

To The Shelter

Middle East Stories of Finding
Strength, Courage, and Hope in God

by
Kay Browning

2020

Nazarene Missions International

Books

TO THE SHELTER

MIDDLE EAST STORIES OF FINDING
STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND HOPE IN GOD
by Kay Browning

THE ROAD BACK

HOPE, HELP, AND HEALING
FOR SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING
by David and Lisa Frisbie

WANDA

by Carol Anne Eby
Edited by Andrew Bennett

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Strength, Courage, and Hope in God

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To my parents, Dean and Dorothy Embick,
who encouraged me to obey and follow God;
to my husband, Lindell,
who led the way;
to our great kids—
Brittany, Lindsey, Erin, and Reuben—
who have shared and made
the journey wonderful; and
to our grandchildren Zoe, Scarlett, Grace,
Elliott, Nora, Cameryn, Lucy, Pippa, Luca, and Hugo.
May their journey of faith bring them to Christ.



Browning Family in 2018

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Kay Browning, wife, author, mother of four, and grandmother to ten and former missionary to the Middle East. She has written a number of articles and curriculum pieces and contributed to other NMI reading books. She and her husband made their home in the Middle East from 1980 – 2014. Since returning to the United States, she continues to speak about missions and mentoring prospective missionaries.

Lindell Browning served as a missionary with his wife and resides now in Indiana. He regularly travels to the Middle East to lead Vision and Prayer tours that focus on visits to our schools and churches. When in the States, he is busy preaching and sharing about the work of the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East.

Lindell and Kay both received honorary doctorates from Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois, USA, in 2014.

A graphic featuring the word "Foreword" in a large, white, serif font. The text is centered over a dark, textured background that resembles a piece of paper or fabric with some white, torn-edge-like patterns. Below the text, there are several horizontal, wavy lines in a light gray color, suggesting a decorative border or a stylized wave.

Foreword

2019

Kay: What do you remember about those early days in the Middle East?

Lindell: During the first few months, I felt very lonely and homesick. The challenge of Arabic language school was almost overwhelming. When we started making friends with some of the other students, I believed that all would be okay.

When Christmas time came, we visited new friends and church members. Most of the language school students we had become friends with were from independent mission groups and had to raise their own funds. Some had very meager housing arrangements and lived in cold, damp apartments. Even though the Middle East could be very warm during most of the year, the winters were cold with little heat in homes. Visiting some of our friends, seeing them in damp and cold apartments made me feel guilty because we were not living like that. I felt a significant amount of gratitude that the Church of the Nazarene was supporting us so that we did not have to do without food, water, and heat. Our comforts made it easier for us to focus on language learning and showing hospitality.

Kay: I had little or no expectation of what life would be like for us. We learned to live in a way that stretched our dependency on God. The “what if” wasn’t a hypothetical question...it was a daily question that reminded us that we lived in an unsettled part of the world. Checkpoints, violent demonstrations, political battles, and car bombs were things that frequently occurred. But, seldom did we feel afraid. I look back and am amazed at how God gave us calmness and protection throughout those years.

Lindell: The feeling of despair came over many of the Arabs who were so badly misrepresented and misunderstood by the media. I knew very little about Arabs until I moved to that part of the world. I learned to respect the resilience and fortitude they had, despite the decades of turmoil in the region.

A memorable occasion was one Sunday after there had been a bus bombing in Jerusalem. We knew that the church attendance would be down, and the security forces were out looking for the perpetrators. Ahmed [AH-med] was a young convert from Islam that had studied with us at Bible College, joined the Church of the Nazarene and scheduled to speak that morning. He lived in one of the Palestinian refugee camps and had to pass through several checkpoints to get to church. We were not very optimistic that he would make it into Jerusalem, so we began to worship in song and prayed for him and all those who were suffering that day.

Twenty minutes after we started the church service, Ahmed came walking in. His shirt was untucked, obvious

to us that the soldiers had frisked him. As he stepped into the pulpit, I was not sure what kind of sermon he would share. Instead of talking about what he'd been through that morning, he opened his Bible to Revelation 21 and read of the new heaven and new earth coming down, and the old had passed away. He set his sights on perfect peace in his eternal home.

Kay: We learned a lot from the people in our churches and from our neighbors. They didn't dwell on the problems; they lived day by day. The believers had great trust in God. How do you think the unrest affected the churches?

Lindell: During times of unrest, it was not safe for church members to travel back and forth to church after dark. Since we usually had Sunday evening services in Jerusalem, we had to cancel those meetings. There was always a story from someone about a narrow escape or recent incident. It certainly drove the church to be more prayerful.

Kay: Despite all the hardships and difficulties, Christians in the Middle East are remaining faithful to Christ. Unfortunately, the Christian population is shrinking in nearly all Middle East countries. Kent Hill, former president of Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Massachusetts, USA, and presently the Executive Director of the Religious Freedom Institute had this to say about the Christians in the Middle East.

“The Church (in the Middle East) has and always will survive, and it always will be victorious in the long-run over persecution. Being victorious, however, does not mean that death and suffering will be escaped in the short-term. For believing Christians, death, however, is never the end which the world thinks it is...”¹

Lindell: We were and still are blessed to have lived among and fellowshiped with these amazing followers of Christ.

¹ Hill, Kent R. “Will Christianity Survive in the Middle East? A Christian Perspective.” Posted 22 June 2017. Providence. <https://providencemag.com/2017/06/will-christianity-survive-in-the-middle-east-a-christian-perspective>



Original Preface

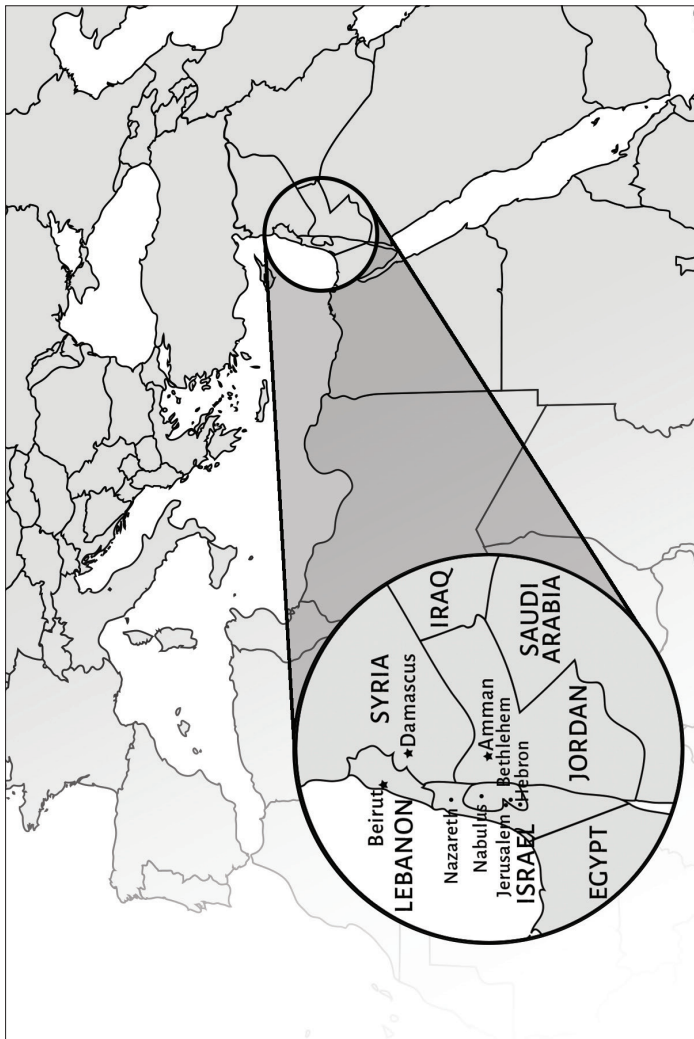
When a Work and Witness team traveled to the village of Karak, [KAIR-ak] Jordan, a year after the Gulf War, they found scattered around the city Arabic signs pointing to our church. At first, they thought these signs said, “Church of the Nazarene.” But when a team member asked the pastor of the church, he explained, “The sign simply says, ‘To the Shelter.’ During the Gulf War, the municipality asked the church if our building could be used as a bomb shelter. Mattresses and food supplies were brought in, and signs were put up pointing the way to the church. After the war, we could have taken the signs down, but we decided to leave them up. After all, that’s what the church should be—a shelter for everyone.”

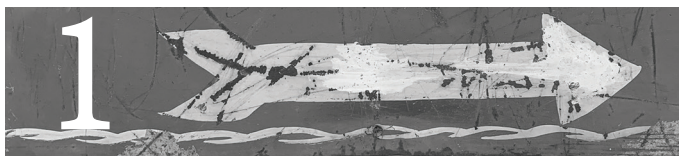
In an area of the world that bears the scars of both political and spiritual battles, men and women have looked for a place of shelter and safety. King David fled to the cliffs of En Gedi [EYN-ge-dee] and called on the Lord to protect him. That same Lord has provided shelter to Arab and Jewish believers and to missionaries who have faced heartbreaking trials. They have found refuge under His wings in places such as prisons, bomb shelters, and empty apartments. Unexpected friends have shared their burdens, and unknown Nazarenes have upheld them in prayer. God has not failed them.

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. . . .
"He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:1–2).*

As the doors of peace crack open, there are new opportunities for the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East. People there are looking for someone whom they can trust and in whom they can believe. The message of the church is one that leads “to the shelter.”

Note: Some names of persons and places have been changed to protect identities.





Spiritual Glue

1979

Boxes were piled high in our living room. The movers would come again tomorrow to finish packing, and our shipment would begin its long journey to Amman, Jordan. In August 1979, just two months away, we also would travel there to start Arabic language study. I picked up our 18-month-old daughter, took her to the nursery, and laid her on the changing table. Tears came to my eyes as I looked around the yellow and peach bedroom that we had so much fun decorating for the new baby. I thought, “Will I ever be this happy again?”

We were moving and changing jobs, and it was robbing us of our sense of stability. It also put to the test our trust in God’s plans for our lives. Even though our transition was part of a missionary call, there were still insecurities. I was thankful that our two daughters were small and needed only to be near us to feel secure.

Lindell and I had been married five years and had lived four of those years in Anderson, Indiana, USA. After finishing seminary, Lindell worked as the youth pastor for

Anderson First Church of the Nazarene. Those were wonderful, happy years. Our daughters Brittany and Lindsey had been born during our time there, and the church had enveloped us with love and made us feel like family. They understood that we had been preparing ourselves to be missionaries ever since we were teenagers and that God had called us, but it was still going to be difficult to leave them. The congregation gave us a generous deputation offering and promised to support us with prayer.

Our families had also been supportive, even when they learned our assignment was to “Arabic language study” somewhere in the Middle East. When I told my dad where we had been assigned, his chin quivered, and in a tearful

Will I ever be this happy again?

voice, he said, “That’s the hot spot of the world.” He obviously had been more attentive to world events and knew more than we did about where we would be going. Granted, we had not expected to be sent to the Middle East, but we were willing and eager to go where the church wanted to send us. We would just avoid the troubled spots, and nothing would happen.

Bidding farewell to our families was the most difficult part of leaving. I remember saying those final good-byes and having the impression that something would happen to my mother, that I might not see her again. I tried to shake away that feeling, for we had a long journey to make. Our hearts ached as we made those farewells.

Lindell and I sat down on the plane and shared the secret fears we each had. I admitted my own fear of living in the Middle East, and Lindell confessed to me his feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. The unknown future seemed like a monster ready to swallow us. Then we remembered the wall plaque we had given my mother just before we left. On it was written the words “God’s will does not take us where His grace cannot keep us.”



Kay in Amman with Brittany and Lindsey,
a few days after arrival in August, 1979

The journey to our new home was not an easy one. When we flew out on August 27, 1979, our itinerary included a stopover in Cyprus, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea. The eight Nazarene missionaries in the Middle East were meeting there for a time of fellowship and planning, and they had requested that we join them. After two days

together, it was time for us to continue our trip to Amman with Gordon and Pat Johnston, our Nazarene missionaries living in Jordan.

We arrived at the Cyprus airport an hour before departure, only to be told that we couldn't board because the airplane was on the runway ready to take off. The departure time had been moved forward an hour, and we had not been notified. Our only option was to exchange our tickets for a flight two days later and spend two nights in a hotel near the airport. Unfortunately, there was no direct flight to Amman, and we had to make a connecting flight in Beirut. That was the one place in the Middle East we didn't want to go. God had other plans.

On Wednesday, we arrived at the airport more than two hours early. The flight was overbooked, but we were assigned seats and told to pass through security clearance. While waiting to board the plane, an announcement was made. Our flight was delayed due to a strike in the Beirut airport. An hour later, we were told we could board the plane. Lindell and I eagerly gathered our many pieces of carry-on luggage and our squirming daughters then headed across the hot tarmac to climb the steep stairs of the aircraft. Just moments after we sat in our seats, the airline attendant apologized as she informed us we would have to disembark. The strike was on again, and the plane could not land in Beirut.

After another hour of waiting in the airport lounge, the welcome announcement came—Beirut passengers could board the plane again. This time we settled in the airplane

and breathed a sigh of relief as the flight took off. After half an hour in the air, the aircraft made a sharp turn. We were headed back to Cyprus. The Beirut airport was again on strike, and we could not continue our journey. As we waited in the now-familiar departure area, we wondered if we would ever get to Beirut.

It was another 30 minutes before we were told yet again to board the plane. We sat down and buckled our seat belts, doubting that the plane would ever take off. To our surprise, about an hour later, we finally landed in Beirut. Predictably, we missed the connecting flight to Amman, which had departed on schedule, and there was no other flight until the next day. Despite our pleas for permission to stay in Lebanon, armed soldiers escorted us back to the airplane we had just left because we didn't have the necessary visas. The airline, of course, was happy to sell us a return ticket to Cyprus. As we looked forlornly at Gordon and Pat Johnston, all they could say was, "Welcome to missionary life in the Middle East."

Welcome to
missionary life in
the Middle East.

Another day was spent in Cyprus before we finally left on a direct flight to Amman. We were so happy to get off the plane and settle down somewhere. Amman became the most beautiful city we had ever been in—never mind if our new apartment had little furniture and inadequate water supply. Our sense of adventure carried us through days of adjustment, and God's call upon our lives gave those days purpose.

It wasn't long, however, until the excitement wore off and our family faced homesickness. I would sneak away to the bedroom to cry, so my husband and daughters wouldn't see me. Later I learned that Lindell did the same thing. But we knew that homesickness wasn't fatal, and soon we were feeling better. By the time General Superintendent V. H. Lewis came in October for the district assembly, we were ready to hear his words of challenge. We were admonished to stick with it, learn the language, and keep God's goals in mind. Lindell and I were no longer looking backward but ahead.

Just a few days after Dr. and Mrs. Lewis left Amman, a message came for me to call my sister in the United States immediately. We didn't have a telephone in our home because there was a two-year waiting list, and my family had made several phone calls before they got ahold of someone who could contact us. At eight o'clock in the morning, we bundled up our girls and headed to the Jordan District office, where we could place a call to my family in Illinois. After two hours of waiting, an overseas line opened up, and we made contact with my sister.

She explained that our mother had developed an aneurysm on the optic nerve and had suddenly gone blind. She had been rushed to a hospital for surgery. The operation had lasted over 7 hours, and Mother had not regained consciousness in the 20 hours since. There was the possibility that she might not live. If she did live, she might be blind or have severe brain damage.

I hung up the phone with a feeling of helplessness and shock. This couldn't be happening. We had just left family

to serve God as Nazarene missionaries. The hurt was almost unbearable, yet I felt God's sustaining presence and knew that people in the United States and Amman were praying for us.

When we telephoned my family two days later, we learned that my mother's condition had worsened. She had not regained consciousness after the surgery, and there was swelling in her brain. After two more days, a call came from my oldest brother, telling us that Mother's condition was critical and that the doctors needed to perform more surgery to remove the pressure on her brain. The specialists made no promises; they simply told the family that the procedure was her only chance of survival.

Lindell and I knew the time had come for me to go home to my family. Before we drove to the airport, Lindell wanted to see the pastor of the church we attended. The news had already reached Brother David Nazha [NUZ-ha], and he greeted us with sympathy and understanding. He expressed his concern and asked if he could pray for my mother and me.

In a booming voice with words of a language I barely understood, he began to pray. Although we stood in a circle facing each other, it was as though he picked up my wounded spirit and lifted me to the Father. I realized then that part of our lives intertwined with these people of the Middle East. Through the years, their suffering had been great. They had much to teach me, and I had much to learn.

In just 48 hours, God had helped us work out the arrangements for me and Lindsey to be on our way to

St. Louis, Missouri, USA. During the 20-hour flight, I prayed that my mother would not die and that she would know I had come back. My younger brother met us at the airport and brought us the news that Mother had survived surgery and was starting to come out of her coma. Part of my prayer had been answered.

We went directly to the hospital and entered my mother's room. There was little about the person in the bed that looked like my mother. The operation had left her head shaven, bruised, and swollen to twice its normal size. Wires and tubes connected her to life-saving machines. But when I placed my hand in hers and said, "Hi, Mom—it's Kay," there was a gentle squeeze that let me know she had recognized me. The second part of my prayer had been answered.

The doctors were reluctant to make any predictions about Mother's recovery. She had suffered a stroke during the period between the two surgeries, leaving her left side paralyzed. There was brain damage, and her vision was limited. I stayed with my family for almost six weeks, spending most of that time at the hospital. Gradually Mother was able to talk, and some of her strength returned.

When the decision was made to move Mother to a rehabilitation center, I knew it was time for me to return to my husband and daughter in Jordan. My family was hopeful that with intensive therapy Mother would be able to return home in a few months. It was difficult to say good-bye again, especially to my father. But he understood that I had to follow God's direction for my life, and he realized that my own

family needed me too. I returned to Jordan and worked diligently at trying to catch up in my language studies.

Two months later, another phone call came. Mother had suffered seizures for several hours and gone into a deep coma. The doctors said she might remain in a coma for days, months, or even years. This time I did not return and tried my best to focus on the task of learning Arabic.

Despite my diligence, I was not very successful as more distractions and obstacles arose. During our second year, Brittany had hepatitis while I was pregnant with our third child. When the doctor diagnosed Brittany's illness, he stringently warned me to be careful, since hepatitis was extremely dangerous during the first three months of pregnancy. The physician gave me a long list of "things not to do" in order to avoid getting sick, but I had already done them all. Knowing that hepatitis was highly contagious, we again called upon the family of Arab believers to pray for us. After a few weeks passed, we knew God had heard those prayers. Six months later, a healthy baby girl, whom we named Erin Elizabeth, was born.

The months stretched into another year, and my mother remained in a coma. There was nothing we could do but pray for her and my family at home, who carried such a heavy burden. A month after Erin was born, we moved to Nazareth, Israel, where Lindell began supervision of the Nazarene work in the Galilee. The people of our new church were loving and concerned, and they began to help us carry our burden for my mother and family. After hearing my concern for the financial burden my father faced, one young

woman even suggested we bring them to Nazareth so they could help us take care of them.

Just 20 months after Erin was born, I gave birth to our son, Reuben David. When our first furlough came in 1983, we returned, eager to show off two new babies. But that excitement was overshadowed by the need to see my mother.

With a broken heart, I left the room muttering the word “Why?”

After a year and a half, she had come out of the coma but had suffered severe brain damage. This time when I went to her hospital room, she didn't know me. Eyes that were clouded over

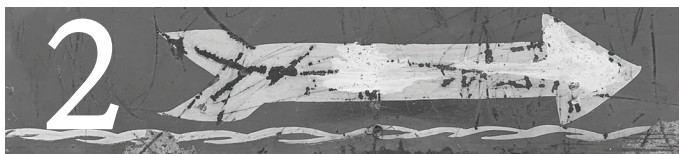
with cataracts showed no sign of recognition. With a broken heart, I left the room muttering the word “Why?” My mother was to remain in that same condition until she died ten years later.

God listened to my question and eventually gave me a release from the burden of needing to know. The promise of Philippians 4:11–13 took on new meaning in my life. I discovered the peace that God could give in all circumstances. He taught me that there could be contentment even without ecstatic happiness, and He helped me realize that He understands and feels our hurts and sorrows with us. I once heard contentment described as “peace that doesn't fall to pieces.” It is the spiritual glue that holds us together.

We returned to Nazareth after a year of furlough, renewed by the prayers and encouragement we felt as we visited Nazarene churches in the United States. Farewells

were again difficult, the Middle East was still unstable, but we were ready to return and see what God's future held for us.

Editors' Note: Dorothy Embick, Kay's mother, lived in a care facility until her death 4 July 1992. Her general health had remained stable, despite the neurological damage that had left her in a vegetative state. Kay returned alone to the States to attend the funeral.



The Cedars of Lebanon

1975 - 1991

Our first Christmas overseas was a bittersweet one. I had just returned from spending almost six weeks with my family during the initial crisis with my mother. Despite the concern for my family in the United States, I was eager to get back to my husband and daughters. Lindell had been a wonderful “Mr. Mom” and had even managed to unload the crates that had arrived with all our personal belongings. I knew he was eager to travel and learn more about the Nazarene work in the Middle East, so when I got home, I encouraged him to make a trip to Lebanon with Gordon Johnston during our Christmas break from language school.

It was 1979, and the civil war that was destroying this beautiful country had been in progress for about six years. Nazarene missionaries had stayed as long as possible, but in 1975 the United States State Department required all American citizens to leave Lebanon. Gordon and Pat Johnston relocated to Jordan, where Gordon continued to direct the work in Lebanon. As often as possible, Gordon

traveled back to Beirut to encourage the people and check on the condition of our churches and school.

Lindell's first visit to Lebanon took him through the streets of a city divided and controlled by various militia groups. As he and Gordon drove down roads lined with soldiers, tanks, and checkpoints, it was difficult to discern who was on whose side. They met with our church members, who lived under the threat of bombs and bullets and who often had to seek protection in bomb shelters when the fighting became intense. Although a temporary truce was in effect during the time of their visit, it was apparent this war would not soon be over.

The next 11 years brought more devastation and despair. It became impossible for American missionaries to make even short visits into Lebanon. Americans and Europeans continued to be kidnapped and held as hostages, and missionaries had been among those taken. It was not until 1991 that Lindell and I returned there. The militia groups that had been fighting finally signed a peace agreement, and we were given special permits to visit the country.

Our journey to Beirut began in Damascus, Syria. We traveled overland by bus across beautiful mountains and through the Baka [BAH-kah] Valley. Our guide pointed out that it was likely some of the hostages were still being held in the villages through which we passed. Ironically, it was safe enough for us to stop and buy a quick lunch in one of the friendly village shops. However, when we arrived in Beirut, we slept in a convent situated in the mountains overlooking the city, rather than in a hotel. Security precautions were still necessary.

The only way to get to Beirut from the convent was by a chaotic, 40-minute drive down the mountains. In a city overcrowded with cars, there were few functioning traffic lights and even fewer frustrated traffic police. The devastation to the city was indescribable. In the center of Beirut was a 10-mile (16-kilometer) circle in which nothing remained but shells of collapsed buildings.

From a population of just over 3 million people, there had been 150,000 deaths. One-third of the inhabitants had been displaced, often moving from one safe place to another. But statistics don't tell the stories of tragedy and hardship that people have endured. One taxi driver told us that he and his family had survived by driving their vehicle to the mountains and making their car their home.

During the years of conflict, communication with our Lebanese church leaders was nearly impossible. Since U. S. citizens had been forbidden to make even

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short visits to the country, our Lebanese Nazarenes had little access to anyone connected with the rest of their international family. Despite the hardships and struggles, however, our two churches and our Nazarene school in Beirut managed to keep their doors open. The school was located in an area where heavy fighting had taken place during the latter years of the war. Bombs had hit buildings on both

sides, and the shattered walls crumbled down on the school. The whole area had been without electricity for months at a time. But God honored the faith and determination of the Lebanese Nazarenes, and the schools and churches survived the civil war.

The director of the Beirut Nazarene school was a man named Abdu Khanashat [AHB-doo Khah-nah-shot]. When we visited him during that 1991 trip, he was eager for us to see the restoration that had been made possible by a grant from Nazarene Compassionate Ministries. The freshly plastered and painted walls stood in contrast to the bullet-ridden, shattered structures surrounding the school. Abdu told us how the adults and young people of the church had helped repair the buildings. He then took us to the basement bomb shelter that had provided safety for hundreds of people during the bomb attacks. After the restoration was completed, sewing machines and tables had been brought in to give income-generating work for the community.

As Abdu showed us the shelter, he directed our attention to the corner where a simple, concrete container shaped like a giant tub stood about four feet (1.2 meters) high. Brother Khanashat explained that the concrete tub was a baptistery. Just a few weeks earlier, the church had held a special service of praise and celebration in which seven people were baptized. Where else could one find a baptistery in a bomb shelter except in Beirut?

From the basement, we went to the roof, where Abdu showed us the new electric generator. The still-frequent power blackouts would no longer interrupt the school's operation.

But what caught our eyes was a four-foot (1.2 meter) metal frame shaped like a cross. Bullet holes had shattered the opaque plastic that had at one time covered the structure; but even though the cross was badly damaged, it had remained standing. It stood as a symbol of these Beirut Christians, invincible in the midst of overwhelming difficulties.

Abdu drove us to his apartment for a meal and fellowship with his family. As we traveled, he began to tell us the story of a time when he faced great despair and discouragement. Fierce fighting had started in the neighborhood of the school. Knowing parents would be worried about their children, the staff put the boys and girls into the tattered school buses and hurried them to their homes. Abdu loaded his car with the children who couldn't squeeze on to the buses. He then returned to the school to wait for his 17-year-old daughter, who was at a school 10 miles (16 kilometers) away. Because of the fighting, her school bus refused to deliver her to the Nazarene school. Abdu wanted to leave immediately to get her, but his daughter's school said it was too dangerous for him to travel at that time.



Abdu with kindergarten student

By noon there were people everywhere, carrying whatever possessions they could hold. Bombs and explosives of all kinds filled the air with noise. People living close to the school came running with their blankets and food. They held the hands of their weeping and screaming children and led them to the safety of the school's bomb shelter. Soon the streets were empty except for soldiers preparing their cannons and weapons for the next battle. Electrical lines were cut, and the water turned off. Smoke covered the area, and darkness fell over the city. At five o'clock, another battle began.

Abdu carried a candle to a small, dark room in the shelter. Outside, it sounded like a rainstorm as the shooting, bombing, and shelling commenced again. He entered the gloomy space, knelt down, and began to pray. "O my Lord, what shall I do? What do You want me to do? I'm away from my family, and I don't know if they are alive. Would You please keep them safe? The fighting may last for days, and who will take care of them? Who will feed me? Give me some promises from Your Word."

God answered: "Listen, Abdu! Aren't you My son? Don't you trust your Father to whom you are praying every day? Didn't I feed Elijah in the desert?" At that moment, someone knocked at the door. Abdu opened it, and in front of him stood an old man with a dishful of food and bread. He said he knew Abdu hadn't eaten all day and asked him to accept this food from him. With tears in his eyes, Abdu gratefully accepted the food. The simple gift reassured Abdu that God had not forgotten nor forsaken him.

After eight days in the shelter, the bombing stopped. The people ventured outside and found that the school had become the border between the two warring parties. As soon as possible, Abdu went to his daughter's school. He found her well but worried. Together they began to look for the rest of the family. When they reached home, no one was there. Their apartment complex had been hit, and ruined houses and burning fires surrounded the building. None of the neighbors knew where Abdu's wife, daughter, son-in-law, and one-year-old grandson were. They returned to the school with heavy hearts but praying and trusting God that the family would be found alive. After several days, Abdu and his daughter rejoiced as they learned the rest of the family was safe and unharmed. All told, it was a month before they were finally reunited.

Abdu's story ended just as we arrived at his apartment, located in the mountains overlooking the sea. He explained that his family had moved away from the city to avoid the ever-increasing battles, and yet some of the last skirmishes of the war took place in this area.

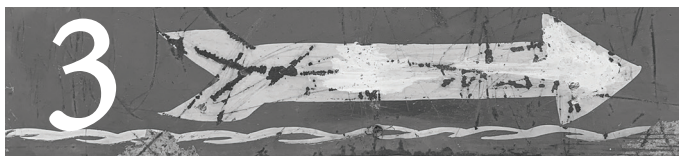
As he showed us his recently repaired apartment, we noticed a freshly plastered wall in one of the bedrooms. Abdu explained that a bomb had crashed through the wall and landed unexploded on the bed. Only minutes before, his grandson had been lying on the bed. Again, he praised God for the protection of his family.

We left Abdu's home, amazed at his family's courage and strength. They and many like them did not lose their faith in God nor their hope for a better future. As we said

good-bye to the people we had met in homes, churches, and schools, they thanked us for coming and encouraging them. Lindell and I were deeply touched.

The people of our churches reminded us of a wall poster with a picture of the beautiful Beirut harbor. On it are written the words “Beirut—a city that will not surrender.” Our Nazarenes had not surrendered their faith in God nor their love for their church. Like the cedars of old, they stand firm, they stand tall, and they offer their country a beautiful fragrance—the fragrance of Christ.

Editors’ Note: Abdu continued as headmaster of the Nazarene Evangelical School until his retirement in 2015. He served at the school for a total of 52 years. In addition, Abdu served on the District Advisory Board as District Secretary. Abdu represented the Church of the Nazarene on the Supreme Council of Lebanon and Syria, an organization for Evangelical churches. Because of his faithful service to the church, he was presented the Distinguished Service Award.



Intifada: Strife In The Holy Land 1986 - 2005

The Arab city of Nazareth was our home in the Middle East from 1981 to 1988. Our family lived in a complex that included a garden, parsonage apartment, church, and pre-school building. It was a wonderful place to live, and we felt settled and secure. Although there were occasional terrorist attacks in Israel, nothing happened in Nazareth except an occasional bomb scare.

During that time, we were virtually unaware of the tensions that were growing stronger and stronger on the West Bank. We often drove through the West Bank cities of Janin [juh-NEEN], Nablus [NAB-luhs], and Ramallah [ram-AH-la], on the way to Jerusalem. Nazarene missionaries living in Jerusalem told us that the dissension between the Palestinians and Israelis was growing stronger. Life in Jerusalem was becoming more and more stressful, and they feared something major was going to happen.

In December 1987, the Palestinian *intifada* [in-ta-FAH-da]² or “uprising” began, in which the Palestinian Arabs protested the occupation of the West Bank by the Israeli government. The unrest started in an Arab area called Gaza and spread to other West Bank cities. A few days later, violent rioting began; Israeli soldiers were injured, and several Arabs were killed. Citizens of Nazareth decided to show their solidarity with the Palestinians and planned a demonstration on the main street of town.

Expecting nothing but a peaceful demonstration, Lindell took our older daughters for their two-hour violin lessons in a city about 35 miles (56 kilometers) north of Nazareth. I remained home with Erin, Reuben, and Rami, an eight-year-old foster boy living with us at that time. Schools were dismissed early and children were sent home as a strange quietness fell over the city.

At one o’clock in the afternoon, churches were to ring their bells as a sign of respect for those who had been killed or injured in the riots of the past two days. As the bells were ringing, I looked out the second-floor window of our apartment and realized that the big iron gates in the garden had not been closed. Before I turned to go down the stairs, a gray police bus stopped in front of the gates and driveway, and

² “Intifada is an Arabic word that translates literally as ‘shaking off’... In the Arab-Israeli conflict, it means a concerted Palestinian effort to shake off Israeli power and gain independence.” McKernan, Bethan. “Intifada: What is it and what would a third Palestinian uprising mean for Israel and the Middle East?” Posted 7 December 2017. *Independent*. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/intifada-what-is-palestinian-uprising-israel-jerusalem-trump-hamas-capital-west-bank-palestine-a8097331.html

50 border police, outfitted in full riot gear, began to descend from the bus.

The children and I stepped onto the living room balcony to watch what was happening. From there, I climbed onto the flat roof of the church and realized that the riots were moving from the center of town toward our buildings. Young men were running in the streets, throwing stones, burning tires, and pushing flaming garbage cans into the path of the police, who were hurling tear gas canisters at the rioters.

Despite the danger, I decided to leave the front gates open in case Lindell and the girls needed to quickly drive the van into the garden when they returned. I then decided to try to occupy the children in some other activity. Rami was happy to play games with Reuben and Erin, but he was



Browning family in 1986

also very curious about the events happening in front of the church. After getting the children settled and distracted, I returned to some work that needed to be finished. I was busy in a back room when someone cried out, “Mommy!”

Rushing to the living room, I found all three children huddled together on the outside balcony. I looked down and saw what had frightened them. In a corner of the garden, police had caught some teenage boys and were hitting them with sticks as they dragged them out of the garden. As soon as they left, I rushed out of the room to shut the garden gates. On the stairs leading to our apartment above the church, I met a young man running toward our door, obviously looking for a place to hide. I could envision police chasing him into our house and didn’t hesitate for a moment to tell him to leave and get out of our garden. Our children had seen more than enough that day. He climbed over the fence and disappeared.

As darkness came, the rioting ended, and Lindell returned with Brittany and Lindsey. They had driven around burning tires to get home but arrived safely. Although Christmas was just a few days away, we knew it would not be a peaceful one in Israel.

That incident started an extremely violent, troubled time within the boundaries of Israel and in the Arab areas occupied by Israeli authorities. The troubled spots continued to be Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem, but not Nazareth, so our daily lives were unaffected. However, when we went to Jerusalem, we no longer traveled through the Judean hills and West Bank cities.

Our churches in Jerusalem were forced to cancel evening services. An outreach Sunday school in a West Bank village had to stop because stones were thrown at the car taking our Sunday school workers there. Protest strikes were called once or twice a week, forcing the closures of schools and businesses in the Arab communities. Our missionaries in Jerusalem told us it was difficult for them to avoid troubled areas. They found themselves in a precarious situation when soldiers forced entry into their house, looking for a neighbor who had thrown stones. Life in the Holy Land began to change.

In the fall of 1989, our family moved to Jerusalem. Needless to say, it was a major change for us. Although Nazareth was a city with 80,000 people, it felt like a village. Jerusalem, however, was the political and spiritual hub of the country. We experienced the increasing stress and danger of the intifada and tried to adjust our lives to the uncertainty it created.

Over the next few years, the violence of the intifada continued to increase. It was not unusual for cars parked in front of our church to have windows smashed by the angry youth in the neighborhood. The stoning of passing cars continued. Every day, at least two or three parked vehicles were burned by angry arsonists. Once while our children were in a church meeting with friends, the car in which they had ridden was set afire. We felt very vulnerable.

In early 1991, we moved from Jerusalem to a larger and cheaper apartment in Bethlehem. Although we lived just beyond the city limits of Jerusalem, our home was located on the West Bank. And the atmosphere there was much

different. We encountered a spirit of despair, hopelessness, and fear among our Palestinian neighbors.

We had not realized the strain they had lived under during the years of the intifada. Jobs were scarce, political pressures high, and daily living full of uncertainties. Sometimes we would help a worried neighbor look for a son who had not returned home after a day's work. If a young Palestinian man were anywhere near the scene of a car stoning or similar incident, he would be taken by the military for questioning, and it might be days before he would be released. We would pray with our neighbors and do what we could to help their situation.

Our daily trips into Jerusalem took us on the main road into the city through an area where stones were frequently thrown at passing cars. If the Israeli government license a vehicle, the vehicle had yellow car plates. Angry youths would hide behind buildings and aim stones at such vehicles. Our minivan was one of these vehicles. We knew the yellow tags made us a potential target, but we put a sign in our window that said: "Church of the Nazarene," hoping that the young men would not stone our car.

Months earlier, when Lindell and I had been driving by a Palestinian refugee camp, a large stone hit our windshield and sent slivers of glass over our clothes. Fortunately, neither one of us was hurt. We reassured ourselves that it wouldn't happen again and continued our daily trips in and out of Jerusalem.

Even though many people were afraid to travel to the West Bank, our children had friends who would come to

visit. Usually, we provided transportation to and from our home. Such was the case one Saturday in October 1991.

Just as it became dark, we loaded our van with three of our kids and four of their friends and drove toward Jerusalem. As we went down the main road and passed a stone quarry, we heard a loud thud. Someone had thrown a large rock, and it shattered a rear side window of our van. Immediately one of the children cried out, "Something hit me!" Our 16-year-old daughter, Brittany, quickly moved to the backseat and saw that Reuben, eight years of age, had been hit by the rock. Blood was pouring from the gash in the back of his head. We stopped momentarily, then sped away from the West Bank to the house of a friend who lived nearby.

The cut was deep, and we needed to get Reuben to the hospital. Our friend Salim [suh-LEEM], an Israeli Arab³ fluent in both Hebrew and English, took Lindell and Reuben to Hadasseh [huh-DA-suh] Hospital. I stayed with Salim's wife and the rest of the children and cleaned the glass from the car.

All of us were distressed and concerned. How could this happen to us? Stories of deaths due to stone injuries flashed through my mind. If Reuben had not turned away from the window while he was talking to his friend, the stone would have hit his eye instead of the back of his head. We shuddered as we thought of the serious injury that might have occurred.

³ An Arab citizen of Israel.

On the way to the hospital, Reuben kept asking, “Am I going to die?” His shirt was covered with blood, and the wound continued to bleed. Lindell did his best to calm him. Finally, a pale, upset Reuben returned with Lindell and Salim, and Lindell told us what had happened at the hospital.

The cut needed eight stitches, but X-rays revealed that there was no concussion. As the doctor stitched Reuben’s head, Lindell stood near, assuring him that everything would be all right. While Lindell was holding Reuben’s left hand, he noticed Reuben staring at his right hand and moving his fingers.

Lindell became worried, thinking something else might be wrong, so he asked Reuben if his hand hurt. Reuben told his father that he was just trying to do what his dad had taught him. He responded, “Dad, remember you said that whenever we felt afraid, we should look at our right hand and think about the verse Isaiah 41:13?” Reuben had been silently repeating those comforting words as he looked at his hand:

*“For I am the Lord, your God,
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.”*

The next morning, I picked up the bloodstained T-shirt, intending to throw it away. Instead, I decided to soak the shirt in a new stain remover. When I checked the shirt a few hours later, all the blood was gone. In all the confusion, we

hadn't noticed the shirt Reuben had been wearing during the incident. On the front of the shirt was written "Rock Solid in Jesus" and on the back, the words, "The wise man builds his house upon the Rock." We were reminded that the foundation of our faith was Christ and that the angry rocks of the intifada could not destroy it.

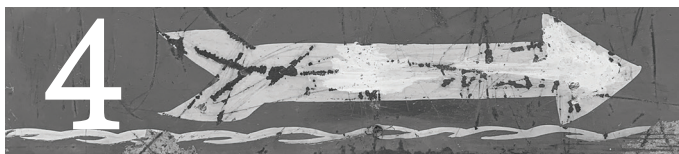
It took a few days for our family to recover from the shock of what had happened. The coping techniques we had developed for the days of the intifada needed revising. We had told ourselves that if we stayed away from certain areas and traveled only in our self-designated "safety zones," nothing would happen to us. Lindell and I decided to replace the glass in our van windows with an unbreakable Plexiglas that would deflect stones and bullets. We even asked our children if they wanted to move to an area that might be safer, but they all agreed that we should stay in our new apartment.

There was an outpouring of love and concern that brought healing to our discouraged hearts.

God did not leave us alone during those traumatic days. Throughout that week, friends and neighbors stopped by to tell us they were sorry this had happened. They delivered gifts of candy and toys to Reuben. Arab pastors came to comfort and pray with us. There was an outpouring of love and concern that brought healing to our discouraged hearts. Their love helped us as we explained to Reuben why faceless strangers had thought of him as an enemy and wanted to hurt him.

Through this incident, we learned again how God could turn evil into good for His purposes. We were able to share with our unbelieving friends how God had intervened, and so the injury had not been serious. God led us to forgive instead of harboring bitterness and kept us “rock solid in Jesus.”

4



The Gulf War 1990 - 1991

In August 1990, during the middle of the intifada, a conflict began that would affect the whole world but especially the people living in the Middle East. President Saddam Hussein [sa-DAHM hoo-SAYN] of Iraq invaded Kuwait [koo-WAYT] and threatened to start a war that would be the apocalypse everyone feared. Our family had been in Cyprus during the time of the invasion, and when we returned to our home in Jerusalem, we found the people in the country anxious and frightened.

Americans living in the country of Jordan immediately felt the tensions increase. Many Arabs living in Jordan were strong supporters of Saddam Hussein and openly demonstrated both support for the invasion and antagonism toward Americans. Just a few weeks after the attack on Kuwait, the United States Embassy in Jordan asked all American citizens to leave. At that time, the Church of the Nazarene had no missionaries living there.

When Jordanian Nazarenes heard Saddam Hussein's threat to use chemical weapons against Israel, they relayed

to us their concern for our family and the Nazarenes living on the Holy Land District. By early September, American citizens living in Israel were told to be very careful and avoid travel in the West Bank. No one knew what to expect.

The country of Jordan faced a tremendous refugee problem. Jordanians and Palestinians who had lived and worked in Kuwait, Iraq, and the Gulf began to return. In addition, thousands of Iraqis from Christian backgrounds fled to Jordan. The Protestant Evangelical churches saw the enormous need of caring for these people and formed a coalition of churches to help.

One of our Nazarene pastors, Afeef Halasah, [ah-FEEF HAL-uh-suh] was asked to coordinate this new compassionate ministry. Jordanian churches and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries⁴ donated money to assist with the refugee problem. The Evangelical coalition that was responsible for one of the tent cities provided more than food and shelter for these men, women, and children. They handed out gospel tracts and showed the JESUS film to thousands of people. When temporary housing was needed for some of the refugees, the Nazarene school in Amman moved some families into guest rooms that were available.

The World Mission Division (now Global Missions) began to call regularly to let us know they were concerned and were praying for us. Each week tensions increased. The

⁴ Afeef Halasah became the first Eastern Mediterranean Field NCM coordinator in 1992 and developed the Middle East Child Sponsorship program that has helped thousands of needy students who attend Nazarene Day schools. In 1996, he founded a grass-roots mission organization called AFTA.

sound of sonic booms and the whizzing noise of jet fighter planes made us aware that the Israeli Air Force was preparing for war. At that time, Brittany attended high school at the American school near Tel Aviv and lived in a Baptist dormitory for missionary kids during the school week. Since the United States Embassy helps support this school, we hoped they would keep families and students aware of the situation. But it soon became apparent that no one knew what to expect or what to do if there were a chemical attack.

We laughed when we read a letter from the school telling parents that sophisticated surveillance equipment would give a five-hour warning before the launching of chemical weapons. Parents would have time to drive to school, pick up their kids, and get situated in a safe place. We knew that should missiles be fired, pandemonium would take over, and it would be impossible to drive anywhere.

Our children were concerned, but one morning was particularly upsetting. It was the same day the government announced that gas masks would be distributed to everyone in the country. Lindsey, Erin, and Reuben were sitting in classrooms at the Anglican School in Jerusalem when the air raid sirens went off. There was confusion as teachers began to grab students and rush them into the bomb shelter. Some students began to cry. No one knew what to do. Fortunately, the alarm had accidentally gone off while being repaired. The incident made the seriousness of the situation a reality to the children.

By November, the hope for a peaceful solution seemed to be fading away. A phone call came from Dr. Robert Scott,

then director of World Mission Division, telling us that the Security Management Committee had decided we should leave Israel for a safer place and wait there until the crisis was over.

When we told our children that we might have to leave, they cried and begged us not to make them go. Lindell and I knew that no other mission organizations had evacuated personnel yet. If we left at that time, we would be one of the first families to depart. How could we leave our pastors and church people? We prayed together as a family and agreed we would ask to stay. After a lengthy phone conversation, Dr. Scott and the committee were convinced that we should wait. However, we agreed to leave if the United States Embassy advised American citizens to go or if other mission boards evacuated their missionaries.

There was something surrealistic about the possibility of a war using nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, and “smart” bombs. Those kinds of wars were fought on television screens, not in the country where you live. Although we were confident we had made the right decision, we wondered what we would do if war broke out. Lindell and I didn’t want to risk the lives of our children. We prayed much and listened to every news broadcast we could find.

At Christmas celebrations and parties, nearly every conversation turned to a discussion of the likelihood of war. Some families left the country for the holidays, planning to stay longer if the war started. The city was devoid of tourists. War hung over it like a threatening cloud. The rumor spread that the United Nations was evacuating the dependents of

their employees. The time had come for us to at least make reservations on an airline; that was part of our promise.

The day after we arranged a flight to Cyprus, the Israeli radio broadcast a long list of airlines canceling flights to Israel. Cyprus Airways was one of them. The few airlines that were still flying in and out of Tel Aviv had waiting lists with hundreds of names on them.

The younger children, Reuben, aged eight, and Erin, aged 10, began to ask questions that revealed they were becoming afraid. What if they didn't know how to use their gas masks? What if they were at school when something happened? Lindsey, our 8th-grade, and Brittany, our 11th-grade daughters, still refused to think about leaving. At one moment, we would be certain we could not go; then a few hours later, we decided we had to leave for the sake of our children. It seemed that no matter what we decided, it felt wrong.

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I told one of our close friends that if a peaceful solution couldn't be negotiated, it was likely our family would have to leave. A look of sadness and disappointment came over her face. I didn't know what to say but finally asked the question, "Will your feelings about us change if we must go?" She answered with more questions: "What about the people here? And what about the church?" There were no answers for her, and I left with a heavy heart.

In a final conversation with Dr. Scott, we asked if Lindell could stay in Israel if I left with our children. Dr. Scott

understood our mixed feelings and sympathetically told us, "I will take the burden of the decision out of your hands. You must go." Our travel agent called to inform us that Olympia Airlines had not cancelled flights into Tel Aviv, and he had managed to book us on a flight to Athens. From there we could fly to Larnaca [LAHR-nuh-kuh], Cyprus.

Tearfully we said good-bye to our pastors and their families. Distraught faces revealed the fear they felt, but they comforted us with the words, "We love you, and we understand." Heartsick and weary, our family left the Tel Aviv airport on a midnight flight.

By midmorning, we were opening the doors of the Nazarene Center in Cyprus. The Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College owns a fully furnished building that was unoccupied and available for us to use. On January 14 we arrived in Larnaca, and on January 18 at 2 a.m. the first Scud missile hit Israel.

Our family slept in front of the television and watched missiles fly through the air. We recognized buildings and streets and wondered if any of our friends had been injured. Lindell called Butros [BOO-trohs] and Ramona [roo-MOH-nah] Grieb [GRIE-ib], our pastors in Nazareth. Ramona answered the phone with a tearful voice that revealed the exhaustion of the past few hours. Butros and Ramona had not slept since the first alarm went off. When the first Scud missile was fired, the faulty alarm system failed, and the police drove up and down the streets, using loudspeakers to waken and warn people that they were under attack. The Griebs' seven-year-old daughter began to

cry, and the four-year-old wouldn't put on her mask. The baby was put into a special protective cot, but she cried the whole time and tried to get out. We knew they were distraught, frightened, and fatigued.



Butros and Ramona

After the first attacks, all schools in Israel and the West Bank were closed. At least our children weren't missing school, we thought. Brittany was still angry about having to leave. The whole adult world upset her. Wars were adults' doing, and she resented the danger and disruption they brought to her and her friends. Rumors of how long the war would last ranged from six days to six months.

There were several missionary families from other organizations who also went to Cyprus. The Southern Baptist regional director asked us to join their missionaries as they talked about what had happened and about how to handle this stressful time. Realizing that all of us needed some

structure to the long days ahead, Lindell and I offered to help set up an MK (missionary's kid) school in the classrooms we had available. We contacted our children's schools and asked them to fax us lessons for the kids.

Back in Israel, the panic of the first few weeks decreased, and schools reopened after a two-week closure. But people still lived in fear. Katy Tuma [TOO-muh], the pastor's wife of the Jerusalem church, sent us the following fax:

Good morning. We miss you all. How are you doing? It's boring here in Jerusalem; most of the people stay at home. They are scared to go out. Now two nights have passed, and nothing happened, but we still didn't sleep very well. Yesterday, Nizar [nee-ZAHR] opened the church, but nobody came except one lady. We prayed together, then she left. We walked to the house of one of the church families and checked on them. We found most of their family there, so we had a meeting there. Nizar preached from Isaiah 43.

Yesterday was the first time we went out shopping, but there was nothing to be found except bananas in the Old City market. We checked later in West Jerusalem and found everything we needed, but it was very expensive. The overall attitude in the country is bad; everybody is scared. The military has said the danger is still there and that we must take our gas masks with us when we go outside. Nizar called Butros (the pastor) and Nabil [nuh-BEEL] (director of the Nazarene

school) in Nazareth. They are doing well. Butros had services yesterday and said about 60 people came. People want to pray, but most of the other churches were afraid to open.

We love you, and miss you very much. Thanks for praying. We really feel the prayers working for us. Everyone says hello; they are waiting for you to come back.

Love,
Katy and Nizar

Even though our family was only a 45-minute flight away, it seemed as if we lived on another planet. We went to bed with our radios turned to the Israeli radio station so we could hear the attack warnings broadcast over the radio. After one such attack, Lindell called the director of



Children in gas masks

our preschool in Nazareth. Thinking the attack was over, he wanted to see if everything was OK. Nabil Hakim's [HAH-keem] voice sounded muffled and strange as he told Lindell, "Could you call back later? We're under attack and have our gas masks on."

A month passed, and the war continued. Brittany grew restless and was ready to return soon after she heard her school had reopened. She begged us to let her go back with a Baptist missionary who had come from Israel for a few days of business in Cyprus. Eight-year-old Reuben was concerned about his sister leaving and what he should do. One night as I was preparing dinner, he came in to talk to me. "Mommy," he said, "I want to go back to Israel, but I don't want to go back if there might be more missiles. I'm afraid one might hit our plane." I knew we couldn't return yet, just as I knew we couldn't send Brittany away from the family.

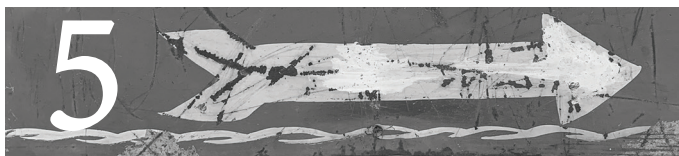
It wasn't long after Brittany asked to go back that the ground war ended and the fighting stopped. Altogether, 39 Scuds had been fired at Israel, but only nine people had died from the war.⁵ The nightmare had ended for our friends in Israel, and our family could go home.

When the war ended, we were among the first group of foreigners to return to Israel. Our pastors, church family, and friends warmly welcomed us back. They knew we had left with heavy hearts, and their understanding spirits helped to heal our guilty consciences. The neighbor who

⁵ Only one person died as a direct result of a missile attack. Others died from heart attacks or suffocation resulting from improper use of gas masks.

had questioned our leaving greeted us with hugs and a warm welcome. Our children quickly settled back into school, although many students didn't return after the war. Somehow the Gulf War had changed us. We no longer felt that our home was back in the United States; home was the little apartment in the Jerusalem suburb of Beit Safafa [bayt-suh-FAH-fa]. "Home" was where God had called us to be.

Editors' Note: Even though the Browning children grew up in the midst of political and social unrest, they feel their experience of living in the Middle East gave them an invaluable global perspective. Their parents encouraged them to have both Israeli and Arab friends, which taught them the value of listening to peoples' stories and perspectives. As adults, their overseas experience has given them resources that sharpen the skills they need in their various professions. Brittany lives overseas and works as a guidance counselor at an international school. Lindsey is a social worker who has used her skills to work with troubled teens. Erin is a Nazarene missionary serving in Europe. Reuben is a post-production editor that works for companies producing documentaries.



Trading the Crescent for the Cross 1991 - Present

An ambulance sped past us as we drove down the main road of Bethlehem. When it stopped at a checkpoint, I recognized the Red Crescent emblem painted on the side of the van. The crescent, symbol of the Islamic religion, encircled the familiar red cross that is associated with humanitarian works around the world and gave it a very different appearance.

As we waited in line for the soldiers to check our passports, I thought about one friend who had been a Muslim and who had attended a Christian conference with Lindell and me and other Nazarenes from our field. Enjoying the freedom of being away from her Islamic environment, she had borrowed a simple gold cross to wear around her neck. The cross symbolized the change that Christ had brought to her life. She and many other Muslim believers⁶ have traded

⁶ Converts from Islam to Christianity are often called "Muslim believers," because "Muslim" is as much a cultural term as it is a religious one. The phrase is not meant to imply that they are still practicing their former, Islamic, beliefs.

the crescent for the cross. As I waited at the checkpoint, I prayed for her and the many Muslim believers who are scattered around the world.

Most of the members of the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East come from Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholic backgrounds; only a few are converted from Islam. The penalty for conversion from Islam to Christianity is very severe. In fact, in most countries of the Middle East, it is illegal for someone to convert. Even if the conversion is not made public, that person risks rejection, physical punishment, and, in extreme circumstances, death.

In 1991 Lindell was asked to work with our churches in Egypt, an Arab country whose population is 90 percent Muslim. On his first visit there, one of the church leaders met Lindell at the hotel and gave him a strict warning: “Be careful—we are being watched.” Islamic extremists had been persecuting and killing Christians, despite the government’s efforts to control the violence. The church has reason to be

cautious. They also have reason to rejoice.

The persecution suffered by the church has brought revival, and there has been a movement of God’s Spirit among the Muslims in Egypt. We heard stories of how young men and women were forced to leave their



Man praying in Mosque

homes after their families refused to accept their faith in Jesus Christ. Lindell and I have had the blessing of visiting with some of these believers. Several had similar stories about the trials they had faced.

A young man named Musa [MOO-suh] shared how he had been arrested and put in prison because he was considered an enemy of the state. Although he was ruthlessly questioned and physically tortured, he refused to deny his faith. The other prisoners watched his persecution, unaware that he was a believer. When they saw him reading a Bible that had been brought to him by friends, they were puzzled. Why would he, a Muslim, want to read the Bible? Musa answered their questions by telling them about the freedom he had found in Christ. After weeks of imprisonment, he was released.

Churches in Europe and the United States have asked Musa and his fellow believers to share their stories of persecution, but they politely declined these invitations. They knew that if they left their country, they would not be allowed to return. God had not released them from ministry in the Muslim society of Egypt.

One form this ministry takes is the maintaining of safe houses, places in which Muslim believers can hide from the secret police. Those being hidden away cannot work and pay for the food and shelter that is given them. The Egyptian believers who provide safe houses feel blessed and happy that God has given them this ministry.

Lindell and I learned that many Egyptian converts from Islam had first heard about Christ while studying in

a university. As students discussed social and political topics, these conversations often led to dialogues about religion. The Christian students were then able to speak about Jesus. Before they invite new students to a Christian fellowship meeting, these Christian students pray for a discerning spirit so they will invite only those who are sincerely hungry to know more about Christ. One such fellowship had over 30 young people who had experienced new birth in Christ.

Throughout our years in the Middle East, our paths crossed with other Muslim-background believers.

Abed was born into a Muslim home that was strongly influenced by Islamic society and affected by the civil war in his homeland. The war had virtually destroyed much of the city of Beirut, especially the area where Abed's family lived. Due to the hostilities in their area, they left their home to find a safer neighborhood in which to live.

As he looked for a new home, Abed's father searched for and enrolled him in a school where he could take Islamic religion classes. The strictly observant Muslim teacher required the students to recite from their holy book, the *Quran*. He taught them that through the daily recitations of the verses, they would find forgiveness and receive many rewards. The teacher even taught the boys to calculate how many rewards they could accumulate.

Abed's father was equally concerned about the future for his son and wanted him to be in a school that could help him become proficient in the English language. So, when Abed was in seventh grade, his father transferred him to the Nazarene School in the Sin il fil [SIN-il-feel] neighborhood

of Beirut. It was understood that all the children, including the ones from non-Christian backgrounds, would be attending the chapel services of the school and also take religious education classes. The Nazarene school had daily chapel times, and it was here that Abed began hearing about Jesus. The Nazarene pastor spoke often in the chapel and invited all the students to attend the youth activities and meetings.

His friendly classmates, Johnnie and Gabby encouraged him to attend church and attempted to explain more and more about what he was hearing. When the church had a youth revival, Abed decided he would visit more out of curiosity than a searching heart. He asked himself, "What in the world is a youth revival?"

Several of the sermons spoke to him, and his inquisitive mind was determined to pay close attention to these stories he had never heard before. The sermon about Jesus being crucified between two thieves and Jesus' dialogue with one of the thieves, made a strong impression on Abed. When he arrived home, he tried to sleep but reached for a

How could a criminal find salvation?" he wondered. If that sinner could, surely Abed could also. He did not know how to respond.

book, the *Holy Bible* that his teacher at the Nazarene school had given to him. He turned to that passage to read that story again. He read and reread. "How could a criminal find salvation?" he wondered. If that sinner could, surely Abed could also. He did not know how to respond.

With that sermon on his mind, he prayed to Jesus that same prayer that the thief prayed. He asked Jesus to receive him, Abed, a sinner, and surrendered his life to Christ. Nothing could keep him away from the church after that night. Without telling his friends about his new faith, they could see the change in his life.

When Abed became a follower of Christ, he went to church as often as possible. He was so engaged, wanting to do and be part of everything. No work in the church was below him. He even took piano lessons so he could play for the church when needed. Amazing things happened in the eighth-grade class that year. Eight of the fifteen students became followers of Christ. Abed's father also noticed the difference in his behavior and attributed it to his new friends. "Keep those friends, my son, they make you a good person," he told Abed.

"God is The Generous One with me," Abed testifies. "He has given me good friends and a great church. One of the greatest gifts that God has given me is a wonderful father who allows me to follow my heart. Even though he doesn't yet know that I am a follower of Jesus Christ, he is open to all my Christian friends, and he allows me to go to the Nazarene school and the church."

New followers of Jesus from non-Christian backgrounds face many challenges when they come to faith. The most common is rejection from their family and their community. In the Arab world, there is great respect for parents and loyalty to family. It was important for Abed to keep a close relationship with his father. "How will he ever come

to know Jesus if he feels that the Lord took me from him?" thought Abed. If a young person is thought to have left their former religion, personal freedom could be curtailed, and the new believer might be forced to get involved in Islamic activities publicly, including attending the mosque with family members. Apostasy, or forsaking Islam is punishable by death in some countries.

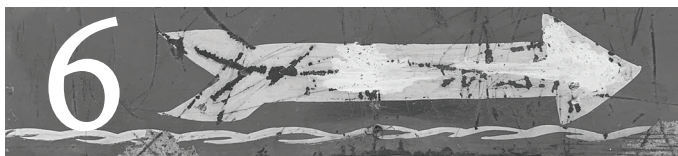
Not only do they face challenges from the Islamic society, but they frequently do not find acceptance in the church or among groups of other believers. Their motives are often questioned along with their sincerity, so they are made to feel like outsiders from both religious groups. Praise God that Abed found love and acceptance in the Nazarene church and school. The pastor mentored him, and Abed became a youth leader, not just in the local church, but also took on the Lebanese district, and Eastern Mediterranean field.⁷ He served as the field representative to the Regional NYI Council.

After completing high school and while in university, he also enrolled the Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College (now the Arabic Nazarene Bible College) and graduated with a Diploma in Ministries. He then completed an M.Div. degree from the Baptist seminary in Beirut, Lebanon, and a D.Min . degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, USA.

Having the influence of a pastor who loved and always desired for Abed to find God's will, now Abed is committed

⁷ The Eastern Mediterranean field is comprised of the Middle East countries on the Eurasia Region.

to education and mentoring young people, teaching future pastors and challenging them to respond to God's will and call to ministry. He now teaches classes at the Arabic Nazarene Bible College. "It is my greatest joy to see other young people respond to a call to the ministry since we see a great harvest in front of us, and laborers to gather it in are few."



Blessed are the Peacemakers

1992

The Church of the Nazarene in Nazareth is one of the strongest churches on the Holy Land District, and its Sunday school and youth group have been two of its primary sources of strengths. When we began our ministry in Nazareth, Lindell and I prayed that God would call some of the young men into the ministry. It was encouraging to see teens from the church invite their friends to attend the youth meetings and Sunday services.

Nizar Tuma was one of the young men who, once introduced to the church, started coming to all the services. Nizar's family were members of the Greek Orthodox Church and had never visited an Evangelical church nor known any born-again Christians. Nizar found the people of the church friendly and, the atmosphere in the church caring. His church didn't have this same feeling, even in its youth group.

When Nizar's parents discovered that he was attending the Nazarene church, they told him he should stop. They

were suspicious of this church of which they knew nothing. But since Nizar was 18 years old and working over 80 hours a week, they decided they should permit him to spend his free time as he desired.

After attending the church for a few months, Nizar responded to a message on salvation and accepted Christ as Savior. The focus of his life began to change. He told his family of his new faith, declaring that he knew he had made the right decision. They again warned him to be careful and not to let his church attendance interfere with his work.

In the fall of 1985, Lindell began to teach theological classes to several young men who had expressed an interest in the ministry. Nizar wanted to take those classes but didn't know if he could shorten his 14-hour workday. God answered his prayer when his boss gave him 4 hours off work twice a week and didn't decrease his salary. In 1986 Nizar used his vacation time to attend Bible classes at Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College in Larnaca, Cyprus. By the end of that summer, he knew God was calling him to become a pastor.

Lindell and I began to pray that Nizar would find a wife who was a strong believer and a Nazarene. At our summer camp, Nizar met Katy, who had been attending the Nazarene Sunday school in the Old City of Jerusalem since she was a small girl. He began writing her letters and calling her every week; 14 months later, they were engaged. When Earl Morgan retired as district superintendent and returned to the United States, we moved to Jerusalem. It was decided that Lindell would become district superintendent and

would assist Nizar as the pastor of Jerusalem First Church of the Nazarene. After Nizar and Katy were married in October 1990, they moved into the apartment above the church.

Nizar has a wide grin that quickly makes people feel comfortable. He is an extrovert who can use his ability to speak Arabic, English, and Hebrew to witness to people. One of his greatest burdens has been to see reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, and God has been using him in this ministry. Since the Christians feel that the process of reconciliation must begin first among the believers and their leadership, Christian



Nizar Touma preaching

leaders in Jerusalem have asked Nizar to help bring together Arab believers and Messianic Jews. It is a ministry that has been challenging and fulfilling.

On the Mount of Olives is a building called the House of Prayer, which is dedicated to prayer for the people of the Middle East. The building has provided an opportunity for Arab and Jewish pastors to join together for times of intercession. Nizar often attends these meetings.

One evening as they met together and shared the breaking of bread, Nizar was so moved by a spirit of love that he

felt he must show his brothers in the Lord how much he cared for them. After speaking just a few words of explanation, Nizar went to the kitchen, filled a basin with water, picked up a towel, and returned to the room. He asked his friends to remove their shoes and socks; then he began to gently wash the feet of each one. Agape love filled the room as these men realized that they truly were brothers in Christ. When Nizar finished, one of the Jewish pastors washed Nizar's feet. Although these men had different political views, they were experiencing the peace that Jesus brings to His children.

Nizar is also involved with a group called Musalaha⁸ [moo-SAH-lah-ha], which organizes teaching sessions and social activities to promote mutual understanding and

Barriers
are broken
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reconciliation
begins to take
place.

friendship between believers from two peoples who have been at war for generations. Many of these young adults come with anger and bitterness in their heart toward each other. One of the best ways to get them to focus

on the need to forgive has been to take them away from the city for retreats in the desert. On these trips, they learn that they need to trust and depend upon each other for survival. Barriers are broken down, and reconciliation begins to take place.

⁸ Musalaha is a non-profit organization that promotes and facilitates reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, based on biblical principles of reconciliation. www.musalaha.org

One night as the group gathered around a campfire by the Red Sea, they began to confess to each other. Nizar told them that he had one time thought Jews had no right to become followers of Jesus. After all, they had rejected Jesus once, many years ago. Nizar then asked for their forgiveness for this attitude. Then a young man who had served in the Israeli army confessed to Nizar his hatred of all Arabs. While serving on the West Bank, this soldier had mistreated and been cruel to Arabs. He embraced Nizar and asked if he, as an Arab, could forgive him. The barrier and dividing wall of hostility came down.

One of the most exciting times of reconciliation came when 20 Jewish and Israeli Arab families traveled to Jordan to have fellowship with Jordanian believers. Two years earlier, no one would have imagined the borders between Jordan and Israel would open, and the Cold War would end. Nizar and Katy were part of the group that traveled across the newly opened northern border crossing in order to share in this time of rejoicing and fellowship. They had found unity as Jews and Gentiles in the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated with His blood.

Nizar has used his Bible school studies to help him teach religion to Palestinian boys living at a boarding school in Beit Jalla [BAYT-JAHL-luh]. These young people are children of the intifada and harbor much bitterness and hatred, and the message of reconciliation is not one they want to hear.

In a school north of Jerusalem, Nizar has been teaching Hebrew to 9th- and 10th-grade students. When he began teaching, he asked students why they wanted to learn Hebrew.

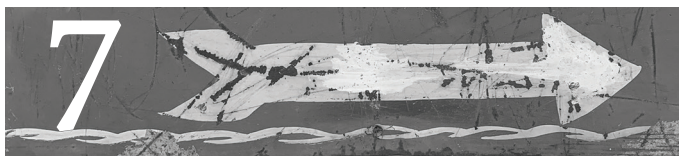
One said it was because Hebrew was a nice language. Another answered she thought it would be easy to learn since it was similar to Arabic. But one angry young boy replied, “Because it is the language of our enemy.”

Before Nizar started his lesson, he told the students, “The only enemy you have is Satan. You need to learn Hebrew to help you understand the other people who live in this land. Jesus teaches us that we don’t have the right to hate and do harm to those who are against us.”

Nizar continues to use his gifts for God and spread the gospel message. He tells people that Christ is our Peace and that if we follow Him, then one day, we will all be one.

Editors’ Note: Nizar Touma moved to Nazareth in 2000 where he serves as pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in that city, one of the largest evangelical churches in Israel. He served as chairman of the Nazareth Pastors Association from 2010-2014 and is active as a board member of Musalaha. “His heart for reconciliation between Arab believers and Messianic believers is still strong. He occasionally invites Jewish pastors to preach in his church and has also preached in some Messianic congregations.”

www.nazarene.org/article/nazarene-nazareth-we-are-light-world



Exiles from Babylon

1992

After the Gulf War ended, Iraqi refugees continued to flood into Jordan. Some left the country because basic commodities were either unavailable or unaffordable. Others fled because they were afraid of the future under a government ruled by Saddam Hussein. Many of these people were from Christian backgrounds and had suffered under the domination of Islam. The future seemed dark, and people were desperate.

When I traveled to Jordan, I was anxious to meet these refugees. What would cause someone to leave a stable job and the shelter of a comfortable home for a crowded tent or a one-room apartment? A young Iraqi woman in our Nazarene church explained to us why so many people had run away from their homeland. The main reason was that a primary goal of the Hussein regime was to build a strong, united Islamic state. Even though nearly 95 percent of the population of Iraq is Muslim, there is a concerted effort to undermine the Christian religion.

One Iraqi Christian was asked if she ever read the Bible. Her answer was, “What Bible? We only know that someone named Jesus was born.”

The few Christians who attended church services knew nearly nothing about Christianity. The Iraqi government pushed its political ideas and Islamic principles on Christians through the public educational system. It became apparent that if someone wanted to have a future in Iraq, he or she must accept the practices of the government, including those policies that discriminated against non-Muslims. Christians became so despondent that they were willing to pay a year’s wages to obtain the exit permits needed to leave the country. Most families could not afford to send the entire family at once, so husbands and wives, and even parents and children would be separated for months or possibly years.

Lindell and I were proud of our churches in Jordan. Nazarenes there reached out to these people in very tangible ways by providing food, shelter, and blankets. They realized that the refugees were spiritually starved as well as hungry for food, so church members invited them to the meetings. Our pastors and wives not only opened wide the doors of the church but also opened the doors of their homes and hearts.

Um Abee [OOM AY-bee] is the widow of Rev. David Nazha [NAZ-ha], who pastored the Jabal Amman [JE-bul AH-man] Church of the Nazarene in Amman, Jordan for over 30 years. Throughout that time, she led a weekly Bible study that ministered to both the younger and older women

of the church. Even after her husband died in early January 1991, just before the start of the Gulf War, she continued these meetings. When the Iraqi refugees started coming to church services, she didn't hesitate to invite the ladies to this Bible study.

One of the most faithful to attend the Bible study was an Iraqi named Esther. Even though she lived far from the church, she seldom missed any meetings. When a church retreat was planned, she especially wanted to go. However, she couldn't leave her young daughters at home, and she didn't have the money to bring the girls to the retreat. Um Abee felt so strongly that God wanted Esther at this retreat that she asked the church board if they could pay for the girls to attend the retreat.

That weekend became a turning point in Esther's life. The speaker spoke clearly about a personal relationship with Christ, and Esther's heart hungered to know Him in such a way. After a morning service, Um Abee invited Esther to sit with a friend, and they talked about the things that troubled her. Esther shared her concerns and then told them about the desire she had to know Jesus. Um Abee attentively listened and then said, "Let's pray about all this." As the women prayed, Esther began to cry and also pray.

Suddenly she looked up and excitedly told the two women, "I believe the Lord is with me. I believe He will make a way. I believe!" The women rejoiced together in the sweet presence of Jesus. They went to the next meeting together, where Esther shared what a change she felt in her life. She told those gathered in the service, "I don't know what has

happened, but my heart has changed. Jesus is in my heart.” She returned to her home, willing to serve the Lord.

Esther couldn't wait to tell her husband, Esam [ie-SAHM], what had happened at the retreat. Sometimes he attended the Nazarene church with her, and she knew he was searching for meaning in his life. She dearly loved her husband, all the more so for what he had sacrificed for her.

Sometimes he and his wife would read the Bible together as they searched for a way to put meaning into the chaos around them.

Esam was born a Muslim and had done the unacceptable by marrying a Christian woman. Iraq had the same laws as other Islamic countries—a Muslim man can marry a Christian woman only if she converts to Islam. If the bride will repeat the shahadi⁹ [sha-HAD-ee], marriage is permitted. Esther had said the shahadi but held on to her Christian heritage. Whenever possible,

she attended the Catholic church, and sometimes Esam went with her.

Esam was disillusioned with Islam and was looking for answers in Christianity. Sometimes he and his wife would read the Bible together as they searched for a way to put meaning into the chaos around them. When the secret police learned that Esam occasionally attended a Christian church, they threatened him with the loss of his job.

⁹ The pledge to the prophet Muhammed [moo-HAM-med].

As an engineer, Esam made a good income and provided his wife and daughters with a lovely, big home. But all that didn't matter to Esam. He was tired of living under the restrictions of Iraq. After the war, the family wanted to leave and had enough money to pay for the expensive travel permits. The emigration authorities granted permission for Esther and the girls to leave; but because Esam was a Muslim, he was not allowed to leave Iraq. That did not stop Esam. Even though it was dangerous, he fled from Iraq to Jordan without government permission.

Esam noticed a change in Esther after she came from the retreat. She was full of joy as she told what had happened. He began to attend nearly all the church meetings with her. In the church, there was both a piano and an organ, but often there was no one to play them. Esther told Um Abee that in Iraq, her husband had played the guitar and piano for wedding parties and other celebrations. Esam didn't know any hymns, but she could give him a hymn book. He could practice and learn to play them for the services.

Esam agreed to this arrangement and began to practice. Sometimes he would come two hours before the service to practice on the organ. Alex Abugazell [ah-boo-guh-ZAL-ee] led the singing in the service and came early to help Esam learn the hymns. During these practice sessions, they began to talk about the Lord. Esam shared with Dr. Alex how he had been drawn to Christ in Iraq. Just a short time after Esther came back from the retreat, they prayed together for Christ to come into his heart.

There was rarely a service that Esther and Esam missed. The organ music was beautiful, and the congregation loved to hear him play. Esther was never too shy to pray in the meetings or share her testimony. They loved their church very deeply.

When their daughters started attending a Christian school for Iraqi refugees, they were told the whole family must attend the church that operated the school. Esam explained to the school principal this wasn't possible since they attended the Jabel Amman Church of the Nazarene. The principal sent a message to Esam and Esther threatening to dismiss the girls from the school if the entire family didn't come to their church. Most other schools wouldn't accept Iraqi children, so this was a serious concern. But Esam stood firm and told the school principal, "I'm not going to change my church for the sake of my children." The administration reversed their decision and allowed the girls to stay in the school.

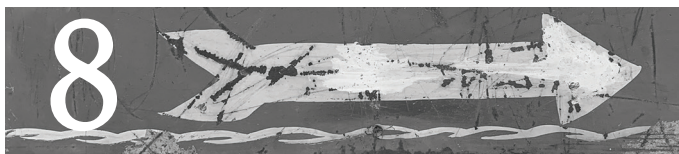
In Iraq, Esam's work as a government engineer provided his family with a comfortable lifestyle, but in Jordan, they lived much differently. Still, they were more fortunate than many, for they had not used all their savings to buy the expensive travel permits. When they left Iraq, they planned to be in Jordan for only a few weeks. Esther had family in Australia, and they hoped to immigrate there as soon as possible.

That immigration was not going to be easy. The family needed new passports to travel; but because Esam had illegally left Iraq, they couldn't go to the Iraqi Embassy. They could apply for Jordanian passports, but since Esam was

from a Muslim family and Esther from a Christian family, they knew the government would not give them passports. Their case was presented to the United Nations department that deals with refugee problems. After a review, the United Nations accepted their application for special travel documents. Esther could hardly wait to tell Um Abee and the whole church what the Lord had done. A few months later, the family traveled to Australia, and one of the first things they did was look for a church.

Um Abee dearly misses Esther and Esam and loves to tell how God worked in their lives. After they had settled in Australia, Esther wrote Um Abee: “We thank the Lord because you showed us the right way to know Jesus. We wouldn’t have found the Lord if we hadn’t come to this church.”

The church is a shelter for those who are weary and beaten down in a chaotic, sinful world. Sometimes those needing refuge can’t get to a church. They are trapped in bomb shelters, prison cells, or even their own homes. But God provides for His own and lifts them above the discouragement and trials of life. “For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock” (Psalm 27:5).



Some Through the Fire

1994

I picked up the ringing phone, happy to hear Lindell's voice on the other end. He was calling me from Jordan, where he had just arrived after conducting a district assembly in one of the neighboring countries.¹⁰ During this particular trip, General Superintendent William Prince was to meet Lindell in a northern city and conduct the assembly. Neither he nor Dr. Prince expected this to be an ordinary meeting since one of the ordained ministers on that district was being held in prison on false charges. During the assembly, they planned to spend most of the day in intercession for the pastor.

Lindell's first words to me were, "I've got wonderful news! Brother Gabriel has been released from prison. He got out the same day as the assembly, and we had a celebration instead of a business meeting." As Lindell, Dr. and

¹⁰ Israel does not have diplomatic relationships with several of the Middle East nations, and no phone or mail connections existed at that time. Lindell and I could contact each other during Lindell's visits to some of the districts, so I was always anxious to hear from him after one of these journeys.

Mrs. Prince, and Franklin Cook, Eurasia regional director at the time, walked into the host pastor's home, they fully expected to find troubled, saddened faces. Instead, they saw a table spread for a feast, filled with Arab dishes served only on special occasions. They were greeted with the news "Guess who's joining us for dinner? Brother Gabriel has just been released."

On a warm, sunny day in July 1994, Brother Gabriel had left his home for the long drive to the city, where he was to appear in court. He had been asked to give testimony concerning a legal matter, a confusion over property registration. But the questioning took a direction he didn't expect, and by the end of the session, he found himself sentenced to jail.

Somehow Gabriel managed to stay calm and asked the judge, "If I must go to jail, don't put me in a place with murderers and thieves. You know I've committed no crime." Remarkably, Gabriel was sent to a jail that was relatively clean and organized. He did find it difficult to sleep at night; since his flimsy cot was located in a busy corridor. When one of the younger prisoners noticed his predicament, he insisted on giving Gabriel his bed in a small room, and he took the cot on the hallway floor.

When we first heard that Brother Gabriel had been put into prison, we were much concerned. There was nothing tangible that Lindell and I could do to help. Even if we could obtain visas to this Arab country, a visit to the prison by Americans might make the situation more difficult for Brother Gabriel. A tall, handsome man in his mid-50s,

Brother Gabriel was not in good health at that time. We wondered how he could handle the hardships of prison life. An urgent request was sent to the Prayer Mobilization Line of the Nazarene World Mission Society (now Nazarene Missions International), asking Nazarenes around the world to pray for his release.

The most significant concern Gabriel had in prison was the burden his wife and church carried. Silwa [SEL-wuh], his wife, was shocked when she learned the court had sent her husband to prison. She cried out to God, questioning how something like this could happen to someone who had served Him so faithfully for so many years—the church needed him. She knew that those who had lied about her husband and brought about his imprisonment could make problems for the church. Immediately the church board organized a special time of intercession for Brother Gabriel. Every morning they went to the church and prayed for his release. Those prayer meetings became a source of strength for Silwa.

The weekly trips Silwa made to visit her husband in jail were both physically and emotionally exhausting. The journey took four hours by bus or taxi; and when she arrived at the prison, she had only a few hours with her husband. As a pastor's wife, she never expected to visit her husband in a jail. Nothing prepared her for the humiliation and discouragement she felt as she waited in line with the other visitors before going through an interrogation and security check.

Silwa's first visit was the most difficult. Her dignified, well-groomed husband walked into the visiting area,

wearing dreary prison pajamas. She spoke to him through prison bars. Brother Gabriel tried to lift her spirits and never complained. He reminded her of the words of Psalm 23—his God was with him in this valley.

Gabriel spent much of his time in the jail reading his Bible. He asked Silwa to bring him more Bibles, and he began distributing them to the other prisoners. Some began to read the Word of God and started to ask Brother Gabriel questions. This gave him the opportunity he needed to tell them about the change God had made in his life. He shared his testimony and told them how God had saved him from a life of sin.

Gabriel had been born in a nominal Christian home, but his parents were not believers. His father struggled with alcoholism and died when he was only 45 years old. Even though Gabriel saw his father's addiction and the pain it caused his family, he followed in his father's footsteps and became a teenage alcoholic.

The worldly life attracted Gabriel, and he made plans to become rich and powerful. One of his cousins was a believer who tried to get Gabriel to attend church. He occasionally attended church with him but only because he enjoyed arguing with the preacher about the existence of God. His cousin didn't give up, however, and asked Gabriel to stay in his home for a few days when he came for a visit. Gabriel accepted the invitation with the understanding that he was free to drink if he wanted to.

On the first day of his visit, a pastor came by to call on the home of his cousin. He began to talk about Jesus and

the power Christ had to change our lives. Gabriel's life of sin had not made him happy, and his addiction to alcohol was making him miserable. The pastor reminded him of what he knew—that God wanted to forgive him if he would confess his sins.

When Gabriel started to argue with the pastor, the words wouldn't come out of his mouth. The power of conviction moved upon him; and instead of arguing, he repented and asked the Lord to accept him. From that day on, there was a radical change in his life. He had once told his cousin, "When I believe in something, I want to do it wholeheartedly."

Gabriel returned home and found a Nazarene church to attend. He began to witness for the Lord and helped with Bible studies and Sunday school. It was at this church that he heard about sanctification and the power the Holy Spirit gives for holy living. He consecrated his life to Christ and made himself available for ministry in the church. After studying and serving in the church, he one day became a Nazarene pastor.

Gabriel shared his testimony of God's grace several times in prison. Some of the prisoners began to believe in the power of Jesus to change lives. The story Brother Gabriel told was quite different from the other tales they heard. Often, they entertained each other with detailed stories about the crimes they had committed, but Brother Gabriel told them about the One who loved the criminal.

Silwa met with a lawyer about Gabriel's situation, and he immediately began to try to get him released. But the days turned into weeks and then months. Silwa contacted the

lawyer almost daily, hoping to hear good news, but his usual reply was, “Maybe next week.”

One morning during his morning devotions, Gabriel felt the Lord tell him to prepare to go home. So, he packed and cleaned up, waiting to hear he was free. A few hours later, guards came and told him he could go home.

As Brother Gabriel sat and drank a cup of coffee with Lindell, he told him how prison had affected him. He had learned to trust more in God. Then he said he had a greater burden to tell those whose lives are captive to sin about the freedom Christ can give.

“I will tell them about the jail of condemnation after the Judgment Day,” Brother Gabriel says. “You’ll be locked away from loved ones and from God in heaven. Unless you’ve been in jail, you wouldn’t understand what that is like. I will plead with those who aren’t right with the Lord to repent.”

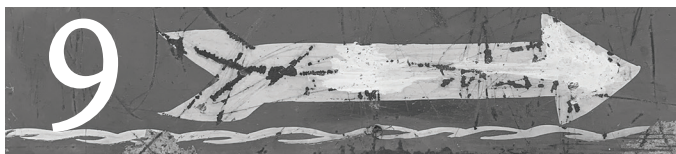


Gabriel celebrating with general superintendent, Dr. William Prince

In coming out of the prison, Brother Gabriel had only one regret. “I got out of jail just a little too soon,” he said. “My time there wasn’t long enough, because I was able to lead only two men to the Lord.”

Gabriel thanked Lindell for the prayers of his Nazarene brothers and sisters around the world and welcomed him to the banqueting table, where he told everyone there about the banner of love and protection God had provided.

Editors’ Note: Gabriel still lives in the Middle East and pastors his church.



Outreach to the Moon

1991 - 2003

Although the work of the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East began in the 1920s, it was not until 1991 that the Nazarene radio broadcast was initiated. Realizing that the most unevangelized areas of the world are the Muslim areas, the Church of the Nazarene decided to send the Good News message in the Arabic language across the airwaves of North Africa and the Middle East. Rev. Jacob Amari [yah-KOOB uh-MAR-ee] accepted the position as director of the Arabic radio broadcast in 1992.

Hours of preparation went into the planning of the Arabic radio program. Brother Jacob traveled to Monte Carlo to receive training from Trans World Radio in program production. Sermons were recorded and edited for future broadcasting, and a method of follow-up was developed in anticipation of listener response. As the day of the first broadcast drew near, publicity was sent to the Nazarene churches on the Eastern Mediterranean Field, encouraging them to listen to and pray for the broadcast. On April 1, 1993, the first Nazarene broadcast in Arabic was aired.

No one knew what to expect. Unfortunately, the Nazarene program was scheduled for the late hour of 11:45 p.m. on Monday nights, not exactly a prime-time slot. Still, good reports came in from our Nazarene listeners. They were proud and pleased to hear the voice of a Nazarene preacher on their radios.

In just a few weeks correspondence from listeners started coming into Brother Jacob's mailbox. At first, most of the letters came from Egypt and Jordan. Many of the listeners were Muslims interested in knowing more about Christ. They asked questions about the crucifixion of Christ, sometimes challenging Brother Jacob's statements with arguments from Islam. As quickly as possible, Brother Jacob would answer the letters and send them Christian literature that explained the plan of salvation. Lindell and I rejoiced over the response to the Nazarene radio program.

Brother Jacob longed to meet personally with some of the people he regularly corresponded with, and it had become apparent to him that some of the Muslims were true followers of Christ and had accepted Him as Savior. Often their letters expressed the loneliness and isolation they felt in their homeland.



Jacob Amari

In strict Muslim countries, the only churches that are legally permitted to conduct services are those that minister to the expatriate community. Those who attend the meetings are Americans, Europeans, Indians, and Asians, but few if any are from the local population. Underground churches may exist, but often the new believers don't know about them or are afraid to attend. In countries such as Saudi Arabia, conversion from Islam to Christianity can be punished with death. The "Voice of the Nazarene" radio program became the spiritual lifeline for many of the listeners.

Each time we spoke with Brother Jacob, he talked about visiting some of these countries and finding the new believers who wrote to him. When talking over the phone about the possibility of a trip to the country of Yemen, he chose his words carefully. There's always the concern that others may be listening in on the conversation. Even when speaking in the privacy of his home, Brother Jacob would speak in hushed tones and use a coded language. Lindell and I would smile as he told us, "I need to go to the moon. When do you think I can go? Why don't you go with me?" I knew, of course, that they weren't dreaming about becoming astronauts but were planning a trip to this Middle East Muslim country.

It was nearly a year after the first broadcast that Brother Jacob made his first visit to the country of Yemen. One of the listeners to the Nazarene program was a Yemeni journalist married to an engineer. She and her husband invited Brother Jacob to stay in their home, for they wanted to have their two young daughters learn more about Christianity.

While the Muslim parents sat nearby and listened, Brother Jacob would teach the girls about Jesus. Although the father faithfully prayed to Allah five times a day, he seemed interested in Brother Jacob's ministry. He even used his car to drive Brother Jacob to the home of other radio listeners living in their city.

Sometimes Brother Jacob would travel by bus for eight hours to meet and visit with listeners. It was thrilling for him to meet those from whom he had received letters. A young man named Nihad [nee-HAD] amazed Brother Jacob with his knowledge of the Bible. He knew from his own personal studies that when the disciples followed Jesus, they were baptized. So, he asked Brother Jacob if he would baptize him as a follower of Christ. In a remote beach beside the Red Sea, Jacob baptized Nihad. After his baptism, he asked Brother Jacob to tell him all there was to know about the Church of the Nazarene. Brother Jacob sent him a simple book that had been translated into Arabic. Nihad embraced the doctrine of the church and now proudly calls himself a Nazarene.

Another Yemeni [YEH-men-ee] radio listener contacted Brother Jacob when he was visiting Jordan. He explained that he lived and worked in Saudi Arabia and listened every week to the Nazarene program. He also wanted to be baptized, so Brother Jacob arranged for his baptism at one of the Nazarene churches in Amman.

A few months later, Brother Jacob baptized a third Muslim believer. A young Iraqi woman named Zayna [ZAY-nuh] had contacted Brother Jacob and asked if she could meet

with him and his wife, Miriam, when she came to Amman. She came to the office with an Iraqi believer who was eager to have someone speak to Zayna. After Zayna explained that she had been listening to the program for months, she told Brother Jacob she had had a hungering in her heart to know more about Christianity ever since she was a little girl.

Brother Jacob began to explain the teachings of the Bible to her, starting with Adam and Eve and ending with Christ. She asked how she could become a Christian, and they prayed together in his office. He invited her to attend one of the Nazarene churches. Not long after she became a believer, she asked to be baptized as a testimony to her new life in Christ.

After Brother Jacob's trip to "the moon," he began to receive even more letters of response. Some months he received as many as a hundred. It was evident that God was moving in miraculous ways. Brother Jacob said that many Muslims feel their

After Brother Jacob's trip to "the moon," he began to receive even more letters of response.

religion and their political systems have failed to meet the needs of the people. In countries where there has been a civil war, the ruling governments have not had time to monitor Christian activity, and there is actually more freedom for people to examine Christianity. Our Nazarene radio program was started at a strategic time and is touching the lives of hundreds of Muslims in countries that close doors to Christian missionaries.

After his first visit to Yemen, listeners would write Brother Jacob and ask, “When are you coming again? We need to see you.” So, another “moon journey” took place. This time Brother Jacob’s goal was to bring together the various listeners around the country for fellowship and prayer. With suitcases packed full of Christian literature and Bibles, he flew to Yemen.

After settling in a hotel, Brother Jacob contacted Nihad and the other believers he had met on his previous visit. Most of these believers were young men, 18 to 30 years of age. They are secret believers, privately practicing their faith, and the problems they face are similar. Often, they publicly confess their faith to their parents when the family is trying to force them to marry a Muslim. Even without the guidance and support of a local church or pastor, they know it is important to marry one who shares their faith in Christ. Angered parents would often reject this new faith and send the young man out of the home. They are cut off from family and live their faith without the support of Christian fellowship.

But Brother Jacob set out to change this isolated situation. One by one he visited or called the believers who had written him. He asked if they could travel and meet at the home of one of the believers for a time of fellowship. Over 23 came together and greeted each other with the warmth and hospitality characteristic of the Arab culture. They shared their testimonies of faith, prayed together, and departed as brothers in the Lord.

During one of our recent visits to Amman, Brother Jacob proudly showed Lindell and me pictures of these young men.

We saw a photo of a Yemeni judge who had been baptized as a small child. His father had been a secret believer who wanted to raise his son as a Christian. The grown-up son, also a secret believer, longed to bring up his family as believers, but he had married an unbeliever and was concerned that his wife would divorce him when she learned he was a believer. Brother Jacob encouraged him to tell her about Christ by giving her books to read about Jesus and then talking to her about Him. “Gradually, you will lead your family to Christ,” he encouraged.

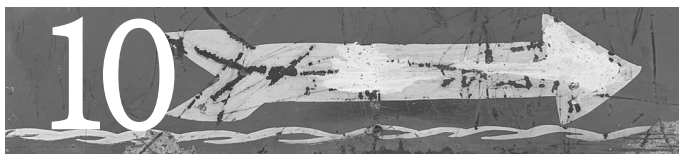
Gradually, you
will lead your
family to Christ...

When the photos were put away, Brother Jacob carefully brought out an intricately embroidered piece of fabric from his briefcase. The craftsman had beautifully created a work of art that displayed the Christian symbols of a cross and lamb. Golden threads were sewn on the design, giving the illusion of light. Jacob told us that the man who had created this work of art owned an art shop in the market of the city. He made his living as a craftsman, famous for his embroidered wall hangings. This design was a special one that he had made for Brother Jacob. The craftsman proudly told Brother Jacob that this design symbolized Christ, whom he now chose to follow.

As the Nazarene radio program reaches into the untouched Muslim world, spiritually hungry Muslims are finding a peace and forgiveness unknown in Islam. The Islamic crescent is being illuminated by the light of the Cross.

Editors' Note: In 2003, Jacob retired from the Radio ministry. But the work did not end. People had started watching more television and using computers so it was necessary to find a new way of reaching into the countries to which we could not physically travel.

A young, well-known entertainer found Christ and was discipled by one of the pastors in Lebanon. Ayman Kafrouny [IE-man KA-froo-nee] and his wife, Grace, enrolled in the Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College. He soon felt the Lord leading him to leave the secular music world and start singing for Christ. The idea of a television ministry grew in his heart and was supported by Nazarene Media and Broadcasting. His program was so successful that MTV of Lebanon invited him to share a series during Lent through Easter to be aired at prime time every day. Backed by a choir, he sang, shared his testimony and preached the gospel. Renewed every year, this program has continued, and many have come to Christ through the broadcast.



Exiles, Refugees, and Immigrants: Finding Hope in Christ 1920 – Present

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17-19, ESV)

Who is the sojourner? Today, many names are used to describe those the Bible calls sojourners, strangers, and foreigners. Here are a few: displaced persons, migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, stateless persons, visitors, exiles, and refugees. While there are many words to describe the foreigner, there is one command from God's word that clearly describes how we are to respond to them. We are to love others as Christ has loved us.

From the beginning days of the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East, God spoke to the hearts of missionaries about the spiritual and physical needs of the refugees. In the 1920s, the Krikorians [kree-KOR-ee-an], themselves Armenian [ar-MEEN-nee-uhn] refugees living in America, requested permission and funds to begin their ministry. Samuel Krikorian moved to Jerusalem and started a day school, hoping to help some of the thousands of Armenian refugees who had left Turkey. In the 1950s, missionaries and church leaders opened schools, in Zarqa [ZAR-kuh] and Amman, Jordan; Beirut, Lebanon; and Damascus, Syria. Most of the students in these schools were Palestinian¹¹ refugees. Students came for an education, but they also heard about Jesus.

Decades later, another wave of refugees needed help. When Saddam invaded Kuwait, thousands and thousands of Iraqis crossed the borders of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria to find shelter in tent camps or overcrowded apartments. Nazarene churches in these locations were ready to help with the needs of these desperate, marginalized people. Governments were willing to help, but they could only do so much. It didn't matter that churches and Christian NGO's¹² were the providers of assistance, the refugee problem was a great

¹¹ Until 1948, the area from the geographic region in the Southern Levant between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River (where Israel and Palestine are today) was called Palestine. A Palestinian was anyone who was born and lived in that area regardless of race or religion.

¹² Non-Government Organizations who primarily focused on humanitarian assistance.

burden on these nations and they welcomed the help our churches and others offered.

Although a vast majority of the refugees are Muslims, Christians have also been refugees. Some of these refugees used their time of exile to study theology and prepare to return to their homeland with the Good News. The Church of the Nazarene in Baghdad [BAG-dad], Iraq was started in 1994 by a refugee who returned to his hometown. Other Christian refugees had been leaders for Nazarene ministry and churches in refugee sites in Europe.

The most recent movement of refugees came after the Arab Spring¹³ shook and shocked the Middle East. Thousands and thousands of frightened people fled to borders, hoping



Mother and infant waiting for help.

to find safety. By this time, the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East had grown not just numerically but also in their understanding of what it means to “love your neighbor.” They had learned that “to preach the gospel, you have to be the gospel.” Our churches have also developed leaders

¹³ Arab Spring refers to the democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Arab_Spring

and skills to administer assistance and relief programs with efficiency and dignity.

Nazarene Schools and churches are opening their doors to provide help to as many refugees as possible. Not only do they provide food and medical assistance, but they also invite them to their services, pray with them, and offer Bibles and JESUS film DVDs. They tell them the story of Jesus the Hope, who loves them and knows them each by name.¹⁴

They had learned that “to preach the gospel, you have to be the gospel.”

The Middle East refugee crisis entered its eighth year in the spring of 2018. An end to this great humanitarian tragedy is not in sight.

According to UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, the refugee situation is dire.

- Syrians continue to be the largest forcibly displaced population in the world, with 13 million people at the end of 2018. That’s more than half of the Syrian population.
- More than 5 million people have fled Syria seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and beyond. In Lebanon, where more than 1 million Syrian refugees reside, there are no formal refugee camps, and approximately 70 percent of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line.
- In Jordan, over 660,000 Syrian refugees are trapped in exile. Approximately 80% of them live outside camps,

¹⁴ Church of the Nazarene Eurasia. “Middle East church shares its heart with refugees.” Posted 07 March 2017. *NCN News*.
<https://nazarene.org/article/middle-east-church-shares-its-heart-refugees>

while more than 140,000 have found sanctuary at the Za'atari [zah-AH-tar-ee] and Azraq [ahz-RAK] refugee camps. 93% of refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line.¹⁵

Jesus spoke to his disciples about their need for compassion in Matthew 25. His words continue to be relevant to the churches, not just in the Middle East, but around the world.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” (Matthew 25:35-40, ESV)

Nazarene Schools and churches are opening their doors to provide help to as many refugees as possible.

¹⁵ USA for UNHCR. “Refugee Statistics.” *USA for UNHCR*. www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics



Original Epilogue

1996

As I sat at the computer and worked on the final chapters of this book in April 1996, the news that came over the radio caught my attention. The Iranian-backed terrorist organization called Hezbollah [hez-BAH-luh] was firing Katyusha [kuh-TOO-shuh] rockets into northern Israel, and Israel was retaliating with “surgical” attacks in southern Lebanon and the city of Beirut. Immediately I thought about Lindell. He and Louie Bustle, director of the World Mission Division, had flown into Beirut that day. As far as I knew, they were still there. I prayed for their safety and hoped soon to hear from them. I struggled with the disappointment over the deterioration of the peace process. Hope for a better future seemed to be melting away as “cold” peace turned to “hot” peace and again to “no” peace. Then I reminded myself of Romans 8:28—God uses all things for His purposes. He was in charge.

When Lindell called about 30 hours later, I told him how concerned for his safety I had been after I heard about the Israeli bombing on Beirut. He was shocked. They didn’t

know anything had happened. But after I relayed what I knew, we concluded that they had left the city just a few hours before the bombing began. Lindell explained they had taken a taxi across Lebanon into Syria and spent one night in Damascus. The next morning, they rode in another taxi and arrived in Amman just in time for Dr. Bustle to speak at the special church service.

Of course, Lindell was eager to hear more information and soon learned that over 200,000 Lebanese civilians had fled cities in southern Lebanon and traveled north to seek refuge in Beirut. Within hours after he and Dr. Bustle had left the Nazarene School in central Beirut, thousands of people moved into the area of Sin-el-fil, where the school was located. The director of the school saw the crowded tents around the school and decided to help. Classes were canceled, and the doors of the school opened to provide shelter for 350 people. Most of the “guests” were from non-Christian backgrounds. Nazarene Compassionate Ministries sent money to buy blankets and food, and again, a cup of water was given in the name of Jesus.

But that’s not all. Members of the church conducted a day camp to provide activities for the restless and frightened children. New Testaments were given to everyone, and over 50 attended the Bible study held at the nearby Nazarene church. Shelter and safety were provided, and Jesus’ name was glorified.

The missiles stopped flying, and a cease-fire was negotiated two weeks later. The refugees returned to their homes.

Undoubtedly, the missiles and bombs will fly again in some area of the Middle East. That's characteristic of the peace that governments and politicians provide. But God has placed a body of faithful believers who will be there to show the way to the shelter of His love and truth.



Afterword:

2019

Kay: We left the Middle East in April 2014 and made our home in Indiana, USA. There are so many things I miss from our lives there: cultural diversity, election campaigning that lasts only three months instead of two years, walks along the hillsides of Jerusalem and eating warm *pita*¹⁶ [PEE-tuh] with freshly made hummus¹⁷ [HOOM-mus], just to name a few. Of course, we miss the people most of all.

Lindell: I've traveled back to the Middle East at least four times since 2014. On those trips, I get to see how God used us during that time and give thanks to God for the opportunity I had to train and mentor indigenous leaders. Two years before we left the Middle East, I felt the Lord releasing us from our responsibility there. However, I did not feel He was finished with me yet, so we stayed until we were sure a national leader was ready to take over. One of our pastors, Khalil Halaseh [khu-LEEEL HAL-uh-suh] was assigned as the new Field Strategy Coordinator, the position I had vacated. He is doing a great job.

¹⁶ Pita is a common flatbread in the region.

¹⁷ Hummus is a dip made of pureed chickpeas.

Kay: How have the churches handled the challenges of the last five years?

Lindell: The refugee crises taking place in Iraq and Syria are viewed as opportunities to share Christ with others, and that is precisely what I see is happening in all our churches. What a blessing it is to see God leading His Church. The Jordanian and Lebanese Nazarene churches are eager to minister to the thousands of displaced persons and provide an example of boldness and servanthood for the global church.

Kay: How many churches do we have there now? Have any churches had to close?

Lindell: There are 33 churches in the Middle East today and additional house groups that meet regularly. The churches have all remained open during days of unrest because worship and community are essential to their existence in the Middle East. Many of the churches have even grown, and several hold additional services for the refugees.

Kay: The story of the Church of the Nazarene in the Middle East is still being written. No one knows what the future holds; it's likely Christ will return before there is peace in the Middle East. Until then, despite all the difficulties and obstacles they will face; the Church will persevere. In God, they find refuge, strength, courage, and joy. He is the HOPE that the world needs.



1. Think of a time when you found circumstances in your life overwhelming. What do you do to get through these times? In this day of social media, we have numerous ways to connect. Do you find these helpful or not?
2. It is unlikely that many outside of Lebanon knew the difficulties that Abdu Khanashat faced as headmaster of the school during those years of civil war. Think of the responsibility educators have today. Make a list of schools, teachers, and administrators in your area. Pray for God to give them wisdom, strength, and courage for the responsibility God has given him or her.
3. Scripture gave strength to the Brownings during the time of strife. List Bible verses that have given you strength when the situation around you proved beyond your control. Let them be a personal reminder of God's faithfulness, but also make them part of "your story" as you share "His story" with others.
4. Do you have acquaintances or friends who are from another religion? What do you know about their religion that might help you begin a conversation with him or her? Even if you don't know anyone from another religion, spend some time learning about another religion and pray for opportunities to meet someone of that faith.

5. Why is reconciliation important for us to grow as Christians? Reconciliation can be between individuals or groups. Throughout history, horrific acts of violence have been inflicted on others in the name of religion; Christianity included. Today with so much division because of political differences, believers need to be reconciled to each other. What are some things we can do to make this happen?
6. If there are any refugees or immigrants in your area, how could you help them? How might you help refugees that are around the world?
7. World Mission Broadcast ministry was once the primary media for outreach. Today we have new ways to communicate the gospel. What are some of the media options available today? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
8. Many Christians today live in places where they face persecution and discrimination. Make an effort to keep informed about the situations they face and pray specifically for their needs.

