

The nation of Iran has been in the headlines recently. It has been under the theocratic tyranny of the Ayatollahs since 1979, but there has been a popular uprising against their dictatorship in recent months. For several years there have been reports of a massive spiritual revival taking place, especially among young people. Tired of the religious bondage of Islam, many are turning to the good news of freedom through Jesus Christ. One key influence has been the prolific occurrence of dreams and visions about a man in light who is identified as none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, this is nothing new, for Christianity grew rapidly through the influence of the apostle Paul, who came to Jesus through a personal revelation on the road to Damascus. He became so devoted to Jesus, that he was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of the kingdom of God. He knew that chains, trials and persecution would occur in every city. He responded with these words:

**But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy.' - Acts 20:24 NKJV**

That was the attitude of many of the early Christians. They were ready to die for their faith in Jesus. God had already displayed His great love for them through Jesus Christ, who died for all mankind at the cross. The above underlined words from Paul reminded me of a book I read over 35 years ago that impacted my faith; **Is Life So Dear** by Brother Andrew, which challenges Christians to actively defend their faith, be bold in spreading the Gospel and engage in spiritual warfare. Andrew van der bijl, known as Brother Andrew and 'God's Smuggler', founded a group called Open Doors which focused on smuggling God's Word into countries closed to Christianity.

If you didn't know, Open Doors can trace its history back to 1955, when a young Dutch lad called Andrew stepped off of a train in Warsaw, Poland. He was there to attend a communist festival for young people. But he wasn't a communist.

Andrew was a risk-taking, follow-Jesus-with-everything-he-had kind of Christian. As he stepped off that train he carried a suitcase filled with Christian literature to give out. He figured if they were going to shout about the benefits of communism, he'd shout about the love of Jesus. On that trip, Andrew first met Christians who were persecuted for their faith. It changed his life. God spoke to him with a passage from the book of Revelation – 'Awake, and strengthen what remains and is about to die' (Rev 3:2). From that point, Brother Andrew decided to dedicate his life to support and strengthen persecuted Christians. He started off in communist Europe, then China, North Korea, the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, India and many more. Nine of the ten top nations that persecute Christians today are Islamic, the religion of the sword. Islam descended from Ishmael - Genesis 16:11-12. Mohammed used violence to make converts.

Brother Andrew died in 2022, but Open Doors continues its work, serving in over 60 countries around the world; his words, actions and history still have the power to inspire us to be more like Jesus. Andrew wrote the following words in 1952, when he responded to God's call to serve. In essence, Andrew died to self in 1952 and gave his whole heart and life to Jesus.

**"Whenever, wherever, however you want me, I'll go... I'll begin this very minute. Lord as I stand up from this place, and as I take my first step forward, will you consider this a step towards complete obedience to you? I'll call it the step of yes".**

Let us remember the Christians in Iran and many other nations where Christians are being persecuted and even killed for their faith. Before I headed overseas for full-time missions, I had memorized several key scriptures to prepare me for the spiritual battles ahead. For example,

**'They overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.' Rev. 12:11 NIV**

Most Christians will not become martyrs for Jesus, but God asks us all to die to our self. We praise God for all who have died to self and loved God with all their heart.

**We serve Christians around the world whose brave faith in Jesus means they are, beaten, threatened, imprisoned, tortured, falsely accused, disowned and hated.**