



his life for me, so
for him, I will use every breath
proclaim his
abundance, or need,
will not. I cannot
his grace
me
boldly
in safety
keep quiet
if his name costs
I will not deny
me, I will

THE MARTYR'S OATH

*Living for the Jesus
They're Willing to Die For*

he is always with me.
to live is Christ for me to die is gain.

JOHNNIE MOORE

AUTHOR OF *DEFYING ISIS*



THE MARTYR'S OATH



*Living for the Jesus
They're Willing to Die For*

JOHNNIE MOORE

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The Martyr's Oath: Living for the Jesus They're Willing to Die For

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*The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear.
What can mere people do to me?*

PSALM 118:6, NLT

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INTRODUCTION

I'LL NEVER FORGET witnessing two thousand followers of Jesus take a martyr's oath.

I was in India attending the graduation at a Bible school founded by one of my mentors, the late Bishop M. A. Thomas. He not only knew firsthand the sting of persecution and the reality of holding a minority faith in a dangerous world, but he also knew the power of God's love to soften even the hardest heart. Born into poverty, he had walked across India to the area where God called him, wearing a giant placard with the gospel written on it so he could minister along the way. Once he arrived, he was thrown in prison, but he led so many inmates to Christ that the jailers kicked them all out. Those inmates became the first members of his church.

The ministry he founded in Kota in 1960 grew and eventually established ninety-five Bible institutes, sixty-one orphanages, forty-three thousand church plants, a hospital, medical clinics, substance abuse programs, and a publishing arm that prints literature in the countless languages of India.¹ And as a bishop, he oversaw ten thousand churches, many of which were planted in leper colonies. He survived at least fifteen assassination

attempts and walked with a limp because he was beaten so many times. Yet he wore a prominent cross around his neck to ensure extremists would recognize him. He was not ashamed of the cross.

Bishop Thomas made it clear that each of his students would be qualified for graduation only once they stood and confessed their willingness to serve Jesus even if it meant their death. They were to repeat after him, word for word, a martyr's oath. And they did—standing in an open-air tent next to a church that was too small to house them all. To this day, that church has a memorial next to its platform listing the names of the graduates who have already been martyred for Jesus.

One year extremists threw Molotov cocktails over the wall during a gathering the day before the graduation service, threatening to kill Bishop Thomas and burn the church. I can still hear Bishop Thomas's resonant voice booming over the microphone. "Listen to me!" he said. "Tomorrow there will be a service at this church. It will be a funeral service or a graduation service, but there will be a service!"

He was fearless.

The first time I witnessed the graduation, it shook my faith in a way I had never felt before. The temperatures soared over one hundred degrees without even a whiff of breeze, and an aroma of spices and humanity filled the still air as two thousand students pressed together with their family and friends. Unlike the American culture I was accustomed to, no one complained about the heat, the smell, or the inconvenience while singing "I Surrender All."

Word by word, the resolute roar of the students' voices rose from that dusty tent as they pledged their lives and deaths to

Jesus. I remember thinking that I was standing in the book of Acts, witnessing a raw, first-century Christianity that I'd been shielded from in the United States. I felt deprived yet suddenly spiritually alive in an entirely new way.

My faith finally made sense. All the disparate parts of the New Testament came together in my heart as I witnessed this authentic expression of faith in Jesus. *Real* faith in Jesus. These bold brothers and sisters weren't just willing to live for Jesus; they were willing to die for him.

I asked myself—as I have a thousand times since—*Why are so few of us in America willing to live for Jesus when others are so willing to die for him?* Seeing Jesus through the eyes of the persecuted church transformed me.

I've written this book because I believe seeing your faith through their eyes will change you, too. My prayer for you is that their stories will change your life in a way you desperately need. Perhaps it will change you in a way you don't even know you need.

I've also written this book because the Bible declares, "If one part [of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, NLT). I feel like we barely care or barely know the stories of our persecuted brothers and sisters. Either is an unspeakable tragedy. As my friends at Open Doors International are fond of saying, "If you follow Jesus, there's a part of your family you need to know: those who are suffering and those who will die for Jesus."

Some estimate that every five minutes, a Christian is martyred for the faith.² For many, avoiding martyrdom is as simple as writing or even saying that they renounce their faith in Jesus. For these martyred believers, the gospel is so precious, the comfort of the Holy Spirit so tangible, and the example of those

Christians who have come before them so compelling that they will not weaken or renounce their faith—regardless of the cost.

It has cost them their lives. The gospel has cost most of us nothing.

My team and I have crisscrossed the world, recorders in hand, to gather reports from survivors, asking them to tell us what God is doing in and through ordinary people who meet extraordinary circumstances with overcoming faith.

In these pages, I relate what they said, using their exact words. We've transcribed their stories, connecting each with observations about the suffering they face and the lessons to be learned. In every story, as in the declarations of those graduates from Bishop Thomas's school, you will find a willingness to live and to die for Christ.

Like the family we met in the Middle East who found faith in Christ as refugees fleeing the Syrian war. They were jihadists themselves until they encountered Jesus in a miraculous way. The news made it all the way back to one of their adult siblings in Syria, prompting a strongly worded message in reply, guaranteeing their death by crucifixion if they did not return to Islam. The new follower of Jesus replied to his brother-in-law, "We are willing to die for Jesus, but please do not crucify us. We are not worthy of dying in the same way as our Savior."

Unlike the jihadist martyrs gaining the attention—and fear—of the world, these followers of Jesus are not seeking to die in order to *earn* a place in heaven. They are willing to die as an expression of gratitude for *having already received* the gift of God's salvation through Jesus and his promise to live together in a real, eternal heaven. They die with prayers of love and forgiveness on their

lips. In their dying breaths, they profess Jesus' kindness and love for the world.

And that's another reason I've written this book. In a time when we are witnessing martyrdom and persecution akin to that endured by our brothers and sisters in the first century, we are also seeing the same miraculous works as those days in the early church. Nearly every day, a terrorist is encountering Jesus on a road to Damascus. There are countless "apostle Pauls" emerging in our time. Many of them are converted as miraculously as he was, and many of them will suffer and die as he did. All of them believe that Jesus is the only real hope in the world.

First-century persecution in the twenty-first century—while horrific and evil—is also producing a first-century harvest of millions coming to follow Jesus in the most miraculous ways and from the most unlikely places.

Here are their true stories, and my hope is that by the end of this book, you, too, will be willing to take the Martyr's Oath, which I have included at both the beginning and the end of this book. The title of each chapter is taken from the oath, and the stories within each chapter illustrate what it means to live out this statement.

If you are ready to stand with Christians around the world in harm's way and take the Martyr's Oath, then go to www.MartyrsOath.com and take your stand.

More important, I hope you learn how to live for the Jesus they are willing to die for, wherever you are and whether it costs you anything—or everything.

Johnnie Moore
The Netherlands
2016



THE MARTYR'S OATH

I AM A FOLLOWER OF JESUS. I believe he lived and walked among us, was crucified for our sins, and was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. I believe he is the King of the earth, who will come back for his church.

As he has given his life for me, so I am willing to give my life for him. I will use every breath I possess to boldly proclaim his gospel. Whether in abundance or need, in safety or peril, in peace or distress, I will not—I cannot—keep quiet. His unfailing love is better than life, and his grace compels me to speak his name even if his name costs me everything. Even in the face of death, I will not deny him. And should shadow and darkness encroach upon me, I will not fear, for I know he is always with me.

Though persecution may come, I know my battle is not against flesh but against the forces of evil. I will not hate those whom God has called me to love. Therefore, I will forgive when ridiculed, show mercy when struck, and love when hated. I will clothe myself with meekness and kindness so those around me may see the face of Jesus reflected in me, especially if they abuse me.

I have taken up my cross; I have laid everything else down. I know my faith could cost me my life, but I will follow and love Jesus until the end, whenever and however that end may come. Should I die for Jesus, I confess that my death is not to achieve salvation but in gratitude for the grace I've already received. I will not die to earn my reward in heaven, but because Jesus has already given me the ultimate reward in the forgiveness of my sins and the salvation of my soul.

For me to live is Christ; for me to die is gain.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

CHAPTER 1

I AM A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed;
we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but
not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9, NKJV

MORE CHRISTIANS WERE MARTYRED for their faith in the twentieth century than in all previous centuries combined.¹

Some people are fond of saying that the persecution Christians are now facing is just history repeating itself. They suggest it's the same as it has ever been, but that is not the case. Persecution against Christians has dramatically escalated, and the scale of the brutality has worsened.

Open Doors International, an organization that ranks levels of persecution around the world, has noted that, conservatively, more than 7,100 Christians were killed for their faith in 2015. That's nearly double the number killed in 2014 and more than triple the number killed in 2013.² The actual number is probably much higher. Statistics are hard to come by in countries that behead, burn alive, and enslave people.

It's as if Satan himself is playing for keeps, employing astonishing efforts to wipe the followers of Jesus from the face of the earth—to finish us off and to do it with all the spectacle he possibly can. Yet Christianity is now the largest religion in the world, with more than two billion believers worldwide.³

What is it about Christianity that has caused so much hate to be unleashed against it?

It comes down to what we believe, which I've summarized in the Martyr's Oath:

I am a follower of Jesus. I believe he lived and walked among us, was crucified for our sins, and was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. I believe he is the King of the earth, who will come back for his church.

In his day, the apostle Paul wrote that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18). And we see that same opinion shared today, especially as Christian faith is pushed out of the public arena in secular states. But in some parts of the world, believing in Christ is seen as worse than foolishness. It's viewed as a threat, and it comes with a death sentence.

Under Communist regimes, where the state demands full and unquestioning loyalty, Christians' beliefs that Jesus is Lord and that our citizenship is in heaven are viewed as seditious. And in the Islamic world, believing that Jesus is the only way to God the Father is viewed as blasphemy.

As we consider at the outset of the book what it means to be followers of Jesus, I want you to read these stories from Christians

in Nigeria, in their own words. In Nigeria, simply following Jesus has cost some faithful believers nearly everything.

DORIS, UCHE, AND GABRIEL || *Nigeria*

Christmas Eve 2010 in Jos, Nigeria: the streets are buzzing with last-minute shoppers in a crowded suburb. Doris, a widow of just one year, browses the shops. The mother of five needs just one more item to start her cooking.

Middle-aged Uche, sporting short-cropped hair and a mustache, is walking from work to the market to buy supplies for his family's Christmas celebration.

Gabriel is a father of two, with a slender build and wearing a thin, short-sleeved white oxford shirt with no pocket. He tends his mother's fabric shop and notices something is off. He has come to this part of town just to help her after taking time off from his own work. While busying himself, he sees a few men drop off a package at the shop. He thinks it's strange, but like other shop owners and shoppers, he doesn't do anything about it—it's Christmas Eve, and everyone just wants to get home to their families.

As the clock ticks toward 7:00 p.m., a series of blasts shakes the market. A transit bus bursts into flames, streaking the night sky with orange and red. Burning shops, homes, and automobiles add an eerie, dancing light. Building walls are sprayed with black film. The smell of chemicals, heat, and charred wood permeates the air. The streets are littered with food, clothes, and body parts.

Doris, Uche, and Gabriel are just a few of the hundreds who have faced constant hardships since the blasts. Yet they are lucky.

Nearby, two churches were attacked, and another bombing targeted a Christian area. In all, more than eighty funerals were held in the few days following the attack.

Yet the church remains, and the survivors choose to remain. They continue to speak Jesus' name and to tell of his grace with boldness. Silence would mean security. Fleeing would mean safety. But it isn't about security and safety to them. It's about the privilege to be the light of Jesus in the very darkest places.



DORIS

“ I was in the market, and I was on my way back when a bomb went off near a bridge. I had stopped to buy spices so I could cook. The bomb went off, and I was lifted off the ground. When I fell down, I tried to stand up. But I fell down again, and I realized my leg had been blown off.

After the accident, I was taken to the hospital, and my leg had to be amputated. Now I walk slowly. I fall down. I don't even know who paid for my medical bills. It might have been the government, but I don't know for sure.

My church has been helpful. I have five children, and they support me as well. I live with my daughter and her husband. I am following the Lord strongly because he spared me. Many died that day, so I have a lot that I owe him. I always thank him. Since he spared me, it means he wants me to carry on his work. ”



UCHE

“ God has blessed me with three children. I am a metalworker, and on Christmas Eve, I got off work early for the celebration. I went to the market very close to where I live to buy things for our Christmas celebration. I heard the sound of a bomb nearby, and when it went off, I lost both of my legs.

They took me to the hospital, and from there I spent months in the hospital. My colleagues helped pay my medical bills. I finished the treatments and then went back home with two artificial legs. I still have expensive medicines I have to buy. My wife would not stay. She left me and the children.

I can't go back to my job, so it is hard to pay school fees for my children. We struggle to pay for where we live, but we cannot afford to move. Life isn't easy for our family.

From the beginning, I gave my life to God. I know he will never leave me. Whatever the reason for why this happened to me, I know he will meet my needs. ”



GABRIEL

“ I am a worker and have two children. My mom has her own fabric shop in a market.

On Christmas Eve, I took off work to help her at her shop because she had lots of customers coming. I noticed Muslims came and left something nearby. But I didn't pay

attention, because I was busy. Around 7:00 p.m., the bomb blew up in the shop.

It killed many people. That's how I got this injury on my leg. I was rushed to a nearby hospital, where they started treatment. There were not enough doctors to treat me. I had my leg amputated and now have an artificial limb.

Now, I've been buying medicine day in and day out. I cannot work at my old job. My mother is aging. Her business has collapsed. She is depressed. I can't work enough, and I can't care for her. My children are still small. They look up to me. But I cannot even pick them up because I can't lift heavy things now. My injuries handicap me.

My mother depends on me. She needs me to help care for her financially. But I depend on others to give me simple jobs. I have to care for my wife and children, too, so I need consistent work.

I'm telling you, this is real life for us. It's only through the help of God that we have survived.

We all believe in Christ. He is our personal Lord and Savior, and with him all things are possible. He is our source. Man cannot give you these things, so I stand strongly in my faith. Without him we can do nothing. ”



HANNAH || Nigeria

Sixteen-year-old Abigail was asleep in her school's dormitory during finals week. Only one assignment stood between her and the

close of the school year. She would soon be home and enjoying the life of a teenage girl.

As she slept, Abigail didn't know of the phone calls coming to her area from neighboring villages, warning that the terrorist group Boko Haram was on the way. She didn't know of the failed attempts to get more security to her school. She probably didn't even know that Boko Haram had threatened to burn schools and kidnap children. All she knew was that she was surrounded by her friends and classmates, her parents lived nearby, security forces were outside her dorm, and she had just one more assignment to finish.

Today, Abigail has been featured in a Boko Haram video released to prove that the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped on the night of April 14, 2014, are still alive. Obviously under duress, she states in her native Hausa language, "Our parents should take heart. Talk to the government so that we can be allowed to go home. Please come to our rescue. The aircraft have come and killed many of us. We are really suffering here. There is no food to eat, no good water to drink."

A terrorist then takes to the screen to repeat their same demands, that the government release imprisoned Boko Haram fighters. "Or we will never release these girls."

Reports of the kidnapped girls electrified the media within thirty-six hours of the assault on their school. The kidnapping arrested the attention of the entire world, with millions tweeting #BringBackOurGirls. Even former US First Lady Michelle Obama joined in the social-media advocacy. Yet all civilian and government efforts couldn't convince Boko Haram of the evil they'd done. They kept the girls, forcibly converted them to Islam, and made some of them sexual slaves and others soldiers.

Today, a "BBOG" Facebook page features scores of likes.⁴ An

outspoken BBOG activist group helped elect a new Nigerian president whose campaign promises included finding the girls. With that hope dashed, the BBOG campaign continues staging protests and rallies to keep the vanished girls before the eyes of the world.

Hannah, Abigail's mother, has been in the news herself, criticizing the government for not rescuing the girls and blaming it on the fact that her village is poor.

Around 135 of the original girls have now escaped or been released. But not Abigail. She's still lost.

Hannah wears a head wrapper made of a bright geometric print that matches her dress. She holds her head upright and speaks in declarative statements tinged with defiance. She talks freely until she comes to the end of her story. Then she speaks wistfully, with long pauses. And then she weeps. She just weeps. She is grateful to God for the four children she has, yet nothing takes the place of her baby.

She is spirited. She is passionate. She is a mother. She is determined. She is hopeful. She is angry.⁵

“It was an awful night, April 14, 2014. We had no information, no idea, no news, nothing. We just heard gunshots coming from the direction of her boarding school. *Lord, my daughter!* All my knowledge, my brain, my head, my strength, my energy went out to that school.

We had heard they planned to attack schools and kidnap kids. I called my sister. She didn't know anything. She said, “Just give up for the night.” But I said, “I [am] going to the school for my baby!”

My husband stopped me. He said, “There is security in

the school.” But I could hear the gunshots, so I planned to go fight. I grabbed some rocks because we have rocks everywhere.

It was the long, long night.

There were normally fourteen or fifteen security soldiers. But they could not win. We don’t know what happened. But we heard Boko Haram from 11:00 p.m. until 4:00 in the morning—shooting, burning. At 4:00 a.m. it became quiet, so we rushed to the school. The girls were gone. We saw their uniforms, their dresses, everything scattered everywhere. We thought the girls had tried to escape or the security had rescued them or something of that nature. But the whole school was burned. They destroyed the roof. They burned out everything.

We met one girl, and I asked her, “Where are the girls?” She said, “I don’t know.” I kept crying, “Where is my baby?” I called her name, “Abigail!” The girl said, “Maybe she went home.” She didn’t know what happened. I screamed, “She is not at home!” Then I asked her more questions. The girl said that night she was not feeling well. She was sleeping in some other dormitory when the noise from Boko Haram woke her up as they burned the building. Before she came out, she realized the heat of the fire was too much, so she climbed out the window and onto a tree. She climbed down, then climbed over a fence and ran away. That’s how she escaped.

We talked to her and then stayed at the school, hoping to see our girls. After an hour or two, some girls came walking toward the school. We rushed to them and said,

“What’s happened?” They said, “Boko Haram has kidnapped and packed up all of them.”

“How did they pack them up?” I asked. They said, “In a truck.” The escaped girls said they packed them in trucks and cars and carted them away.

It was a government-run “comprehensive boarding school,” so the boys went in the morning for the lectures. In the evening, after closing hours, the boys would go home. But the girls stayed in the dormitory. So the boys were secured because they were home with their parents. But the girls . . . the girls . . . that happened to them!

I talked to many girls. Many girls. I tried to sort out where my baby was. I have a cousin who was with her, who escaped. She said Abigail was in the truck close to the driver. Abigail couldn’t jump out. My cousin called to her that she was dropping out of the truck, but Abigail just couldn’t make it. She couldn’t escape.

Another girl, before she escaped the next day, said she saw my baby sleeping. Abigail was tired because as they were driving, their truck broke down. So they had to trek on foot to the Sambisa Forest. That’s where they are to this day.

Now there is a negotiator with Boko Haram, and they got fifteen of the girls and interviewed them on December 25 last year. They still have hundreds of girls in captivity. The military is combing the forest, still looking for them. They say the place is too dangerous. They can’t enter with firepower because that could harm the girls. Maybe Boko Haram will harm the girls. Maybe Boko Haram will use the girls as a human shield.

My baby was not yet sixteen, but now she is eighteen.
 She was writing her final paper. I don't know where she
 might be. I am hoping that one day we will see them.
 Prayer is the only key to success. With God, it is possible.
 He is a great God. My baby . . . ”



Make no mistake. Both the Jos market bombing and Boko Haram's kidnapping of schoolgirls targeted the victims because of their Christianity. The extremists have gone from one Christian village to the next, terrorizing Nigeria's Christians. In one province alone, more than 70 percent of the churches have been destroyed.

Jesus tells his disciples, "If you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. But don't begin until you count the cost" (Luke 14:27-28, NLT). For many Christians around the world, and for those who tell their stories here, they have counted the cost. Whatever they suffer, whether they give up their health, their livelihoods, or even their lives, they recognize that Jesus is greater than it all.

I wonder how many of us in the United States have counted the cost of following Jesus—I mean *really* counted the cost. For some of us, we may think we have. We just don't think we need Jesus very much. Jesus is the ultimate "value add" to whatever version of the good life we've fashioned, the capstone to a life well lived. He gives unilateral approval to our decisions and may get us out of a jam now and then, but he doesn't require much from us. We don't demand much of him, so he can't demand much of us.

I want to draw your attention to Gabriel's brave words: "We

all believe in Christ. He is our personal Lord and Savior, and with him all things are possible. He is our source. Man cannot give you these things, so I stand strongly in my faith. Without him we can do nothing.”

Without him we can do nothing.

In our self-reliant, individualistic culture, these words are radical. They are an acknowledgment of Jesus’ lordship, his authority over every area of our lives. And Jesus’ authority is one that we willingly, lovingly, and eagerly must submit to.

What does it mean for those of us who are in the most prosperous nation on earth to join with those who are losing their lives for believing in Jesus? What does counting the cost look like for us?

These brave believers who are so confident and fearless in their testimony, even in the face of horrific loss, show us the way. For sure, believers around the world need our prayers, and they need our financial support. It’s not unusual for social support systems to be nonexistent for Christians in countries where Christian persecution is common. And those Christians who manage to escape are often not allowed to work in the countries that have granted them refuge, leaving them in jeopardy. They need *our* help.⁶

But we also need *their* help.

For all that we may be doing to help them, they also help us. They inspire us to a deeper place in our commitment to Jesus. They inspire us to *live* for the Jesus they are willing to *die* for. Their testimonies call us to take our own faith more seriously, and they lead us to discover the true power of Jesus.