

Stepping into the **Darkness**

"Please, no, Father. Not me!" I wrote in my journal. "It's fine for the gospel to go forward on the blood of martyrs, but not on mine. My blood prefers to be in safer places, more comfortable ones."

How God helped her accept his next step for her and her family in Central Asia

BY GRACE KINGSBRIDGE*

After eight years of fruitful missionary work with the Alliance in Hungary, God began directing us toward ministry in Central Asia. I responded in fear. Did he have to lead us to a more dangerous place?

When God whispered my name and invited me to step into the darkness of the unknown, his all-powerful hand did not shove me into place or slap me into shape, but rather gently grasped my small, feeble hand and led me safely, step-by-step, on his new adventure for me. He patiently guided me in my struggle with fear, my surrender to him, and my search for vision.

STRUGGLE WITH FEAR

In summer 2002, we left Hungary and moved back to Canada for a year of ministering in churches and waiting on God to show us his next step for our family. Early that fall, he started pointing us toward Central Asia.

As we waited for his specific direction, I battled a growing sense of foreboding about ministering in a closed, resistant nation. I wrote in my journal, "I ache because I am terrified about going to a closed Muslim country and living in constant insecurity and fear.

"I don't want to go where people hate us because we're Christian, where we live so close to the atrocities that man does to man that we have to see and even experience them. I just want a home, safety and stability. I don't want to be a hero or a fool and go somewhere that no one wants to go because it is so dangerous."

Later I wrote, "I'm so tired of waiting, Lord. And the worst part is that the path you seem to be opening up for us is one I've never wanted to travel, so I feel impending doom rather than anticipation."

A few days later I sat on the couch with our two children and read them a Ladd Family adventure story. As the plot thickened, my nine-year-old daughter said, "Stop reading, Mom, it's too scary! I don't want to read this book any more."

"Let's see how the book ends," I replied. We read the last page and saw that the story ended happily. This enabled her to endure the frightening circumstances with the characters through the rest of the book.

That evening, as I reflected on this incident, the parallel to my own life hit me powerfully. I had already read the last page! As a follower of Jesus I

knew that no matter how frightening the conflict in my life, my story would end wonderfully in heaven. I realized that night that whenever fear of the unknown overwhelmed me, I could read about my last page in God's Word and be encouraged to press on.

SURRENDER TO GOD

Though comforted by my new understanding of how to move forward in spite of my fears, I still dreaded going to Central Asia. Something held me back.

In October 2002, I attended a service where the speaker shared his vision of the cross. After his moving message, he invited those to whom God had spoken to kneel at the foot of the large wooden cross in the front of the auditorium. I sat in my seat, delighted at the response of so many. But as we sang, "Oh the wonderful cross, bids me come and die and find that I might truly live," I felt God urging me to surrender completely to him at the foot of the cross.

I walked forward to the cross, bowed down and surrendered myself to serve God even in places where persecution is a threat for Christians. Filling tissue after tissue, I relinquished everything to God—my husband, my children and myself, my pride, selfishness and love of comfort and control.

As I knelt with my head in my hands I felt free, but also spent and empty. I asked God to fill me and give me a blessing, as Jacob had requested after wrestling with God.

I had hoped for something more dramatic, but instead God gave me what I really needed

"My presence will go with you and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14), came to mind. I had hoped for something more dramatic, but instead God gave me what I really needed—the promise of his presence and rest no matter what lay ahead.

The next day, my seven-year-old son brought his Bible to me and said, "Look at this cool verse, Mom!" He read, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."

A month later God started to answer my prayer with a disturbing picture



Grinning, he said, “See, God’s *presents* are going with us!”

God promised me his abiding *presence* as I walked on his path, but he also blessed me with his generous *presents*, like the rest that comes with complete surrender and the amazing confirmation of his Word to me through my young son.

SEARCHING FOR VISION

Fear no longer overwhelmed me, and I had fully surrendered my heart to God, but I still lacked a clear sense of purpose for me in Central Asia. Later that fall I wrote again in my journal, “Going to an unknown place in Central Asia doesn’t excite me at all. Is my faith so feeble? Why is my husband so gung-ho on Central Asia and I have no desire to go there?”

“Why do I hope against hope that you will open up something else for us? Is this just like Jesus going to the cross and saying, ‘Take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done?’ Am I just being a Jonah? If you do want us in Central Asia, will you ever give me a vision and joy for going there?”

A month later God started to answer my prayer with a disturbing picture. My stomach contracted and my heart beat faster as in my mind’s eye I saw a thin, oval, rubber-like cloud floating up from southeastern Central Asia and spreading to enshroud all of the Central Asian countries. The powerfully evil cloud was called, ‘The Shadow of Death.’ I shuddered and did not understand what it meant.

In my scripture reading several weeks later, the promise in Matthew 4:16 struck me with great force: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Those living in the land of the Shadow of

Death. That was the picture God had given me! What a tremendous promise for the people of Central Asia—that they, who live under the darkness of the Shadow of Death, will see God’s great light. And God was offering me the privilege of being a part of this unveiling!

Light began to dawn in my heart as I became fully convinced of God’s call for me personally to Central Asia.

STEPPING INTO THE DARKNESS

When England faced a new year enshrouded by World War II, King George spoke these words to his people, “I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.’ May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all.”

The adventure of stepping into the darkness of Central Asia was not easy for me, but God gently held my hand each step of the way. When I struggled with fear, he reminded me that I have already read the last page of my life, and can look forward to a true ‘happily ever after’ in heaven.

In the pain of surrender, he promised me his continual presence and rest. When I searched for vision, he showed me the hope of his light dawning over Central Asia and that I am privileged to play a part in that ‘Sonrise.’

God continues to hold our hands as we walk in his light here in Central Asia. As is often the case with fears, most of them were unfounded, and we live in relative peace and security. ☪

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