and often illegal.
- S 2 MYANMAR** Pray for pastors and Believers in the Wa region who have faced increased persecution and imprisonment.
- M 3 INDONESIA Pray that Cut Fitri will be reunited with her children, who were taken when she left Islam.
- T 4 ERITREA Pray for Eritrean Believers in Tigray who have had to flee or have been taken by the army.
- W 5 BAHRAIN Pray for Michael, who is in hiding from family members trying to harm him.
- T 6 DJIBOUTI Pray for Christian converts from Islam, who face pressure and persecution from their communities.
- F 7 AZERBAIJAN Pray for Front-Line Workers reaching those in small towns and villages.
- S 8 MAURITANIA** Pray for the repeal of apostasy laws, which carry the death penalty for former Muslims.
- S 9 ISRAEL** Pray for young Believers from Orthodox Jewish backgrounds trying to restart their lives with little education.
- M 10 TANZANIA Pray that Christians in predominantly Muslim areas will be bold and courageous witnesses.
- T 11 BRUNEI Pray that registered churches will find favour with the government and their neighbours.
- W 12 SAUDI ARABIA Pray that the asylum cases of persecuted Christians will be expedited.
- T 13 QATAR Pray for the establishment of an indigenous church in Qatar.
- F 14 MEXICO Pray for local leaders who enforce laws under which pastors and church leaders can be imprisoned.
- S 15 VIETNAM** Pray for those distributing Bibles in areas tightly controlled by the government.

\*United Arab Emirates

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