



LifeSpot ... Stories of trust

In the presence

A man named Brother Yun served many years as a leader in China's underground church movement. "You must have had a terrible time in prison," people would say. "What are you talking about?" he would respond. "I was with Jesus and had overwhelming joy and peace in his intimate presence." Yun thinks those who don't know what it is to experience God's presence are the ones who really suffer. He reminds believers we have a cross to bear—perhaps ridicule or rejection. "When you're faced with such trials, the key is not to run from them or fight them, but to embrace them as friends. When you do this you'll not fail to experience God's presence and help."

Opportunity to trust

In the early to mid-1800s in America, courageous people formed a secret network of routes and safe houses to help slaves realise their freedom. Churches were an important part of the network. For his involvement, a Methodist minister named Calvin Fairbank was caught by authorities and imprisoned for 12 years. He kept a log of his beatings. During his incarceration, he received a total of 35,105 lashes with the whip. As the world cascades into turmoil over spiritual freedoms, who knows which of us might be called to suffer on account of our integrity? Will we endure? In Christ we will endure, and the trust learned through small trials now will have a lot to do with it.

Spirit of adventure

A memorial in Queenstown, New Zealand, includes these words from the diary of Captain Robert Scott, as he and his men lay dying in their Antarctic tent: "We took risks; we knew we took them. Things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last." Here is the spirit reflected in those who venture for God—the spirit of disciples faithful to the end. Our Lord has promised us many things; freedom from trouble is not one of them. But endurance, resolve and patience are gifts we can count on. "We do not lose heart. . . . Inwardly we are being renewed day by day." 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV).

Refiner's fire

Susannah Spurgeon, wife of the preacher Charles Spurgeon, suffered illness for more than 25 years. She wondered, "Why does my Lord permit lingering weakness to hinder the sweet service I long to give him?" One evening, sitting by the fireplace with a friend, she thought she heard a robin singing. A sweet, melodious, mysterious sound. Then her friend exclaimed, "It comes from the log on the fire!" "Ah," thought Susannah, "when the fire of affliction draws songs of praise from us, then indeed we are purified and our God is glorified!" God's Word is both realistic and hope-filled on this subject. Suffering "for a little while" is the fire that refines us and leads us to eternal peace and praise (1 Peter 1:3-9).

A choice to trust

Dr Viktor Frankl wrote about his three years in Nazi concentration camps. He recalled that even in those extreme conditions there were men who “walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the freedom to choose his attitude in any given set of circumstances.” *Evidence*: Daniel in the lions’ den, Nehemiah building the wall, Christ in his trials, Paul and Silas in prison. The choice of trust does not originate in ourselves. It’s gift, it’s miracle, it’s grace, it’s Spirit. It’s the One in us, who is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:1).

True freedom

Armando Valladares was 23 years old when he refused Castro’s order not to worship. His refusal brought 22 years in prison, with torture and unbelievable deprivation. His first Christmas was spent naked in a tiny cell, with a fractured ankle, covered with urine and faeces dumped over him, sores covering his body, fingertips chewed by rats, his hands bleeding as they were clasped in prayer. With his blood he wrote poems of hope. On another Christmas, Armando led 900 prisoners in carol singing, while guards watched in awe. He wrote, “The greater the repression and torture, the firmer and more resistant my internal framework. My situation is difficult, but I feel and am a free man.”

“I can trust”

Hudson Taylor was a modern apostle, giving his life for souls in China. He was familiar with suffering. He endured persecution, criticism, separation, the death of two children, the death of his wife, disabling illness, and perpetual uncertainty. In the Boxer Rebellion, 58 of his missionaries and 21 of their children were killed. At that time one grief-stricken, dying mother said, “I wish I could have gone back there to tell the dear people more about Jesus.” Hudson said “I cannot think; I cannot even pray; but I can trust.” Two firm assurances sustained him: *Ebenezer*—“The Lord has helped us,” and *Jehovah-Jireh*—“The Lord will provide.”

The night and the morning

The night before his martyrdom under Queen Mary, Robert Glover prayed desperately for the joy of the Lord. But it didn’t come. A friend visited him in prison, encouraged him, prayed with him. But still, Robert had no sense of God’s closeness—none at all. In the morning, he stumbled in darkness of spirit toward the stake at which he would be burned. Then, in a moment, everything changed. The Spirit of God came upon him and overwhelmed him. He clapped his hands together and cried out to his friend, “Austin! He is come, He is come!” For our own dark times, we have God’s total promise: “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Psalm 30:5 (NIV).