



The Idolatry of Comfort & the Glory of Christ

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—I invite you to open with me to Philippians 1. The plan this morning was to dive back into our “12 Traits of a Biblical Church” series after Easter last week and, Lord willing, we’ll continue that series next week. But as I was praying and preparing this week, I had a strong sense that we need to go in a different direction today, particularly in light of a couple people who are in worship with us.

One of these people is a brother named Gilbert Hovsepian. His father, Haik, planted a church in Iran back in 1964, and in the days that followed he became the leader of a large network of churches there. Gilbert’s dad was known for proclaiming Christ in the middle of increasing persecution, defending Christians when they were persecuted. Back in 1993, he received news about an execution order that had been put out for an Iranian pastor who had been converted from Islam and who had been in prison for about ten years. Gilbert’s dad started working tirelessly to bring international attention to that pastor’s plight, and eventually that pastor was released. But three days after he was released, Gilbert’s dad disappeared. Gilbert was 17 at the time and two weeks later Gilbert’s family found his dad’s body, stabbed 26 times in the chest. In the days that followed, several other Iranian believers disappeared suddenly or were murdered, including that same pastor who had just been released.

Gilbert is here with us today and led our worship. He also led worship yesterday at a conference put on by Voice of the Martyrs held here. A variety of people spoke at that conference, including Gracia Burnham, whose husband was martyred beside her years ago in the Philippines, where they were serving as missionaries. She is here with us today as well.

As I was thinking about Gilbert and Gracia, and praying about what God wants to say to us today, I couldn’t help but think that we need to pause what we had planned and hear a word that I believe we desperately need to hear, for our lives, our families and this church. I’ve titled this sermon, “The Idolatry of Comfort and the Glory of Christ.”

Let’s just put everything on the table. We live in a culture that is deeply committed to comfort, health and safety which is not surprising. If this life is all there is, then make it as comfortable, as long and as pleasure-filled as possible. Get more and better and nicer and newer possessions. Build bigger barns, larger savings accounts and 401k’s to protect you—just in case. Avoid risk. Maximize reward.

Live your best life now. This is success, according to our culture. What's sobering, though, is the way this perspective has penetrated the people of God—you and me, our lives, our families and the church.

I was talking this last week with the professor at a respected Christian university. He told me how the trustees of that school have forbidden professors to take students on mission trips overseas to Muslim countries, because there's too much risk involved. I asked him, "Do they not want students to obey the Great Commission?" He said, "Oh, the trustees aren't the biggest barrier. The biggest barrier is the parents. Even if trustees allowed trips to Muslim countries, parents of Christian students won't let them go, because they think it's too dangerous. The parents won't go and they're sure not letting their kids go."

Parents in this room—if that is our perspective, then we may call ourselves Christians, but we are not following Christ. We in the church need a totally different perspective than the culture. What if, in these ways, the worldview of our culture is completely wrong? What if this life is not all there is? What if God never intended this to be our best life now? What if there is something that is infinitely more important in your life and family than comfort, health and safety? What if missing this actually means missing the whole point of your life?

Listen to the Word of God. These are not my words. Paul wrote these words from prison, inspired by the Holy Spirit. He was in prison for proclaiming the gospel. Listen to Philippians 1:12-30:

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of

Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Christ is your life.

Do you hear what the Word of God is saying? For the Christian—for every true follower of Christ—He is your life. Plain and simple, Christ is your life. This is what we saw last week in John 20. We asked the question “Is Christ your life?” on Easter. When you truly believe in Christ, then you have life in His name. That’s exactly what Paul is saying here. He says it explicitly in verse 21, “*For me to live is Christ.*” Jesus is his life.

It’s all over what we just read. In verse 13 he says his imprisonment is for whom? It’s for Christ. Then in verses 15-18 he starts talking about people who are preaching Christ for different motives. He says in verse 18, “What is most important is that Christ is proclaimed. That’s what makes me joyful. That’s what brings life to me. As long as Christ is proclaimed, I rejoice.” Verse 20: “I just want Christ to be honored in my body, regardless of whether I live or die. I just want Him to be glorified.” Verse 23: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

It’s like when I’m out of town on a long trip and I’m sending a text to Heather saying, “I miss you so much. I can’t wait to be back home with you and the kids.” I want to be away from wherever I am and home with them. That’s how Paul feels about Christ. He just wants to be with Jesus. He can’t wait to be out of here and with Him. “But for now,” Paul says in verse 26, “I trust that Christ has me here for your sake, so that you might glory in Christ.” In other words, “So you might know Christ as your life.”

We’ll jump over Philippians 2, where Paul talks about how great and glorious Jesus is. He tells how Jesus became God in the flesh, coming to us in love in the very nature of a Servant. He made Himself nothing and became obedient to the point of dying on a cross for our sins. Then He rose from the dead and is exalted as Lord over all.

After this glorious picture of Jesus, Paul writes Philippians 3 where he’s talking about a group of people called Judaizers and calling them out for how they’re defining success. Essentially, he tells them, “No one can compete with me when it comes to success in this world.”

Let’s pick this up in the middle of verse four where Paul starts listing off the highlights of his resume. He says, “If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.”

1. Family heritage. “*Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews...*” (3:5). Paul’s Jewish roots were thick. He was born, not just to the people of Israel, but to the tribe of Benjamin. We learn from the Old Testament that this tribe gave Israel its first king, Saul, after whom Paul was named. You can’t beat his Jewish family heritage.
2. Social status. He’s from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. Basically, he’s in the upper echelon in Jewish life. High class. He’s at the pinnacle of Jewish social structure.

3. Biblical knowledge. “*As to the law, a Pharisee...*” Now, we have to be careful here because many people who read the Bible think of Pharisees mainly as hypocrites, because Jesus was continually calling them out. But that’s not necessarily how they were viewed in that day. The Pharisees were known for their love of the law, for their strict interpretations of and zealous obedience to the law. They knew the law backwards and forwards, and they followed it.
4. Religious activity. Paul is saying, “I knew the Word,” and then he backed it up with religious activity. He wasn’t just mildly religious; he was zealous in his religion. Verse six: “*As to zeal, a persecutor of the church...*” He was on a mission.
5. Moral lifestyle. “*As to righteousness, under the law blameless.*” Do you want to see somebody who follows all the rules and keeps all the law? Nobody can compare with Paul.

I want you to look at that resume and think about what these things have in common. Family heritage, social status, biblical knowledge, religious activity and a moral lifestyle. What do they have in common? They’re all good things! Family heritage isn’t bad. Social status—not necessarily bad by any means. Biblical knowledge is not bad. Religious activity or a moral lifestyle. These are all great things.

But listen to what Paul says next in verse seven: “*But whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*” All these good things are just loss. And just in case we didn’t hear him the first time, he says it again: “*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” And then he says it a third time. “*For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*”

We need to feel the weight of this statement. That word “rubbish” in the original Greek is literally “dung.” You likely can think of other words that would be inappropriate to use right now—but that’s what Paul just said. He just took all the good and valuable things in his life and he just called them all rubbish—compared to knowing Christ. He says, “I would gladly lose all those things just so I could know Christ.” In verse ten he says, “*That I may know him...*” Christ is his life.

Picture this. It’s like Paul took a piece of paper and put two columns on it. On one side, he lists all the good things this world has to offer. Then above that list he writes one word, “Loss.” Then in the other column, he writes one word: Christ. On top of that column, he writes “Gain.” He really believes that the best things of this world are like dung in comparison to Christ. That is a very different way to think. That is a very different way to live. That is a radically different Christianity than the one that is so often practiced in our culture—in churches like ours.

This is so important; I can’t emphasize this enough. The danger is that you can have all these things in this world—a good family life, good social status, nice house, nice car, nice job, nice vacations. You can have biblical knowledge and religious activity on top of that. You can lead a good, moral, decent, upstanding life. You can have all these things and still not have Christ.

I'm not asking, "Do you go to church?" "Have you prayed a prayer?" "What kind of car do you drive?" "How successful are you in your business?" "How moral of a life are you living?" "How much biblical knowledge do you have?" Get through the rubbish. Get through the dung. The important questions are, "Do you know Christ?" "Is Christ your life?" "Is your life such that you would say all the best things in your life—family, finances, possessions, pleasures, comfort, safety, health, wealth, success—don't compare to the treasure I have in Christ?"

Isn't this the testimony of men and women throughout history? God help us. God make us like Job. If You take it all away—my land, my home, my possessions, my health, my children and even my own wife is cursing me—I will still have my joy and my hope and my life, because "my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25).

God, make us like Hannah. Amidst her longing for a child, she cries in 1 Samuel 2:6 (NIV): "*The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.*" She trusted in Him.

Lord, make us like Moses as described in Hebrews 11:24-26 (NIV): "*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*" Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as being of greater value than all the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

God, make us like men and women throughout Christian history. Just like Gilbert's dad in Iran, saying, "I'm going to protect the body of Christ and I'm going to proclaim the gospel of Christ, no matter what, because Christ is my life, even if that means I will never see my family that I love again—at least not in this world."

This is huge. This is such a different way to think and a different way to live. This affects everything. It affects the way you view possessions in this world. You realize they're rubbish. This affects the way you view so many pursuits and pleasures this world puts in front of you. They're all rubbish, compared to knowing, gaining, treasuring and loving Christ. He is your life.

So is it true that Jesus is your life like that? Then follow this next point.

When Jesus is your life, then suffering is a gift.

If what we've been talking about so far has been crazy in this world, we are totally off the reservation now. Suffering, a gift? Go back to Philippians 1 and look at verse 29. This is a weird verse—very strange. Paul says, "*It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*"

What does that mean? *“It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him....”* Okay, that makes sense. It’s a gift to believe in Christ. To receive salvation in Christ, to believe the gospel—the good news that God loves us enough to send Jesus to die for our sins. Absolutely, that’s a gift. It’s a gift to believe in Christ. But that’s not all Paul is saying here. Paul is saying there’s another gift here as well. Great. What’s the other gift? *“It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”*

What kind of gift is that? Have you ever been given a gift you didn’t want? You didn’t ask for this. Suffering has been granted, given, to you.

Imagine this invitation: “Become a Christian and get a gift.” What’s the gift? “Suffering.” Who’s walking forward now? How in the world do you see suffering as a gift? I’m so glad you asked. Here’s how.

Think about what suffering is. Suffering, simplified, is when things that we want, things that we love, things that we desire and enjoy—oftentimes really good things—are taken away from us. People. Family. Friends. When we lose somebody we love, we suffer. When a spouse no longer loves, we suffer. When we lose health, when we’re struck with disease and pain, we suffer. When we lose money, when we lose a job—we suffer. When we lose all these things we’ve been talking about we suffer: comfort, health, safety, on and on and on. Oftentimes these good things are taken away from us, sometimes by circumstances in our control, but many times by circumstances out of our control. Regardless of when or how they’re taken away from us, we suffer.

Go back to what we talked about earlier. When you have already taken all the best things this world has to offer and you put them in a column under “Loss,” and you put Christ in a column under “Gain,” then when one or more of these things are taken from you, it’s easy. No, it’s not easy! I want to be clear. I’m not saying, and the Bible is not saying, that suffering is easy. Losing great and good things in this world—people we love, our health, and on and on—is not easy. The pain is real. The tears are many.

Suffering becomes a gift when treasuring Christ above all is your goal.

When Christ is your life, and one or more of these things are taken away from you, then in the end the suffering—the taking away of these things—only drives you more to Him. Suffering becomes a gift when treasuring Christ above everything is your goal.

I was talking with Gilbert before this gathering. He was telling me that he was in prison for his faith, he had nowhere else to turn. Prison made him a man of prayer and a man of the Word. Prison made him a man of faith. Prison caused him to cling to Christ like he’d never clung to Christ before.

Do you see that as a gift? If you do, then you realize the dangerous place to be is not in prison, but in comfort and safety., because imprisonment—being in danger for your faith—causes you to cling to Christ, whereas comfort and safety oftentimes cause you to cling to this world. That’s the dangerous place to be. Nowhere in Scripture do we see any exhortations to pursue suffering, to pursue persecution, to pursue even dying for our faith. That’s not martyrdom—that’s just plain-dumb. We don’t do that.

But when we do pursue Christ in a world of sin and suffering, then we will experience sin and suffering. And the more that suffering takes things away from our lives, the more we’ll be drawn to Christ. Do you realize what this “treasuring Christ above all” means then for your life? Don’t miss this. The Bible is showing us here a rock-solid foundation for security, joy, peace, hope and life in this turbulent world of suffering.

When you’re treasuring Christ over and above everything in this world, then there is nothing this world can do to rob your joy, hope, peace and life, because you have all these things in Christ—and nothing can ever take that away from you. Cancer can’t take that away from you. Nothing. This is why Paul speaks this way about his imprisonment. “When my freedom is taken away, it’s not easy. But it’s good—why? Because Christ is being magnified.”

This is not true just in Paul’s life. It’s not just about Paul. It’s not just about you. It’s not just about me. In the providence of God, suffering leads to the spread of the gospel to others. Suffering leads not just you and me to treasure Christ more—suffering leads others to see Christ as the treasure He is. Listen to Paul. He’s saying, “Here I am in prison. My freedom is gone. But look what’s happening as a result. The whole imperial guard is hearing about Christ. The gospel is being preached all over the place.”

Then he says point-blank, “I don’t want to be suffering in prison here. I don’t want to be here anymore. I desire to depart and be with Christ. That would be better by far.” It’s not even close for Paul. Then he says, “But I want you to know the treasure that’s found in Christ, so I’m glad to stay here toward that end, that you might know Him, that you might know how good He is.

Don’t miss the connection here between suffering and the spread of the gospel. Think about it. If you and I profess faith in Christ and everything always goes well for us, then the world will not take notice of that. The world will see us just like everybody else who has all the comforts, all the stuff, of this world like everybody else. Then you tack on Jesus on Sundays—big deal. Nice for you.

But here’s where things will take a decidedly different turn. When you lose some of the most valuable and precious gifts in this world, in the middle of suffering, and you have joy and peace and hope because Christ is your life, then the world will take notice of that. When that child is born with special needs that totally change the course of your life and family—and like many families across this church, you’re exhausted every single day caring for those needs—yet in the middle of your weakness you say, “The strength of Christ is sufficient for me,” the world will take notice of that.

When that cancer is killing your blood cells and you're walking through indescribable pain, it's not that the pain isn't real. But in the midst of that pain, when you can testify, "Christ alone is my peace," the world will take notice of that. When you get that diagnosis that you only have months to live, then you live out those months with hope rather than despair because Christ is your life, then the world takes notice of that. When you lose that person you love and were dependent on, you may be grieving like you've never grieved before. Yet if in the middle of that grief you can say, "I trust in Christ. He's my King. I know He will take care of me," the world takes notice of that.

I was talking with a brother this last week who has liver cancer. He desperately needs a transplant, but just found out he doesn't qualify for one. Yet he told me, "I'm sending out prayer updates to all kinds of people every week and I'm preaching the gospel in every single one of them." Like Paul, these literally were his words: "I just want Christ to be glorified, whether I live or die." That's a different way to live, and that's a different way to die.

When Christ is your life, then dying is gain.

When Christ is your life, not only is suffering a gift, but also dying is gain. Paul said, "To live is Christ and to die is...okay too." No. It's gain. It's better. How is that possible? Let's put it all together. Think about what we've talked about. When even the best things in this world are in one column under "Loss," and Christ is in the other column under "Gain," then when literally everything is taken from you—your family, your spouse, your children, your possessions, your job, your health, your very breath—when it's all gone, then what will you have? You will have Christ, and you will have Him as you've never had Him before. You'll have Him more fully and more finally than you've ever had Him before. You will have Christ.

So this is the question for each of us. Let this land on your heart, right where you're sitting. Do you love Christ so much that to lose everything in order to be with Him would be gain for you? That is a radical way to live—and that's a radical truth to believe.

As your pastor, I sense as I'm preaching this that this is totally against the grain of every message we hear in our culture, and often in our church culture. As your pastor I'm urging you to believe that Christ is better than falling in love, than marrying and having healthy children and seeing your children grow up and making a name for yourself and finishing your career and having your dream home and dream vacations and dream retirement. Christ is better than all of those things. Christ is better than life itself.

When you believe this, then you will live so differently in this world. You won't run after all this world says you want and says you need. You'll see this world in its proper perspective. You'll see your life in its proper perspective. And then it will just make sense to sacrifice your possessions, plans,

dreams, comforts and safety. It will just make sense to sacrifice your life to make the goodness and greatness and glory of Christ known wherever God leads you in the world.

Now it will make sense to take this gospel of Jesus Christ to the Middle East and to gladly send your kids there as well. For now, because of Christ, the worst that could happen—death—actually becomes the best thing that could happen. In Christ, the worst thing that could happen to you will become the best thing that will happen to you. That transforms how you view comfort and health and safety in this world. It totally transforms everything when Christ is your life.

It's one thing to preach this and talk about this—it's another thing to live this. So I want to invite you to watch this video.

Video Clip

Narrator: At the end of May 2001, American missionaries to the Philippines, Martin and Gracia Burnham, made the fateful decision to celebrate their 18th wedding anniversary in a secluded resort on the island of Palawan.

Gracia: About four in the morning, there was pounding on the door. At first, I thought it was a drunk guard or something. Martin kind of knew we were in trouble. Just as he got to the door, it burst open and in came three guys with M-16s. I think one of them had a mask on.

Narrator: The masked men were Abu Sayyaf, a militant Muslim terrorist group with ties to al-Qa'ida and Osama bin Laden. Along with 20 other guests, the Burnhams would be forced from their room at gunpoint and taken many miles across the open sea to the Muslim stronghold of Basilan. For more than a year, the Burnhams were constantly on the move, living in primitive conditions in the jungle, evading capture from the Philippine military, under the total control of their captors.

Gracia: They were the enemy and we never forgot that they were “the bad guys.” But on the other hand, they were our family. They were the people we lived with for a year and hiked with and starved with. You got to know the personalities of the guys.

Narrator: Throughout their captivity, the Burnhams had lived through 16 different gun battles between the Abu Sayyaf and the Philippine military. On the afternoon of June 7, over a year since their abduction, the bullets erupted once more.

Gracia: I dropped from the hammock and before I even got to the ground, I was shot in the leg. I kind of slid down the mountain. It was so steep, I slid down a little bit and came to rest beside Martin. I looked over at him and he was bleeding from his chest. During the gun battle, the grenades were all around us, and the shooting. But I just kept thinking every moment was my last moment. Sometime during that time I just felt Martin's body get real heavy.

Narrator: Tragically, Martin was killed during the fire fighting. Gracia was rescued and returned home amidst a national spotlight.

Another female speaker: There was no way Gracia and Martin could escape....

Sean Hannity: Welcome to the show. Good to have you. Thank you for being with us....

Gracia: Thank you.

Male speaker: What started as a romantic getaway for Martin and Gracia Burnham, American missionaries working in the Philippines....

Male speaker: I want to thank her for having the courage to be here today....

Male speaker: Gracia, it's good to have you with us....

Gracia: Thank you.

Narrator: The outpouring of support was beyond anything Gracia could have imagined. Gracia Burnham lived through a real nightmare of fear, captivity, physical trauma and devastating loss. Yet she has survived the ordeal more convinced of God's grace than ever before. Gracia truly has lived in the presence of her enemies, and with God's help, has learned to fly again.

David: Just recently I've gotten to know Gracia Burnham enough to know that that applause made her very uncomfortable, because the Spirit of Christ is all over this sister. Let me back up a little. What did your and Martin's ministry look like in the Philippines? What were you guys doing there?

Gracia: Martin was a jungle pilot for New Tribes Mission. People who work with New Tribes Mission—who have now changed their name to Ethnos360—work in jungle areas where roads don't go. They go into totally unreached and unreachable places. So our job was to take supplies to people who were living in the middle of nowhere, sharing the gospel.

Think of all the things you buy for your household in a month. We had 12 families we would buy that stuff for. We'd box it up and take it in. We were also available for medical emergencies and to bring tribal people out when they needed it. We did that for 17 years. We loved our ministry there.

David: They have pretty state-of-the-art airports in those regions?

Gracia: [Laughing] No. Interesting flying.

David: I'm guessing you all knew there are safer places to fly in the world and longer landing strips with pavement. So why did you go to the Philippines? Why use your gifts in that way?

Gracia: I think Martin knew that one person can make a difference. Martin grew up in the Philippines. His parents were tribal missionaries. When they had four little children they felt God calling them to go to an unreached people group, and they were the first foreigners ever to go into this group of people called the Eboloi. Martin grew up with that. When he would go off to boarding school,

the pilot that would pick him and his brothers and sisters up took them in a small airplane. That began his love of flying. So when he became a good pilot, he thought he should use his gifts for something that mattered, so he became a missionary pilot.

David: I'd like to pause for a second. Let's get the picture of our brother and sister who are pursuing Christ, who are obedient to Christ. It's not just thrill seeking: "Hey, we want to go do some cool flying." They wanted to obey Christ. If that meant letting go of comforts, they still wanted to obey Christ. So they let go of safety. This is not the easiest job, but they decided to let go of that—because they were obeying Christ. Obviously the Lord would call you to let go of everything in the days to come. So how have you seen suffering as a gift?

Gracia: Oh, I think God gave me the gift of suffering in order to change me. I didn't even realize I needed to be changed until everything was gone—everything but Martin was taken away from me. There in the jungle, I began to see a Gracia that I didn't even want to believe existed. I saw a hateful Gracia. I saw a Gracia who thought God had abandoned us. It was shocking what happened in my heart.

When I saw that, I began to cry out, "God, would You change me?" I was such a mess. I didn't even think He could. But of course, God can do anything—and He promised to change us. He started teaching me really good things in the jungle: forgiveness, kindness, love, joy, peace—you know, all those things you want to have in your heart. I wonder if it's things that never would have happened if I hadn't had my jungle experience.

David: So looking back, in light of all that happened, do you regret going to the Philippines?

Gracia: No. I don't regret going to the Philippines. We love the Philippines and our hearts are still there. One of the last things Martin said to me was on a long day of hiking. I was so discouraged, as I often was. I said, "I don't know how much longer I can do this."

Martin said, "Gracia, I've been thinking about Psalm 100 all day long, especially that first verse that talks about serving the Lord with gladness. This doesn't seem like serving the Lord. We've been walking through this jungle for over a year. But let's, by faith, accept that that's what we're doing here—that we're serving God here—and let's do it with gladness."

It was only minutes later that the military came over the hill, opened fire on us, and he was dead. It was like God's words to me through Martin—his final charge. So I can carry that with me. Whatever God calls me to do now, I'm going to do it with my whole heart. I'm going to do it with gladness.

David: It's real—to live is Christ and to die is gain. So I'm going to call us to pray, and then after we've prayed I want to ask Gracia to lead us in prayer. I want us to pray in two ways. One, I want us to pray specifically for brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering right now for the spread of

the gospel. Think especially of people who are in prison, who are being held captive—which is a reality for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ right now. I was reading in 1 Corinthians 12 this last week, where it says if one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. We need to come alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray for them, interceding for them and their families.

You pray alone, or with somebody else, or with a group of people. You can sit or get down on your knees or stand, but I want us to cry out to God. I think of times I've been in places like South Korea where our Korean brothers and sisters call out with one cry. All their voices are crying out to God together. I want to invite us to do that—speaking in one voice to God at the same time on behalf of our brothers and sisters around the world. I know there are 106 different nations represented here, and I want you to pray in your heart language. Let's just cry out to God with one voice, all at the same time, out loud. Let's pray and intercede for our suffering brothers and sisters around the world.

Then the second way I want us to pray is for our lives and our families and our church. If you're not part of this church, pray for your own church. Pray that we would live like this is what we believe—not like we're just going along with the rest of the world and tacking Jesus on to it. Does that make sense?

So right now, by yourself or with one or two or more people around you—sit, stand, on your face—let's begin right now to speak aloud to God. Let's cry out to God on behalf of our persecuted suffering brothers and sisters around the world. Let's plead to our Father for our family in chains. Begin calling out to God, right now.

Now in light of praying for our brothers and sisters around the world, let's also pray for our lives and our families. Pray for this church or whatever church you're a part of. Let's pray that God would help us believe that Christ is better, that we would gladly forsake the pleasures and possessions of this world in order to follow Him wherever and however He leads us. Pray that He will give us a right perspective on the greatest things in this world, compared to Christ. Let's pray for our lives, our families, our church.

Gracia: Heavenly Father, we want to lift up our brothers and sisters who are hurting today—hurting because they know You and because they've had the boldness to step out, follow You and share You with their neighbors and co-workers. And because of that, they're facing hardship. I pray that today You would be very, very near to them. I pray for the women who've lost their husbands this week because their husbands decided they would stay true to You. Would You comfort those women's hearts?

I pray for children who are going to grow up now without their dads, like Gilbert did. Lord, I pray that those kids will know that their dads are heroes. They stayed true to God's Word. Their dads stayed true to You. I pray that You would provide for them food, water, whatever they need today. We just

lift them up. I pray most of all that You would be glorified through their lives, because that's the very reason these folks are suffering persecution: they want You to be lifted up.

Then I pray for us, the church here in America. O Lord, would You shake us to our core? Would You teach us to open our mouths and talk about the beautiful Savior we have and how You changed our lives and our hearts? Lord, we offer our children to You, to go out to places that will never hear the gospel otherwise. I pray that we'll be their biggest cheerleaders as they go to hard places. We offer our grandchildren to You, that they'll love You enough to go out and spread the gospel.

As for us, we pray that everything will be counted as loss for the excellency of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in Whose name we pray. Amen.

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