

FORCED OUT BECAUSE OF CHRIST

When the authorities found out they were given five days to leave the country they called home

June 4, 2007. Do you know where you were and what you were doing that day? For us it is a date we will not soon forget. It was our own personal 9/11. That was the day we were forced to leave a people and a nation we had called home for more than seven years.

In February 2000 we got on a plane and flew over ocean, mountains and desert to Central Asia, to live among a largely unreached Muslim people group of nearly 10 million. Our adopted people live in an area larger than France and Germany combined. And among these vast distances and large population only about 300 know Jesus.

We were asked by the C&MA to go there as International Workers (IWs) to work to see a church emerge among this mostly forgotten group of people. The C&MA arranged for us to partner with Frontiers, a mission agency dedicated to sharing the good news with the Muslims of the world. And so we joined a Frontiers team and spent 3 ½ years learning two difficult languages.

During this time God blessed us with the opportunity of seeing two young men commit themselves to Christ. They would meet with us weekly (sometimes more often) to pray and read God's Word. How exciting to see them grow in their faith and be baptized. Today, one of them is married to a believer and part of an underground church. Some good things are happening there.

However, the people live under a regime that allows for little actual religious freedom. All fellowships are underground. Believers have been beaten, fined, and jailed for their faith. In light of these facts, is the risk worth



**"SEE I SEND YOU OUT LIKE SHEEP
AMONG WOLVES. THEREFORE BE
AS CUNNING AS SERPENTS AND
AS INNOCENT AS DOVES"**

it? Should we be endangering the lives of these locals (never mind the consequences for ourselves as IWs)?

Certainly these are sobering questions. Yet at the end of the day there is only one answer. As challenging as an earthly existence might end up being for those there who choose to follow Christ, they can then face whatever comes with an assurance of God's love and presence and know that they will spend eternity with him. Compared to the rest of time spent separated from God the question becomes easy to answer. Of course we must go and tell.

As we go, we IWs take Christ's words to heart, "See I send you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as cunning as serpents and as innocent as doves." This is not a character trait most of us grew up hearing many sermons on. We were challenged to read Scripture anew searching for biblical guidelines on things like how to answer questions. (Consider how Jesus often responded to questions. See also I Samuel 16 and how Samuel responded to questions about what he was doing.) We had to ready ourselves for the fact that all communication—whether through the postal system, e-mail, or phone—would be subject to other eyes or ears.

Practically on the ground with locals, this security situation meant we never used our home phone to call local friends. We tried to only have believers come to our home after dark. We didn't associate in public with them. Local language Bibles had to be smuggled in and kept hidden. And then only given out once trust relationships had been established.

In the end, even with these cautions, we had to leave. A local believer we knew took a Bible on the train with him. In this nation to have a local language Bible is illegal. The police called him in for questioning. Under severe pressure, this young man named names. He told what he knew of us. It wasn't

long then until the police came looking for us.

After about five days of questioning, the police called me in again and gave us their verdict. I was guilty of the crime of "spreading religion." What followed was a scramble to pack up our lives in just five days. Passing on business responsibilities, trying to sell our car, disbursing a home full of items, and most importantly, saying goodbyes kept us madly busy for those few days.

As word went back to Canada in those few days of what was happening to us, many of you prayed. Thank you! We felt God's arms sustaining us and assuring us this was not simply the plot of evil men. He was sovereign and was still accomplishing his purposes.

In his goodness he gave us even a glimpse of that in those last days. Anna* was a local Muslim friend of my wife. She loved our two boys and clearly saw herself as an aunt to them. When the news came of our forced departure, she was crushed. She would come to our apartment to help pack and simply sit and cry on the bed. Previously, though warm towards us, she had been cool towards the Gospel.

However, as her heart broke she became softer. We were able to give many of our household goods to her but we had one special gift for her. We told her, "We have given you many things, but this is the most precious of all: God's Word." How it thrilled our hearts to have her come back to say goodbye and relate to us that she and her husband were reading and liked what they were reading.

Then our time was up. We had to get on the plane, leaving Anna behind. Leaving other believers imprisoned simply because they choose to follow Jesus. June 4, the day of our departure, is a date we will not soon forget. Nor will we forget these Central Asian people who have become so dear to us. Our time there is done but our love and even more so God's love for these people continues.

* Name has been changed to protect identity.

These International Workers currently are on Home Assignment in Canada where they continue to keep in touch with their adopted people and speak in churches about the plight of the persecuted church. For the sake of those they left behind, they have asked to remain anonymous

