

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A LONELY FAITH: LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL RESILIENCY LEARNED FROM THE
ISOLATED, CAPTIVE, AND RESCUED

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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A LONELY FAITH: LEARNING SPIRITUAL RESILIENCY FROM THE ISOLATED,
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Americans have always traveled abroad whether as merchants, military service members, missionaries, reporters, or simply, “tourists.” Most return safely, but some have been taken captive by foreign governments, terrorists and criminal organizations. Though many have studied their struggles, no wide-scale attempt has been made to understand the role religious faith played in enduring their captivities. If understood, such information could be used in training those who may be exposed to similar circumstances in the future, and may have devotional value for others enduring crises. In this study, one hundred seventy-eight international travelers are surveyed, assessing their expectations of and preparation for, the spiritual dynamics of a potential captivity. Historic cases are presented, observations are made, and recommendations are presented for those at risk and those ministering to them.

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Chapter One Introduction

In sorting out the story after our release, we found that most of us had come to combat constant mental and physical pressure in much the same way. We discovered that when a person is alone in a cell and sees the door open only once or twice a day for a bowl of soup, he realizes after a period of weeks in isolation and darkness that he has to build some sort of ritual into his life if he wants to avoid becoming an animal. Ritual fills a need in a hard life and it's easy to see how formal church ritual grew. For almost all of us, this ritual was built around prayer, exercise and clandestine communication. The prayers I said during those days were prayers of quality with ideas of substance.¹

These are the words of Admiral James Stockdale, the highest-ranking naval officer among the American Prisoners of War (POWs) held during the Vietnam War. They describe something of the experience of captivity and identify some of the sources of strength these men and women have consistently found. The horrifying reality of cross-cultural captivity has been experienced by tens of thousands of Americans over the history of our nation. In the first weeks of 2014 as this report is being written, an American pastor is being held in against his will in Iran, American reporters are being held in Syria, an American businessman/missionary is being held in North Korea, and Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, United States Army, is being held by an unknown group likely in the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. These are only a representative sample of those currently missing.

When someone is taken captive, suddenly, perhaps violently, and held against their will by a foreign power, they often lose the ability to make their own choices, to communicate with families and loved ones, and suffer unspeakable mental, physical, and emotional hardships. Where do they get the strength to endure? For many, the answer is from God – the One who can never be taken from them no matter how great their other deprivations.

¹ James Bond Stockdale, *The World of Epictetus: Reflections on Survival and Leadership, in War Morality, and the Military Profession*, 2nd Ed. Malham M Wakin ed. (Westview Press: Boulder, CO), 1986, 17.

The author first encountered this topic in 1997 while serving in the United States Marine Corps, during initial training to serve as a Counterintelligence and Human Intelligence (CI/HUMINT) Specialist. CI/HUMINT Specialists have primary responsibility within the Marine Corps to counter the threats of terrorism, including kidnapping, and to conduct investigations into missing and captured personnel. As a Christian, the author began to wonder how the information he was briefing to Marines preparing to travel overseas might benefit missionaries and others also preparing to leave America.

After being discharged from the Marine Corps, the author went on to serve as a Missions Pastor for a missionary sending group operating in East Africa where an ongoing civil war in Sudan, as well as the desperate economic conditions of the area, served as a constant threat to the safety and security of missionary personnel. The author's first trip to Uganda was to assist in the fortification of a missionary compound that had recently been attacked resulting in the death of one employee and the maiming of another. For these missionaries, the threat of captivity or attack was never far from their minds. After returning from this trip, the author began to re-assemble information from briefings given to service members and developed a presentation, tailored for missionaries headed overseas, which addressed issues such as the threat to American citizens from criminal organizations and terrorist groups, how to avoid a potential captivity, how to survive if captured, and how to respond during a potential rescue. Those briefings have since been delivered to hundreds of missionaries, including a presentation to the staff of AIM-Air, the aviation wing of Africa Inland Mission in Nairobi, Kenya. In attendance at that briefing was a pilot who had been held captive in Sudan in 1982 who praised the accuracy and value of the information presented.²

² That missionary pilot was Ron Pontier of African Inland Mission (AIM) Air, whose rescue is described in Chapter Two.

Those original studies and experiences serve as the catalyst for this dissertation. The writer, now a pastor of a local church, continues to travel overseas to speak with missionaries, sends out missionaries from his own church, and serves as a Chaplain with the United States Air Force Reserve ministering to men and women who are likely to travel abroad, often to dangerous places. This dissertation will be helpful for those in similar circumstances who have the opportunity to prepare Americans for the possibility of captivity and to introduce them to the sources of spiritual strength that will help them endure it.

Statement of the Problem

Though Americans have been taken captive since the earliest days of this nation's history, and though the role of religious faith in enduring captivity has been cited time and again in various studies and even in the captives' autobiographical writings, no known effort has been made to study that role collectively. This research is intended to fill the void and make observations and recommendations based on previous events which may be helpful in preparing for or responding to future events. Those who will benefit most from such a study are those headed overseas those currently living overseas, those who minister to them, families of those at risk, and those who have endured isolation, captivity, or rescue.

The research will survey current international travelers regarding their self-assessed preparedness for the realities of captivity and their expectation of the role religious faith would play in their own potential capture. It will further survey a sample of writings from former isolated personnel, hostages, and POWs and their associated rescue missions to collect first person observations on the spiritual aspects of these events. Although the issues will be shown to cover the span of American history, the majority of the research will focus on events of the past seventy-five years.

Research of historical events will focus on Americans who have been unwillingly separated from their preferred location or companions for any reason. This includes individuals who have been isolated, such as a military or missionary pilot downed over unfriendly territory whether or not he is captured. Also included will be those who are detained, meaning they have been simply prevented from proceeding or physically restrained by an organization claiming they have violated local or international law such as missionaries arrested for sharing their faith in a country where such actions are illegal. Hostages, or those abducted for the sake of financial or material gain by the captors will be included as will those considered captured or listed as Prisoner of War who have been seized and held by a military or paramilitary organization. Of particular note is that those considered to be missionaries will be included whether or not their captivity could be properly termed as ‘persecution.’ In other words, the experiences of missionaries will be eligible for inclusion whether they were specifically targeted for their doctrinal beliefs and religious activities, or were simply, “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” The intent is to make possible the inclusion of anyone separated from where they want to be and who they want to be with while traveling or serving overseas when such separation also included the potential for personal harm from organized groups and governments.

Statement of Limitations

The scope of this research is limited by four main factors. First, the subjects are all American citizens. Second, they either profess to be of the Christian faith or have no stated faith preference. Third, this study undertakes an examination of the role religious faith and practice played in the life of the individual enduring captivity. And finally, the experiences surveyed occurred in a cross-cultural environment.

The author recognizes that Americans who identify themselves as Muslims, Jews, Mormons, and members of other faith groups have endured similar experiences to those described herein and recommends an investigation of their experiences as a subject for future studies. However, the scope of this project has been intentionally limited to focus on the experiences of American Christians or those with no stated religious affiliation. The latter are purposefully included to observe whether they suddenly “found religion” during captivity.

Additionally, this study is limited by a focus on the *spiritual dynamic* involved in the lives of *individuals*. Many organizations offer some form of training for personnel sent overseas, and these courses and materials frequently address the risks associated with travel. A good example is the Private Security Overseas Seminar (PSOS) conducted regularly by the U.S. Department of State. American organizations including businesses, non-profits, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and schools may send their representatives to PSOS seminars and receive the same training offered to State Department employees and their families before being posted to embassies abroad.³ Studies have even been conducted on how missionary organizations should respond to the crisis of having personnel taken hostage overseas. However, in each of these cases the emphasis is primarily, if not exclusively, on preparing the organization vice preparing the individual at risk for captivity.

The United States military does conduct training for individuals at risk for capture. The training covers Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE), and includes both classroom settings and field experiences including a simulated period of captivity. Unfortunately, very little is said about the role of spiritual resiliency in enduring these conditions and such training is typically available only to certain members of the armed forces deemed to be at high risk of

³ The author attended a two-day PSOS event held at the State Department’s George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC), in Arlington Virginia in 2009 as a representative of an international medical missions agency.

capture such as aircrews and member of special operations forces. Thus there is a great opportunity to develop materials such as this study, which focuses on the individual and his or her personal sources of spiritual strength.

Finally, it must be noted that this is a study of cross-cultural events. Many studies have been done on the role of religion among domestic incarcerated populations, but there is a difference between domestic incarceration for a crime committed against, or within, one's own country, and the experience of being held overseas. Typically, the individual detained in a cross-cultural setting is engaged in what they believe to be a righteous cause, i.e. commerce, military operations, or missionary service. The domestic prisoner, typically, is being punished for their part in a crime. Therefore, the manner in which each interprets the propriety of his captivity is different. The criminal often knows he should be incarcerated; the POW or hostage knows he should not.

The American citizen in a domestic prison or jail is held by his own people for breaking the laws of his own land. American domestic prisoners know the length of their sentence, the conditions of their incarceration, and their possibility of early parole for good behavior. POWs and other captives have no idea how long they will be held. He or she is in the control of a foreign power that can change the rules of the game at any time, exerts a greater magnitude of control, and in many cases exercises complete sovereignty.

In light of the above, the following research will focus on American Christians and those of unknown religious affiliation and their personal religious experiences while under foreign control or the threat of capture in a cross-cultural environment.

Theoretical Basis for the Project

Information on those held isolated, captive, and rescued overseas comes from scattered sources. Unfortunately, many have died in the midst of the events and have taken their stories with them to the grave. In most of these cases we will never know the role faith may have played in the final days and hours of their lives. However, the memories of some of the deceased have been preserved and recorded by fellow captives; for example, the lives of Lance Sijan and Rocky Versace stand out from among the deceased POWs in Vietnam.⁴

Some survivors have returned and preserved their experiences by publishing autobiographical works. These first-hand accounts are valuable because they offer not only an account of the events, but also the insight of the individual who experienced them. These works are also particularly valuable to this study because in most cases they are not written to principally promote the spiritual experiences the authors had in captivity. Instead, spiritual experiences and exercises are typically described in as factual a manner as any other detail of the event. For this reason, such autobiographical accounts are the primary source of data for this project.

There is more information available on military captives than any other demographic by far. Like missionaries and others, military members have written of their own experiences in captivity. However, due to their unique position as employees and representatives of the United States government, they have also been subjected to numerous studies. An official process exists for debriefing those who have been rescued or repatriated. Over a period of time their experiences and memories are recorded and they receive extensive medical and psychological evaluations. These evaluations and access to treatment continue for the lifetime of the returnee.

⁴ The stories of Sijan and Versace are found in Chapter Two.

When the U.S. military is involved in their rescue, such services are often available to civilians, but they are not mandated to receive them in the way military members are.

The Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies⁵ is an official agency of the United States Navy with the primary mission of providing follow up care to and information on POWs from all American conflicts since Vietnam. Over the years large numbers of studies have been conducted on these men and women analyzing them from medical, psychological, and psychiatric perspectives. However, no known official studies have ever been conducted to assess the role of religion or faith in their experiences as a group. Once again, autobiographical recollections are the best repository of information on the role of faith in the lives of captives.

Additionally, God's word provides illumination and understanding in even the darkest experiences of our lives. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Bible has much to say about the issues of cross-cultural captivity. Indeed, many of the greatest and most familiar names of the Bible belong to men who endured captivity at the hands of foreign powers: Joseph, Samson, Daniel, Paul, even our Lord Jesus Christ who was put to death while in Roman captivity.

In addition to recounting captivity, the Scriptures often allow those held captive a voice as they speak about their circumstances and feelings during the events. But most beneficial of all, the Scriptures help us process the questions that arise in such times, questions such as, why did God allow this to happen and where is God in midst of my suffering?

In the pages of Scripture we find people held individually and in large groups; in fact, the entire nation was taken captive on several occasions. The first incidence of cross-cultural

⁵Website of the Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies:
<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmote/rpow/Pages/default.aspx>

captivity we discover in the Bible is that of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his own brothers.

Genesis 37:23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. 24 Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. 26 So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

The experience of being captured, then sold, transported, and sold again is familiar to many captives such as Chief Warrant Officer-3 Michael Durant, a U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter pilot who was shot down in Somalia during the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993. Durant was originally captured by one Somali clan and then sold to another, that of Mohammed Farrah Aidid.⁶ Being sold, or the threat of being sold, is a driving force in many modern kidnappings, as local gangs know that even if they can’t extract a ransom from the families of an American they capture, there is always the potential of selling them off to Al Qaeda or another similar, larger-scale organization. Little has changed in thousands of years of history.

Once in Egypt, Joseph gained relative freedom through earning the trust and favor of his employer, but lost that same freedom due to a false accusation of attempted rape with his employer’s wife. Joseph thus landed in prison in a foreign land, accused of a crime he did not commit – another experience modern captives would find familiar. In prison Joseph continued to worship and serve God, and in a miraculous turn of events, the relationship with God that he had cultivated in prison led to his release as he was able to interpret the Pharaoh’s dreams. After his

⁶ Durant’s story is told in further detail in Chapter Two.

release, Joseph was promoted to the number two position in the land and enjoyed phenomenal success in his professional endeavors.

This is not an uncommon event today. Many of those held POW during World War II and Vietnam returned home to continue or launch successful careers. POWs have gone on to become generals and admirals, senators, and even campaigned for election to the office of President of the United States. The same is true among missionaries and other captives. Heather Mercer was held by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 as America went to war against that country. She eventually escaped and later returned to missionary service, this time among the Kurds in Iraq after the initial campaign to oust Saddam Hussein in the mid-2000s. Captain Philips was captured by Somali pirates and was rescued during a daring raid by members of SEAL Team Six, and has since returned to pilot ships through some of the same waters in which he was captured.

The Bible also contains examples of people who were captured during military campaigns or as a result of political upheavals. This was especially common during the declining years of Israel and Judah. King Jehoiachin of Judah provides a notable example. After a failed attempt to oppose the Babylonians he was taken captive and led away with “all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.”⁷

Captivity en masse is also a common experience in modernity, most notably in World War II when the Japanese suddenly overran large populations of Americans in places such as Singapore, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, and China. An estimated 20,000 Americans were captured when the Japanese took the Philippines alone. The numbers overwhelmed the Japanese who had no plans for how to control such a large group.

⁷ 2 Kings 24:14

In the New Testament we find examples of missionaries being held captive. Probably the most famous is the Apostle Paul. One of the many captivities he experienced was in Philippi with Silas. After casting demons out of a young slave girl, the girl's owners sought retribution.

Acts 16:20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Miraculous events ensued that evening, and Paul later revealed his Roman citizenship, but the men had already suffered a great deal for being perceived as Jews, that is, members of another culture, who had come to teach new religious ideas. This is similar to the perception of some missionaries today, especially in what are termed "closed-access" countries where Christians are unwelcome by the official authorities.

All of this demonstrates that the Bible has much to say about the experience of cross-cultural captivity. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament will therefore provide a vital source as the theoretical basis of this project.

Statement of Methodology

There is no known source of information on the comparative religious experiences of Americans held hostage. Many studies have been done on POWs, hostages, and even on the religious experiences of inmates. Many POWs and hostages have also written about their experiences after their return, and the theme of spiritual resiliency occurs frequently in their writings. However, a thorough search of libraries and databases did not uncover any records of a publication regarding the specific study of the religious experiences and reflections of Americans

in situations involving cross-cultural captivity. The data must therefore be culled from a variety of sources.

Autobiographical recollections are considered to offer the greatest value whether in print, audio, or video form. The author will review a sample of literature related to the isolation, captivity, and rescue of Americans abroad, focusing primarily on the modern era beginning with the Vietnam War. From this review, trends will be noted, observations made, and finally recommendations presented for how the data might be used in conjunction with a survey of the expectations of modern travelers.

This study of the role faith may have played in enabling Americans to endure captivity has three aims. First, it is hoped such information will have value for those preparing to travel to, or currently located in foreign countries with a potential for captivity. Second, such information could be used by pastors, chaplains, and others training individuals to travel to foreign countries. And finally, the stories of resiliency may prove inspirational to others enduring difficult times in their own lives.

Chapter Two contains a chronological review of the history of Americans held captive and a sample of captive literature. Stories of individuals and groups held captive will be presented. The information here will introduce the reader to the captives, the circumstances of their captivities, and will highlight the role, if any, of religious faith in each situation.

Chapter Three contains accumulated observations of the role faith has played across the spectrum of captivity. Here the reader will observe that captivity is a risk for all travelers and understand what is unique about cross-cultural captivity as well as what this crisis has in common with others experienced on a broader scale. The religious questions captives face will be noted, such as “Why has God allowed this to happen to me?” And, their sources of strength

including prayer, Scripture, song, and forgiveness will be highlighted. Observations are made regarding the unique aspects of pre-, post-, and actual captivity.

Chapter Four contains concluding recommendations about the role of religion and faith for those facing the potential of captivity and those ministering to them. Here the results of a survey of one hundred seventy-eight international travelers and their expectations is included to assist those who may be developing material to train and prepare them for their travels and the potential of captivity. Recommendations fall into two main categories: general preparation and specific training.

Review of Literature

Scripture

The review of Scripture focuses on four main areas: reasons given for captivity; people turning to God for protection from captivity; people turning to God for strength in captivity; and God's view of captivity and suffering.

Deuteronomy 28:15 But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: . . . 25 The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. . . . 36 The LORD will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. 37 And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will drive you.

Deuteronomy 28 lays out the promises of blessings for the nation of Israel if they obey God's Law and worship Him, and then describes in even greater detail the curses that will come upon them if they disobey Him or walk away after other gods. The culmination of the curses is that God will allow them to be taken captive by another culture who led them away, out of the

Promised Land. Therefore, one reason for captivity is that it is discipline for walking away from God.

Judges 16: 28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, “O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!” 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.

Even when captivity is a result of personal sin and rebellion, it is possible to repent and return to God. Many years after God gave the promises and warnings of Deuteronomy 28, Samson became a judge in Israel. He was given supernatural strength, but did not cherish the God who had given it to him. As a result, he was eventually taken captive by foreigners. But in captivity, his thoughts returned to the God who had blessed him and he asked for one final dispensation of that strength. His final act in life was performed in dependence on God.

1 Kings 8: 46 “When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness’; 48 and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: 49 then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, 50 and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them 51 (for they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace), 52 that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. 53 For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD.”

In dedicating the Temple, Solomon reflected on the promises of blessing or cursing in Deuteronomy 28. He realizes that there is a distinct possibility that people will drift away from God “for there is no one who does not sin.” He further recognizes that one consequence of this will be foreign captivity. He requests therefore, that God maintain His mercy towards His people and when they recognize and repent that God would deliver them once again, as He already has out of Egypt. The passage continues to reinforce the idea that freedom is God’s desire for people, but when they allow themselves to become spiritually enslaved to other gods, they may lose their physical freedom as a consequence. However, there is always the promise of an open door for those who wish to return to God and the freedom and blessings He offers.

Jeremiah 29:4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD.

10 For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

From Jeremiah we learn that even if captivity is ordained by God, that does not mean God has completely forsaken the captives, indeed He has “thoughts of peace and not of evil” for them, intending for all this suffering to end in “a future and a hope.” He desires restoration above all; He wants the captive to call out to Him and be delivered. He even has the ability to make captivity more bearable: “build houses...take wives...seek the peace...” Also, prayer plays an essential role in captivity, for one can always communicate with God, even when one cannot speak to anyone else.

Revelation 2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.’ 11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.’”

In the first chapters of Revelation, Jesus dictates seven letters to churches spread across Asia Minor. The letters contain various rebukes and encouragements for the congregations. The letter for the church in Smyrna shows that Jesus is aware of their upcoming captivity. Particularly interesting, however, is that He does not promise to prevent it or to bring it to an early end. In fact, He seems to imply that their suffering will culminate in physical death. Unlike the captivity of Deuteronomy which was promised to those walking away from God, this suffering is promised to those who are actively serving Him and is attributed to Satan. Therefore, it is not advisable to assume that all captivity is proof of God’s judgment; it may actually be the exact opposite.

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they

held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Jesus had predicted the suffering of the church of Smyrna, but theirs was only a small part of the total suffering God expected. There is some number of martyrs, undoubtedly including cross-cultural victims, which must be fulfilled. Until such a time, the faithful in Christ, including missionaries serving overseas, should not expect to be completely immune to suffering for their faith.

Isaiah 36:14 Thus says the king: “Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; 15 nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’” 16 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: “Make peace with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; 17 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18 Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?”

In Isaiah 36-37 we find the city of Jerusalem being sieged by the Assyrians who launch a major campaign of psychological warfare attempting to persuade the people to surrender rather than be taken captive by force. Hezekiah, king of Judah, responds by seeking out Isaiah the prophet and two of them go into the Temple where they seek God’s intervention. Because of their faithful response to the situation, God miraculously strikes the invading army down and thereby prevents the possibility of captivity. So, although there are times when God allows captivity, there are also times when He determines to intervene and prevent it. It is always good to ask for His protection.

2 Corinthians 11:23... Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often...26 ... in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

The Apostle Paul faced the threat of captivity numerous times, including arrest by the governor of Damascus. He escaped this possibility, but spent many other nights bound by Gentiles. Two major observations must be gleaned here. First, when Paul had the opportunity to escape arrest, in this case he took it. At times then, it must be advisable to avoid cross-cultural captivity if escape is a possibility; not all suffering is to be stoically received. Second, even though it is possible to escape or even be divinely delivered at one time, that does not mean this will always be the case. Paul's life and ministry are full of escapes, short imprisonments with miraculous deliverances, long imprisonments, and finally, death. There is no formulaic response to captivity that applies in every case.

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

This Psalm of David is one of the best known sections of Scripture and it mentioned more than any other by those held captive. It speaks to both aspects of life, the calm moments when we peacefully lay down in green pastures by still waters and the turbulent, trying moments when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. In both cases however, the Shepherd is with us, on the one hand causing us to lie down in the peaceful pastures, on the other encouraging us to keep progressing through the valley. And finally, there is a hope for the final destination, dwelling in the house of the LORD.

Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Even in difficult times, when things do not seem to be coming together as expected, God may still be praised. Salvation is still the expectation of the righteous, even when everything seems to be failing. We do not receive an answer to every question this side of eternity, but it is still possible to rejoice.

Psalm 119: 49 Remember the word to Your servant,
Upon which You have caused me to hope.
50 This *is* my comfort in my affliction,
For Your word has given me life.

61 The cords of the wicked have bound me,
But I have not forgotten Your law.

84 How many *are* the days of Your servant?
When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?

85 The proud have dug pits for me,
Which *is* not according to Your law.
86 All Your commandments *are* faithful;
They persecute me wrongfully;
Help me!
87 They almost made an end of me on earth,
But I did not forsake Your precepts.

92 Unless Your law *had been* my delight,
I would then have perished in my affliction.

When the righteous are oppressed by evil, God's Word provides a powerful source of resiliency and strength, giving "life" to the afflicted. The Scriptures are an anchor to cling to in the midst of the storm as the suffering ask God to "remember" His word – the word which gives life. The Psalmist also realizes that opposition in his case comes from the proud; God does not send this suffering, and therefore, he asks to be delivered from it.

Psalm 56: 14 And at evening they return,
They growl like a dog,
And go all around the city.
15 They wander up and down for food,
And howl if they are not satisfied.
16 But I will sing of Your power;
Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning;
For You have been my defense
And refuge in the day of my trouble.
17 To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises;
For God is my defense,
My God of mercy.

David and the other authors of the Psalms frequently turn to God as the source of their strength in the midst of suffering and they put these remembrances to a tune. Songs play an important role in helping people remember comforting truths and therefore music is frequently found associated with persecution and captivity. Another example of this is found in the New Testament where Paul and Silas sing songs after being imprisoned in the Philippian jail.

Psalm 77:7 Will the Lord cast off forever?
And will He be favorable no more?
8 Has His mercy ceased forever?
Has His promise failed forevermore?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

10 And I said, "This is my anguish;
But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."
11 I will remember the works of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
12 I will also meditate on all Your work,
And talk of Your deeds.

When suffering comes into the lives of men and women in the Bible, they often reflect back on what they have already experienced of God. When the present doesn't make sense, we can often be guided by the past. This is an important lesson for those in a situation like cross-cultural captivity where the future is unknown, the present doesn't make sense, and God seems to be silent. When those who are suffering cannot know "why," they can remember "what" God has already done.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Paul saw that there was a redemptive quality to the suffering he experienced; it enabled him to reach out and comfort others. In his own sufferings, Paul had come to know more of the consolation and comfort of God. Now he was able to share this knowledge with others. Paul even went so far as to say that the reason for his suffering could be simply to enable him to conduct

this kind of ministry: “Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” This attitude, which finds the useful aspects of suffering, is beneficial to those enduring captivity today.

2 Timothy 4: 16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul says everyone else he might have counted on for comfort and support abandoned him. And yet, God did not. Paul was not only comforted by the Lord during this captivity, he was actually strengthened, and Paul believes that this captivity was useful for the Kingdom of God because it gave him the opportunity to share the gospel. Paul was seemingly always able to find some God-glorifying aspect to his sufferings, even in cross-cultural captivity when his life was on the line. He viewed himself not as a captive of men, but as a captive of God.

2 Corinthians 12: 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul saw that all of his weaknesses were simply an opportunity for the strength of Christ to shine through. After asking three times to be delivered from his sufferings, he was finally told to just lean on the strength of God instead. There seem to be some mysteries of Christ, some

familiarity with the Lord, which are known only by those who are so weak, so vulnerable, that they must have Christ or they will fail. It is therefore permissible, even desirable, for us to ask to be delivered as well, until we either receive that deliverance or receive the promise of supernatural assistance in enduring. Also, we see there that Paul never supposes that an injury or obstacle should keep us from Christian service or witness, but rather that we should grow in service and ministry in spite of our personal challenges.

Luke 19: 9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

God is the God of rescue missions. When we as human beings were held captive to sin, when we were separated from friendly forces, when we were lost in this world, He sent His own Son to seek us and to save us. Christ knows what it means to be held captive, He knows that when we are captive, we cannot free ourselves, and He knows we need someone to act on our behalf. And so God launched a rescue mission. He inserted His Son behind enemy lines, where He laid down His life that we might live. The mission was a success, and it should give great hope to those who are enduring captivity today – spiritual freedom is available now, and physical freedom through death or deliverance is coming soon.

John 18: 1 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. 2 And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. 3 Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.

Jesus Christ knows what it means to be betrayed into the hands of captors. And, when He was taken captive, He was abandoned by all of His disciples. Peter even went so far as to deny knowing Him three times. At the moment when most people could have used the support and

encouragement of friends, He felt the greatest solitude, eventually asking on the cross why God the Father had forsaken Him. Therefore, the modern captive may turn to Christ, knowing that He can identify with their captivity, the isolation, the abandonment, and the injustice. And, they may know that they can find comfort in Christ who has endured the same.

John 14: 15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

The Christian may know that he or she is never truly alone. Even in solitary confinement in a foreign land, the Christian captive is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who will abide with them “forever.” He cannot be shut out of a cell, He cannot be silenced by captors, and He cannot be restrained, God is always with His children, ever accessible. The captive may not feel His holy presence at all times, but he or she may be certain that He is there.

Romans 8: 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

We do not always receive an explanation of why we suffer on this earth, but we do have the promises of God to cling to and the hope of the future with Him. In the midst of our sufferings, we can reflect back on all that He has already brought us through and we can meditate on the glories of what is to come. We find that Jesus did the same thing when “for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). Knowing what was to come after the present suffering gave Him joy. So too for the Christian enduring captivity, they may know that great freedom and glory is coming soon and will last for all eternity.

Books and Articles

*Unbroken*⁸ tells the remarkable story of Louie Zamperini, a former Olympian who later flew bombers in World War II. His aircraft malfunctioned over the Pacific Ocean and he and fellow crew members spent 47 days adrift before running ashore on the Kwajalein islands which had been occupied by the Japanese. He spent the next three years being horrifically beaten in several POW camps. He was eventually rescued at the end of the war and returned to the United States where he struggled with violence and drunkenness for years until being saved through the preaching of a young Billy Graham.

Colonel George E. “Bud” Day recounts his experiences as a POW in Vietnam in his autobiography, *Return With Honor*.⁹ One of the most highly decorated Airman in the history of the U.S. Air Force - the only Airman to receive both the Air Force Cross and the Medal of Honor, Day was the cellmate of John McCain in Hanoi. Day also holds the distinction of being captured, escaping, and then being recaptured before finally being transferred to Hanoi. He reflects on God often during his captivity. On the day of his worst torture, as he was led to his interrogators, he noticed other Vietcong watching him, and later wrote, “I thought I knew how the Christians had felt in the Coliseum.”¹⁰

Vice Admiral James Stockdale was the highest-ranking Naval POW of the Vietnam War and was also one of the service’s most highly decorated officers receiving the Medal of Honor and four Silver Stars. He published many reflections on his captivity including “The World of

⁸ Laura Hillendbrand. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption*. (Random House: New York, 2013).

⁹ George E. Day, *Return With Honor*. (Mesa, AZ: Champlin Fighter Museum Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Day, 72.

Epictetus: Reflections on Survival and Leadership,”¹¹ where he adopts a philosophical tone noting, “in prison camps...everyday human nature, stripped bare, can be studied under a magnifying glass in accelerated time.”¹² Stockdale found comfort in prayer and reflections on the Scripture, including particularly the book of Job.

Captain Eugene “Red” McDaniel, another Navy pilot, tells of the brutal tortures he endured in *Scars and Stripes*.¹³ McDaniel was heavily involved in a clandestine communication system set up by the POWs in Hanoi, but when his activities were discovered the Vietnamese exacted a heavy toll. In the midst of his worst torture session, he completely surrendered to God. “It struck me then that God must have led me here, let me get shot down, that I might now enter into the totality of what it was all about to be in Him.”¹⁴ His salvation did not end the tortures, but he had the assurance, “God was not far outside this hell. If I had to go on with this nightmare, then I was sure He was with me. Nothing else mattered.”¹⁵

James “Nick” Rowe, was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army’s Special Forces when he was captured along with Captain Rocky Versace and Sergeant Daniel Pitzer. He tells of his unique captivity in South Vietnam in the book *Five Years to Freedom*.¹⁶ Rowe’s story focuses more on the political indoctrinations he and those held in the South faced as the Viet Cong attempted to

¹¹ James Bond Stockdale, *The World of Epictetus: Reflections on Survival and Leadership*, in *War Morality, and the Military Profession*, 2nd Ed. Malham M Wakin ed. (Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 1986).

¹² Stockdale, 12.

¹³ Eugene B. McDaniel, with James Johnson, *Scars and Stripes*, formerly published as *Before Honor* (New York: A.J. Holman Company), 1975.

¹⁴ McDaniel, 120.

¹⁵ McDaniel, 124.

¹⁶ James N. Rowe, *Five Years To Freedom*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).

persuade captives to embrace their communist ideology. During his captivity, American opinion about the war began to change and Rowe listened to broadcasts of demonstrations in America. This led him to question his own country's commitment to him while in captivity. After two years Rowe finally turned to God and found strength in the One who could never be taken away from him.

Chief Warrant Officer-4 Michael Durant tells of his experience as a POW in *In The Company of Heroes*.¹⁷ Durant flew Blackhawk Helicopters for the U.S. Army's elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) during the U.S. intervention in Somalia. His story is part of that immortalized in the book-turned-movie, *Blackhawk Down*, but officially named the Battle of Mogadishu. Durant's helicopter was shot down, and though he survived the landing he was eventually captured by a local gang that passed him along to his final captors. Durant describes his struggles with theodicy immediately after his captivity, and though he receives a copy of a Bible in a Red Cross package during his captivity, he is not able to resolve the issue until almost a year and half after his return to the United States.

Captain Scott O'Grady was shot down over Bosnia on June 2, 1995. He spent six days on the ground behind enemy lines attempting to avoid capture and recounts the story in *Return With Honor*.¹⁸ O'Grady turned to God through prayer in the initial moments after his plane was hit and never stopped leaning on God for strength through the entire event. "I walked though hell for six days. I should have been killed two or three times, but I kept on walking until someone said, 'Scott, you're not supposed to be here.' And He reached in and grabbed me with His hand and

¹⁷ Michael J Durant and Steven Hartov. *In The Company of Heroes*. (New York: New American Library, 2004).

¹⁸ Scott O'Grady with Jeff Coplon. *Return With Honor*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

pulled me out. That someone was God, and those six days in Bosnia were a religious retreat for me, a total spiritual renewal.”¹⁹

Rick Bragg recounts the experiences of Private First Class Jessica Lynch in *I Am A Soldier Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*.²⁰ The book seems to communicate that religion and prayer were more of a concern to Lynch’s hometown community in Palestine, WV than they were to Lynch and her family. Lynch prayed during the initial attack on her convoy in Iraq, and the last thing she remembers of the attack is praying, but little else is mentioned about prayer after her capture. The community back home had a much more fervent and devout response: prayer vigils were held, public prayers were offered to Jesus, local pastors stopped by and prayed, and the Methodist church rallied around the family.

Marcus Lutrell tells his story in *Lone Survivor*.²¹ Lutrell was a member of a four man SEAL team sent to conduct surveillance on a suspected Taliban leader in the mountains of Afghanistan. His team was compromised and wound up fighting against overwhelming odds for several hours. Only Lutrell survived. The helicopter sent in to rescue his team was shot out of the sky leaving him to flee on foot. He was eventually taken in by sympathetic villagers and was successfully repatriated to U.S. forces after several days. During the ordeal he prayed many times, saw that God was working a miracle in ensuring he never lost his rifle, and reflected many times on Psalm 23, which he knew by heart.

¹⁹ O’Grady, 202.

²⁰ Rick Bragg. *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

²¹ Marcus Lutrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007).

Karl Tobien preserves his mother's fascinating life in *Dancing Under the Red Star: The Extraordinary Story of Margaret Werner, the Only American Woman to Survive Stalin's Gulag*.²² Werner was a young girl when her father, along with 450 other American employees, was sent by Henry Ford to help Stalin launch Russia's fledgling automobile industry. Her father was ultimately arrested on trumped up charges of treason, leaving the family with no source of income. Eventually Werner was also sentenced to serve ten years in the infamous Gulag system. While an inmate she leaned heavily on a relationship with God to get through the trials and contrasted her source of strength with the official atheism of the Soviets imprisoned alongside her. "They could not turn to religion for hope; atheism was the Soviet religion. Hopelessness was deeply and permanently etched into their faces. It penetrated below the surface, into their souls."²³

*Hostage Bound, Hostage Freed*²⁴ proves that vulnerability does not diminish over time. Reverend Ben Weir had been a Presbyterian missionary in Lebanon for 31 years when he was taken hostage in May of 1984. His capture had more to do with his identity as an American than as a Christian, even though his captors were Muslim. Though his faith was not of primary concern to them, it offered essential strength to Weir: "I have one important resource they cannot touch, faith in the living God. This foundation can make all the difference for me."²⁵

²² Karl Tobien, *Dancing Under the Red Star: The Extraordinary Story of Margaret Werner, the Only American Woman to Survive Stalin's Gulag*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2006).

²³ Tobien, 186.

²⁴ Ben Weir and Carol Weir with Dennis Benson. *Hostage Bound, Hostage Freed*. (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press: 1987).

²⁵ Weir, 27.

The story of Kurt Muse, an American held in Panama is told in *Six Minutes to Freedom*.²⁶ Muse was jailed by the regime of Manuel Noriega and rescued by members of Delta Force. Muse then had the unfortunate experience of having his rescue helicopter crash. He was later transferred to an armored personnel carrier and finally escorted to safety. Muse had access to a Bible in captivity, though he used it more for communication purposes than devotional reading. Facing the possibility of execution before his rescue, Muse describes making his peace with God.

Gracia Burnham tells of her experience as a hostage in the Philippines in *In The Presence of My Enemies*.²⁷ Burnham was celebrating her wedding anniversary with her husband Martin when a one-night stay at a famous resort placed them in the wrong place at the wrong time. The resort was raided that night by members of Abu Sayyaf, a terrorist group with ties Osama Bin Laden which was financing its operations through ransoms. Burnham speaks openly of her struggles with her faith and also of the strength it provided. Filipino forces rescued her after a year in captivity. Martin died of injuries sustained in the rescue.

Burnham provides a unique contribution to the field of captive literature with her follow-on book, *To Fly Again: Surviving the Tailspins of Life*.²⁸ Four years after her captivity Burnham offers a glimpse into what life is like after such a significant event as captivity. She shares how friends and strangers helped her settle into a new home in America and recounts her experiences at speaking engagements as everyone wants to 'hear the story.' *To Fly Again* offers rare insight into the process of slowly rebuilding life and faith post-captivity.

²⁶ Kurt Muse and John Gilstrap, *Six Minutes To Freedom*. (New York: Kensington Publishing, 2006).

²⁷ Gracia Burnham and Dean Merrill. *In The Presence Of My Enemies*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003).

²⁸ Gracia Burnham and Dean Merrill. *To Fly Again: Surviving The Tail Spins of Life*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005).

In *Prisoners of Hope: The Story of Our Captivity and Freedom in Afghanistan*²⁹ Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer describe their ministry in the closed-access country of Afghanistan. The two began work in the country prior to war that began in 2001. Serving under the guise of a humanitarian NGO, they were arrested by the Taliban when their attempts at evangelizing Afghans were discovered. They were awaiting trial and being held along with co-workers during September of 2001 and the infamous attacks on the United States. In the coming days, as U.S. forces began attacking the country, they were moved from location to location and were eventually left behind as their captors fled, setting the stage for their eventual rescue. Both authors are open about the struggles they had in their faith as well as the strength they found as they awaited the outcome of their captivity.

*Impossible Odds: The Kidnapping of Jessica Buchanan and Her Dramatic Rescue by SEAL Team Six*³⁰ tells one of the most recent stories of cross-cultural captivity and rescue. Buchanan and a Dutch co-worker were serving with a humanitarian NGO in Somalia when they were betrayed by a hired staff member, kidnapped, and held for three months while demands were made for their ransom. Buchanan's health began to fail, and as concerns for her survival increased, a successful rescue was launched. Although Buchanan was raised in a Christian home and though her parents are portrayed as being very devout, Buchanan herself seems to take a more liberal approach to her faith.

²⁹ Dayna Curry, Heather Mercer and Stacy Mattingly. *Prisoners of Hope: The Story of our Captivity and Freedom in Afghanistan*. (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

³⁰ Buchanan, Jessica & Erik Landemalm with Anthony Flacco. *Impossible Odds: The Kidnapping of Jessica Buchanan and Her Dramatic Rescue by SEAL Team Six*. (New York: Atria Books, 2013).

William “Jerry” Boykin gives insight into the attempts to rescue captives in Iran, Panama, Grenada, Sudan, and Somalia in his book *Never Surrender*.³¹ Boykin accepted Christ as a young Army officer and went on to spend most of his career in the elite counter-terrorism unit known as Delta Force. He recounts the prayers that were offered before launching every major operation and openly discusses his own wrestling with why God would allow the kind of suffering he has seen. “I didn’t like what had happened. I *hated* what had happened. But I could not justify praising Him for miracles then denying Him in tragedy. I had seen Him at work in the world, and in my own life, too many times for that.”³²

Additional information on attempts to rescue captive Americans is found in *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America’s Elite Counterterrorist Unit*.³³ Haney describes his participation in Operation Desert Eagle, the failed attempt to rescue hostages at the American Embassy in Iran and the operation’s tragic ending. Also discussed are the efforts of another member of the unit who was sent to Sudan to train a counterterrorism force in Sudan during the early 1980s. That individual, and the unit he trained, were later involved in the rescue of AIM Air pilot and missionary Ron Portier.³⁴

In *No Easy Day*³⁵ pseudonymous Mark Owen, a former member of SEAL Team Six provides some details of the rescue of Captain Phillips from the U.S.S Maersk Alabama. Owen was on the mission, but did not participate directly. He reports Phillips demonstrated symptoms

³¹ William Boykin with Lynn Vincent, *Never Surrender*, (New York: FaithWords, 2008).

³² Boykin, 280.

³³ Eric Haney, *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America’s Elite Counterterrorist Unit*. Dell mass market edition. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2003).

³⁵ Mark Owen. *No Easy Day*. (New York: Penguin, 2012).

of Stockholm Syndrome and was initially upset about the SEALs shooting his captors, but this “didn’t take long before...[it] wore off.”³⁶ Owen devotes an entire chapter to recounting a mission he was on in 2009 which attempted to recover Bowe Bergdahl. Though there was little information to go on, America still launched one of its premier units for the sake of the potential rescue. “‘Hey guys, we are getting our hands forced a little here,’ the troop commander said. ‘We need to accept a little more risk because of who we’re going after.’”³⁷

Captain (U.S. Navy) Mary Anderson authored *Captivity and Culture: Insights from the Desert Storm Prisoner of War Experience*³⁸ while studying at the Naval War College. The research is based on her ability to administer a survey to American POWs who had been held by Saddam Hussein’s forces in Iraq. The study highlights the role of training in preparing individuals for potential captivity and notes that while the training is valuable, in the words of one survivor, “Neither SERE training, nor cultural training, nor any combination thereof can completely overcome the fear and frustration that are fundamental to the condition of captivity. A personal faith system—‘a strategy [which] has to come from inside the individual’—is also required.”³⁹

³⁶ Owen, 98.

³⁷ Owen, 109.

³⁸ Anderson, Mary A. *Captivity and Culture: Insights from the Desert Storm Prisoner of War Experience*. (Advanced Research Project, Naval War College, 1996).

³⁹ Anderson, 41.

Chapter Two

History of Americans Held Hostage

Americans have suffered isolation and captivity from other cultures since the beginning of the nation. This chapter provides a chronological overview of the major events and a sampling of the personalities involved with particular attention given to the role religion has played in the lives of captives. A special emphasis is placed on events after and including World War II with selections presented from the captives' own writings.

Early Problems: From the Revolutionary War to the War of 1812

Not surprisingly, the first Americans held by a foreign power were taken during the Revolutionary War. Though some of those held by the British were of English descent, seven generations had passed since the first settlers arrived in America and though they shared a common language, these freedom fighters now viewed themselves as distinctly American and no longer English. Also among their numbers were Americans of West African and other non-British lineages.

Estimates place the number of American Prisoners of War (POWs) held by the British at around 20,000. Of these, nearly 8,500 died in captivity, many decimated by a smallpox outbreak among the POWs. Most prisoners were held in prison ships anchored in the harbor of Wallabout Bay in New York, Charleston in South Carolina and off St. Lucia in the West Indies. Some, however, were taken back across the Atlantic and kept in English jails.

After declaring independence from England, America desperately needed money and other goods. The new government sent merchant ships abroad to sell American goods and resources. Often these ships were required to travel through the Mediterranean Sea whose

waters were plagued by pirates who found sympathy from Muslim rulers of North African nations. The scope of Barbary Piracy was so large that the Roman Catholic Trinitarian Order, also known as the “Mathurins” undertook the special mission of taking up collections for the relief and ransom of captives from a variety of nations.

Under the Treaty of Alliance (1778-83), France provided much needed protection for U.S. merchant ships travelling through dangerous Mediterranean waters. However, after the Revolutionary War, the United States lost French protection. The first American hostages were captured overseas when Moroccan pirates seized a U.S. merchant vessel, the brigantine *Betsey* on October 11, 1784.

Less than one year later on July 25, 1785, Algerian pirates captured another U.S. merchant ship, the schooner *Maria*. One week later they also captured the *Dauphin*. The crews were held for over a decade, the first of many to suffer a fate Americans are still facing today from pirates off the coast of East and West Africa as well as in portions of the Pacific. By 1795, an agreement was reached between the United States and Algeria in which the U.S. paid over one million dollars to secure the release of 115 American sailors.

The captives were considered slaves, but the conditions of their captivity were fairly relaxed – prisoners were allowed to obtain property, acquire wealth, and advance in social standing. James Leander Cathcart is one example, rising to become an adviser to the bey, or king of Algeria. Cathcart returned to Philadelphia as a freed man in 1798. Some years later his daughter published his recollection of the events, including the amicable religious debates he had as a Christian with his Muslim captors and the prayer he would offer each year on the

anniversary of his capture.¹ The United States Navy was officially formed on October 13, 1775, in great part to respond to the threat of Barbary pirates.

In response to the provocations of Mediterranean pirates and out of a refusal to pay the tributes demanded by their political masters, the United States launched the First Barbary War (1801-1805). President Thomas Jefferson sent an American fleet to challenge and patrol the port of Tripoli, but the USS Philadelphia eventually ran aground on a coastal reef and was captured along with its captain William Bainbridge, officers, and crew. This action led to the first American war fought on foreign soil as American Marines were dispatched to retrieve the captives.

Among the many reasons given for the War of 1812 is the issue of impressment – England captured numerous American sailors, most of whom had been born in England, but who had subsequently tried to convert to American citizenship. England did not recognize this renouncement of native citizenship and forcibly took the men back. That action alone was problematic enough, but among the foreign-born sailors, the British Navy also captured many native-born Americans. Over 5000 Americans were captured by British forces and taken back to England, where they were held in Dartmoor prison.

Charles Andrews survived his time as a prisoner and returned to America, where he self-published a memoir.² Andrews speaks of the despair of captivity that led at least one man he knew to commit suicide. Andrews then wrote a warning over the prison door pointing others to the man's grave, urging them not to succumb to despair as well.

¹ James L. Cathcart, published in 1899, 56 years after his death, under the title of *The Captives: By James Leander Cathcart, Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers*, (LaPorte, IN: Herald Print, c1899).

² Charles, Andrews, *The Prisoners' Memoirs, or Dartmoor Prison: Containing a Complete and Impartial History of The Entire Captivity of the Americans in England, from the Commencement of the Last War between the United States and Great Britain, Until All Prisoners Were Released by the Treaty of Ghent*, (New York: Privately Printed, 1852).

Adoniram Judson: America's First Missionary Captive

Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), one of America's first missionaries, had two experiences of captivity. Ironically, the first occurred as he was crossing the Atlantic to meet with the London Missionary Society since no American missionary agencies had yet been established. French privateers captured Judson's ship and its passengers and took them to Spain. Judson was eventually freed, traveled to London where he met with the society, and having secured their assistance, returned to America. Not long after, Judson, his wife, and three other companions left America for service in Calcutta with the famous English missionary, William Carey. Due to complications with the East India Company, which did not look favorably on missionary activity in India, the Judsons soon left for Burma. There, Judson had his greatest impact, though not without suffering many trials. According to one biographer, "Burma had been Adoniram's first choice for a mission field, until he heard frightening reports of brutal treatment meted out to foreigners."³

Judson arrived in Burma on July 13, 1813, and experienced a very slow response to the gospel he sought to spread. After ten years of labor he had produced his first draft translation of the entire New Testament and the church had grown to a total of eighteen converts. Judson was continuing his work when he was suddenly swept up in the Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). Though Judson was American, and not British, the Burmese still viewed him as a threat and possible spy. Officials burst into his home one night in June 1824 and took him away to the infamous, vermin-infested prison at Ava, where he endured horrendous treatment for the next twelve months:

³ Ruth A Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya, A Biographical History of Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 123-124.

The missionaries were confined with common criminals in a filthy, vermin infested, dark, dank prison house, with fetters binding their ankles. At night the Spotted Faces (prison guards whose face and chest were branded for being one-time criminals themselves) hoisted the ankle fetters to a pole suspended from the ceiling, until only their heads and shoulders rested on the ground. By morning the weary prisoners were numb and stiff, but the daytime offered them little relief. Each day executions were carried out and the prisoners never knew who would be next.⁴

After twelve months of such treatment Judson and several other Western prisoners were then forced to march to a second prison. As they crossed a bridge Judson fought the temptation to commit suicide by throwing himself over the side. Fortunately, British forces were advancing on the Burmese capital and within six months Judson would be freed. During the entire time of his captivity, Judson's wife Ann visited him occasionally in prison and worked fervently to secure his release.

American vs. American

A special case that deserves at least some mention is the American Civil War. Though technically a war among Americans, there can be no doubt that the cultures of the American North and South were distinct in many ways. The war occurred on a tremendous scale and had correspondingly large numbers of captives. An estimated 214,000 Confederate soldiers and 194,000 Union soldiers were held as prisoners of war. Never before, and never since, has an American conflict resulted in so many POWs. Among the POWs was Edward McKendree (E.M.) Bounds (August 15, 1835 – August 24, 1913), a pastor, and later Confederate Chaplain. After the war, Bounds went on to travel the country as an evangelist and authored nine books on prayer, which are still highly influential today.

⁴ Tucker, 128.

The Danger Overseas Grows

Early in the nineteenth century, Chinese resistance to the presence and practices of Western businessmen boiled over. The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) was a bloody and violent assault on foreigners by xenophobic rebels known as “Boxers” who made no distinction between merchants, the diplomats and militaries of the countries they represented, and the large numbers of western missionaries who had also flooded into the country. Eventually, as zeal intensified, the Chinese Empress ordered the execution of all foreigners. Over one hundred missionaries were captured and executed or slaughtered as they attempted to hide or resist capture. Countless others fled for their lives. Eight Western nations rallied together to protect their citizens and together they deployed over twelve thousand troops to China to quell the violence.

World War I

Surprisingly, little documentation is available regarding POWs from World War I. Generally, the prisoners seem to have been well treated, with the Germans especially providing chaplains to attend to spiritual needs of captives. Approximately 4,120 Americans were held as prisoners of war, of whom 147 died during captivity.

In the lull between the two great World Wars, American missionaries continued to “go into all the world” and occasionally received harsh treatment along the way. Notable among them was Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe, who was forced to sleep on the shores of a lake in Guatemala (1919-1935) where he was working because the people would not let him sleep in their village. “It was common for missionaries to be dragged through the streets by their hair, to be jailed, or have their homes burned, etc. in those early days.”⁵

⁵ Larry Walker, “How Many People Groups are There?” in *Perspectives*, Winter, Ralph D., and Steven C. Hawthorne. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999. 563.

World War II

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Japanese began to expand their control across the Asian-Pacific region. It would not be long before the quest for additional territories made the empire a regular and direct threat to Americans living abroad.

One of Japan's first targets was neighboring China, where over 5000 American missionaries were serving. In July of 1937, the Sino-Japanese war erupted and quickly spread to Shanghai where many of the missionaries resided. The U.S. State Department and many of the missionary sending boards called for the missionaries to withdraw. About half complied, mainly women, children, and elder missionaries, but nearly half remained in country to suffer the war with the Chinese Christians they were serving.

And so they remained in war-torn China, attempting in every way to meet the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of a people suffering the hell of war. Amidst the shelling, the bombing, the raping, and the killing, these men and women braved those horrors to provide educational, medical, and spiritual relief, and established refugee camps and war relief programs for widows, orphans, and the Chinese population at large.⁶

In these early days they were not locked up in cells or prison camps, but were able to operate in occupied territories, albeit with regular harassment.

Throughout 1937-1941, the American embassies and consuls in China received numerous complaints of personal mistreatment by Japanese soldiers; complications arising from being denied passes and free movement in occupied territory; humiliation over having to salute or bow to Japanese soldiers; scattered incidents of Japanese-instigated anti-American demonstrations; and damage done to mission stations, churches, and hospitals as a result of Japanese looting or bombing.⁷

⁶ Stephen Craft. "Peacemakers in China: American Missionaries and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941." *Journal of Church and State* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1999). 578.

⁷ Craft, 579.

Prior to the assault on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the Japanese stopped harassing and began to detain Americans. Two hundred and four American Marines were captured by the Japanese in China and held until the end of what would soon be known as World War II in 1945. Similar scenes were playing out throughout the Pacific as the Japanese invaded Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea. Over the course of the war, the Japanese interned nearly 30,000 Americans across the Pacific Theater. Their numbers included both men and women, military and civilian.

The Japanese arrived in Papua New Guinea in the first part of 1942 and quickly began to assert control over the island. As in China, missionaries had an opportunity to escape, but most chose to remain, unaware of what lay ahead. Darlene Rose recounts the counsel she and others received from the leader of their mission:

I want to counsel you not to discuss this decision that must be made with each other—not even husband and wife. Go to your knees and say, “Lord, what do You want me to do? Shall I go or shall I stay?” This is extremely vital because then no matter what happens in the months or possibly years that lie ahead, you will know that you are exactly where God wants you to be. If He leads you to leave, you’ll never feel that you were a coward and fled. If you are led to stay, no matter what happens, you can look up and say, “Lord, you intended for me to be right here.”⁸

Each of the missionaries felt compelled to stay. A few days later the Japanese arrived. At first life went on as usual, but then the men were rounded up and taken away. In December of 1942, they came for the women. Rose was able to pack her own belongings and took her Bible and hymnal in addition to clothing and a few personal mementos. The female missionaries were taken to a women’s internment camp where they were held communally and were able to have

⁸ Darlene Deibler Rose, *Evidence Not Seen: A Woman’s Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 41.

nightly devotions, reading from a section of Scripture, often including the Psalms, and having a time of prayer.

People from other barracks often joined us during evening devotions. Throughout those very difficult years that tried our souls, God kept our barracks a calm center in the eye of the military storm that raged around us...I am convinced the harmony we experienced in Barracks 8 was due to the spiritual shelter beneath which we all hid when there was no other refuge.⁹

Rose survived the entire war in captivity, though she was ruthlessly beaten and interrogated on suspicion of serving in Papua New Guinea as an American spy. Her husband died in a separate camp where the men were held along with military POWs from various nations who had been captured by the Japanese. After the war she eventually returned to life as a missionary, this time in the Outback of Australia.

The fall of the Philippines to the Japanese suddenly created an estimated 15,000 POWs. The surrendering American military troops were organized as regular units and therefore had regular staffing including thirty-seven chaplains. About half of the surrendering forces were taken along the infamous Bataan Death March. Over 9000 men survived the march and were interned at Camp O'Donnell.

Despite the horrendous conditions they endured, the men were able to maintain some sense of order in the internment camps. Chapels were established and prisoners were able to attend regular Protestant and Catholic services. Notable among the chaplains was Robert Preston Taylor who received the Silver Star for gallantry at the Battle of Bataan. Taylor survived the march and the war and went on to serve as the Chief of Air Force Chaplains at the rank of Major General. Also among the POWs were numerous civilian detainees, including seven Jesuit priests rescued from the Los Banos camp in a daring raid by U.S. Army Rangers on February 23, 1945.

⁹ Rose, 69.

Another 11,000 POWs were taken to camps outside Manila. Among them was Dr. Roy L. Bodine Jr., a major serving in the Army Dental Corps when he was captured on April 9, 1942, with other American forces. He kept a journal of the three and a half years he spent in the camps and later on the “hell ships,” floating prisons that were used to transport POWs to prison camps in Japan or to worksites throughout the Pacific.

Though not an exceptionally religious man, Bodine regularly attended Catholic services, often simply to escape the monotony of daily prison life.

21 October [1942]. We have Mass every morning after tinko or bango [roll call] as I have so little to do. I will go every day to Rosary in PM. No air raids but had an alarm. Will go to confession after Rosary every two weeks or oftener. Went before I left camp. Am receiving daily Communion.¹⁰

Bodine speaks well of several chaplains who were among the prisoners and calls one, Father Zerfas, “one good friend of mine.” As the men were held in large open camps the chaplains were able to visit men individually on a daily basis as well as conducting regular religious services.

After several months in the camps, many of the men, including Bodine, were placed on a “hell ship” and set out across the Pacific. Chaplains accompanied the POWs and continued their ministry even in the nightmarish conditions. Life aboard the ships was even worse than in the land-based prisons – POWs were crammed into cargo holds with no access to fresh air, and little food and water, which made them breeding grounds for disease. Additionally, the ships were not properly marked as POW transports and therefore were often attacked by American forces – an estimated 20,000 men died on board “hell ships” sunk by Allied bombers, ships, and submarines.

¹⁰ Roy L. Bodine, Jr., “No Place For Kindness” (unpublished memoir, Fort Sam Houston Museum, 1983), 2.

Bodine describes the night the Allies discovered his ship and launched a particularly fearsome attack:

14 December. Death was very close and I prayed much. Hadn't confessed for three weeks but felt as ready as could be. I tried perfect contrition which is not hard at a time like that. Said Rosary and all my prayers many times over. When bombs were falling and bullets were rattling like hail, I could hear Hudgins praying at my side, as he repeated over and over again "Jesus save us."¹¹

He goes on to describe the rest of the attack, and then adds: "I forgot to say that during the worst of the bombings Father Cummings stood and in a slow loud voice led the Lord's Prayer. I believe everyone appreciated it." Several weeks later Bodine helped the Father conduct last rites for another POW:

I found Father Cummings and after supper we baptized and absolved him. It was hard for Father to get pure water for baptizing, even in this terrible situation. Rex was so glad. Said he wanted to for years and had put it off. Told Father and I to tell his wife he had become a Catholic and wished his daughter to be raised one. Hope it can be.¹²

The following day the man died.

17 January. Rex and the little Van Horn both died last night. Rex actually in my arms. He was very affectionate, wanted his face against me and told me to hold his hand; and asked me four or five times to help him make an Act of Contrition. He is one man who died like a Christian in all this cursing mob. I have his ring which I will try to take home for him.¹³

Ten days later, on January 27, Father Cummings died. On January 30 the ship finally docked in Japan. Bodine and the survivors were taken ashore to a prison camp and life improved minutely as they were given access to occasional Red Cross packages. Apparently Bodine was not as thrilled with the new spiritual offerings.

¹¹ Bodine, 11.

¹² Bodine, 30.

¹³ Bodine, 31.

1 April 1945, Easter Sunday. Went to Episcopal Service with a British Chaplain. Seemed shallow. Hope I never miss Easter Mass again. Have read Masses of Holy Week daily. Believe I have remained in state of grace since 2 weeks before leaving Bilibid. Longest for me. From now on we will have to rely on personal contrition.¹⁴

Bodine survived the rest of the war in the Japanese camps and was liberated after the cessation of hostilities. He served for another ten years, retiring as a Colonel, and went on to become a successful researcher and professor in dental colleges.

Louis Zamperini had quite a different experience on the waters of the Pacific. Zamperini, a former Olympian, had joined the Army Air Corps after the war started. He was commissioned as a lieutenant and assigned as a bombardier on a B-24 flying out of Hawaii. While flying on a search and rescue mission 850 miles west of Oahu, the plane experienced mechanical problems and crashed into the ocean on May 27, 1943. Zamperini, pilot Russell Allen "Phil" Phillips and the tail gunner, Francis "Mac" McNamara survived the crash and climbed into a small life raft. McNamara died at sea, but Zamperini and Phillips survived forty-seven days on the open seas, finally washing ashore on Japanese occupied Kwajalein.

Prior to these events Zamperini had led a tumultuous life. Raised by a Catholic mother, the young man had little personal commitment to a spiritual life since he left the Church as a boy after a priest "punished him for tardiness by grabbing his ear and dragging him out."¹⁵ Even prayer was only an occasional effort. Prior to the crash, the only time Zamperini could remember praying was when his mother was sick and he was afraid she would die. After arriving in Hawaii, he tried to give religion one more shot in an effort to cope with the stresses of

¹⁴ Bodine, 35.

¹⁵ Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. (New York: Random House, 2010), 185.

flying and combat. “Before Louie left the States he had been issued an olive drab Bible. He tried reading it to cope with his anxiety, but it made no sense to him, and he abandoned it. Instead, he soothed himself by listening to classical music on his phonograph.”¹⁶

The difference between Zamperini and Phillips, his pilot and co-survivor, couldn't have been more vast in spiritual terms. Phillips grew up the son of a minister. “According to his family, in his quiet, private way, Phil was a deeply religious man, carrying a faith instilled in him by his parents...Phil never spoke of his faith, but as he sang hymns over the ocean, conjuring up a protective God, perhaps rescue felt closer, despair more distant.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, Zamperini tried to sing songs as well, but could only remember tunes like “White Christmas.” Beginning in 1944, the year after Zamperini's crash, B-24s were equipped with a standard survival kit contained in their life rafts; among the items included were “religious pamphlets.”¹⁸

Two weeks in the open ocean marked a turning point for Zamperini, who began to pray aloud. “He had no idea how to speak to God, so he recited snippets of prayers that he'd heard in movies. Phil bowed his head as Louie spoke, offering ‘Amen’ at the end.”¹⁹ Soon he was asking God for miracles and vowing to dedicate his life to God if God would only satisfy their thirst. The next day, it rained.

Not all of their prayers were similarly answered though. After washing ashore on Kwajalein, the two were quickly captured by the Japanese who transferred them to a camp near Tokyo. Zamperini was singled out for incredibly harsh treatment by a guard nicknamed “the Bird,” who beat him mercilessly each day. “Louie spent hour after hour in prayer, begging for

¹⁶ Hillenbrand, 89.

¹⁷ Hillenbrand, 147-148.

¹⁸ Hillenbrand, 128.

¹⁹ Hillenbrand, 149.

God to save him,”²⁰ but prayers for the beatings to stop seem to have gone unanswered. For a time religious services were permitted in the Omori POW camp where Zamperini was held, but they were considered a ‘privilege’ which was revoked as American B-29s began bombing Japan. Nevertheless, in June 1945 as bombers flew overhead daily, Zamperini and others “prayed ceaselessly for rescue.”²¹

With the end of the war, rescue finally came and Zamperini returned home a hero. Readjustment was difficult and nightmares of his experiences propelled him toward alcohol. When Zamperini’s wife attended a Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles and was born again, he lashed out violently, forbidding her to attend church. But Zamperini himself was eventually persuaded to attend a crusade and hear the young evangelist. At the end of the night he received Christ, threw away his cigarettes, poured out all of his alcohol. Suddenly the nightmares stopped. The next day:

Louie dug out the Bible that had been issued to him by the Air Corps and mailed home to his mother when he was believed dead...He found a spot under a tree, sat down, and began reading...what resonated most with him now was not all that he had suffered but the divine love that he believed had intervened to save him. He was not the worthless, broken, forsaken man that the Bird had striven to make of him. In a single, silent moment, his rage, his fear, his humiliation and helplessness, had fallen away. That morning, he believed, he was a new creation.²²

Zamperini went on to speak across the nation about his experiences and newfound faith. He traveled back to Japan and expressed forgiveness to his former captors and has remained actively involved in his local church to this day, never again experiencing nightmares from his captivity.

²⁰ Hillenbrand, 252.

²¹ Hillenbrand 291.

²² Hillenbrand, 376.

Nearly 94,000 Americans were interned as POWs in the European Theater; many had been shot down while flying missions over Germany or had been captured after the Battle of the Bulge. During the hostilities these captives generally received far better treatment than their contemporaries in the Pacific Theater. Additionally, in the European Theater there were not as many missionaries captured or threatened by advancing forces as there had been in the Pacific.

Before the Cold War

An interesting and little known incident of detainment occurred in the Soviet Union shortly after the end of World War II when American Margaret Werner was sent to a Soviet Gulag. She had arrived in Russia as a young girl with her family in 1932 when Henry Ford sent 450 of his employees from Detroit, Michigan, to Gorky, Russia, to help the Soviets operate an American style factory. The family escaped the Great Depression in America but lived through the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Revolution changed the Soviet approach to manufacturing, and soon her father's grumbling about operations at the factory landed him in a Russian jail. Margaret was seventeen at the time. While she and her mother waited for her father to be released, the world began another war and she survived the German advance and siege on Russia during World War II.

Werner reflects on her own spiritual condition: "I did not think of myself as religious; in fact, religion was seldom brought up in our family. We did not attend church back in Detroit, nor did I ever hear my mother and father speak to each other or with others about God, religion or church."²³ Werner's mother did however have a quiet, steady life of prayer and devotion that influenced Werner in subtle ways. As time and sorrows wore on, Werner found herself

²³ Karl Tobien, *Dancing Under the Red Star: The Extraordinary Story of Margaret Werner, the Only American Woman to Survive Stalin's Gulag*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 101.

increasingly turning to her mother's God for strength and coming to know more of Him in the process.

After the war, Margaret's views about the Communist regime that had imprisoned her father led to her own arrest. She was taken to a political prison and sentenced to ten years in Stalin's Gulag. Here, in prison, her confidence in God grew as she told her interrogator:

Fidoli, I was a ten-year old American girl when I was forced to come to Russia—not of my own choosing. My life was ripped apart, and my dreams were killed by Russia and in Russia! They killed my father. My mother and I have been falsely accused of something I have not done. I am entirely innocent, and yet I am locked up here and speaking with you. Let me tell you something: the only thing I have left to believe in is God. He is real. He exists. One day he will get me out of this insane asylum, I promise you! And I hope that you too will come to know him. Fidoli, in the end, that is all we will have left to take into eternity—our faith in God.²⁴

As part of the Communist agenda of that age, all discussion of religion, God, and faith had been outlawed in Russia. Stalin had even issued a famous decree: “God must be out of Russia in five years.” Werner noticed the effect on the Russian prisoners who had no faith to turn to for strength:

They could not turn to religion for hope; atheism was the Soviet religion. Hopelessness was deeply and permanently etched into their faces. It penetrated below the surface, into their souls. I can still see their faces in my mind's eye today: men and women, young and old, with a look of total resignation, no hope whatsoever. A country without God is a terrible place. A horribly cold, harsh spirit hovered over this country, like a cloud that would not lift. It thickened the air and filled your nostrils everywhere you went. You could feel it crawl into your skin, into your pores. *That* was the condition of their lives and the very look upon their faces as best I can describe it.²⁵

This was not true of all prisoners however, for Werner also records that some of the prisoners of the Gulag would occasionally organize “clandestine religious ceremonies on Easter

²⁴ Tobien, 172.

²⁵ Tobien, 186

and Christmas and were able to conduct modest religious services on Sunday—another way to keep a hopeful perspective.”²⁶ Werner’s hope and faith carried her through a nearly decade-long imprisonment until her release on March 3, 1955. Some thirty years after arriving in Russia, she was able to return to America after writing a letter to Nikita Khrushchev requesting permission to leave the country.

The Korean War

American POWs held by the Japanese had experienced incredible physical deprivations and difficulties. POWs held during the Korean War faced many of the challenges of their predecessors, but were also exposed to persistent attempts by their captors at brainwashing and indoctrinating the captives into communist ideology.

As in World War II, chaplains were among those captured, and these men served as a source of strength and inspiration for their fellow captives. Most notable among them was the life and ministry of the Catholic Chaplain and POW, Emil Kapaun. In 2013, Kapaun’s inspirational example of Christ-like love and spiritual resiliency was recognized by the award of the Medal of Honor.

The official narrative for the medal states:

Kapaun openly flouted his captors by conducting a sunrise service on Easter morning, 1951.

When Kapaun began to suffer from the physical toll of his captivity...the Chinese transferred him to a filthy, unheated hospital where he died alone... As he was being carried to the hospital, he asked God's forgiveness for his captors, and made his fellow prisoners promise to keep their faith. Chaplain Kapaun died in captivity on May 23, 1951.

Chaplain Emil J. Kapaun repeatedly risked his own life to save the lives of hundreds of fellow Americans. His extraordinary courage, faith and leadership

²⁶ Tobien, 249.

inspired thousands of prisoners to survive hellish conditions, resist enemy indoctrination, and retain their faith in God and country. His actions reflect the utmost credit upon him, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the United States Army.²⁷

The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War produced some of the most visible and well-known POWs in American history. Though they were taken in smaller numbers than previous conflicts, they were often held longer: some endured captivity for almost nine years; in World War II the longest captivity was only around three years. The Vietnam POWs also tended to be either pilots shot down over enemy territory or special operations and intelligence forces operating in small units behind enemy lines, and therefore represented a certain kind of individual filled with the drive and determination to make it through specialized training. No entire units were captured as they had been in previous conflicts.

Of the 734 U.S. service members listed as POWs, 662 survived the war, along with 138 civilian POWs; an additional 1,643 troops remain unaccounted for. The names and stories of the surviving Vietnam POWs are likely better known than those of earlier POWs due to the prolific literature they produced. Between 1973 and 1993, at least 30 survivors published autobiographies describing their time in captivity and providing a rich and varied collection of testimony regarding spiritual resiliency.

Not all of the captives have stellar testimonies of God's faithfulness, though. Captain Floyd James Thompson of the Army's Special Forces was the fourteenth American POW to be taken in South Vietnam, and was held longer than any other; Thompson left Vietnam on March 16, 1973, just eight days short of nine years in captivity. Unlike the captives of the famous Hanoi Hilton in North Vietnam, Thompson had been held mainly in remote jungle camps. He

²⁷ The full text of the citation may be viewed online: "Kapuan, Emil Joseph," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/3483/kapaun-emil-joseph.php>.

was captured Mar 24, 1964, while conducting an aerial reconnaissance in a small plane that was shot down by small arms fire. He regained consciousness to discover he was a prisoner and discovered he had been temporarily crippled by the crash, suffering a spinal fracture and other, smaller, injuries. Several months later he regained the ability to walk. His fourth child, a son, had been born the day after he was reported MIA – the shock of the news sent his wife into labor.

Orson Swindle III, a Marine aviator and Vietnam POW for more than six years, referred to Thompson as “our version of a Job” referencing the Biblical character who suffered loss on top of loss until it seemed there was nothing left. After returning home Thompson discovered that though the Army knew he was likely alive, his wife was petitioning to have him declared killed in action so she could move on with her life—she was living with an enlisted man she had met only months after his disappearance. The couple reunited after his return, but the relationship was abusive. He attempted suicide in 1977 and later enrolled in Alcoholics Anonymous. He suffered a heart attack and stroke and was medically retired in 1982. He died in 2002 at the age of 69 living in isolation in a condo in Florida. Though Thompson was raised in the church and once spoke about how he imagined attending “a chapel in the sky” with his family each Sunday in captivity, by the end of his life his daughter stated: “he no longer believes in God.”²⁸

Not all the POWs shared Thompson’s story of epic suffering and tragic unraveling. Others endured quite similar situations and found strength and resilience in faith. Only a few months after Thompson was captured Everett Alvarez, Jr., a Navy pilot, was shot down on August 5, 1964, and became the first U.S. POW captured in North Vietnam. He had been

²⁸ Philpott, Tom. *Glory Denied: The Saga of Jim Thompson, America’s Longest-Held Prisoner of War*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 288.

married only three months before deploying. During captivity the two sent each other occasional letters when permitted by the Vietnamese, yet after five years his wife wrote her final letter, went to Mexico to file for a divorce and found a new man.

Alvarez learned the news on Christmas day, 1971, when the guards distributed letters they had received as a 'gift' to the prisoners. Alvarez initially withdrew from his fellow POWs in depression but found strength in prayer and his Christian faith. A few months later he had regained a sense of peace about the situation and saw it as a way to start with a blank slate when he returned to the U.S. He remarried within months of coming home and went on to live a stable life, achieving great professional success in Veteran's Administration, eventually serving as the deputy director.

Army Captain Humberto "Rocky" Versace, Lieutenant James N. Rowe, and Sergeant Daniel L. Pitzer were members of a Special Forces team operating in South Vietnam when they were captured in 1963. The stories of Rowe and Versace provide another example of men relying on their faith to various degrees. Versace immediately turned to his Catholic faith as a source of strength and defiance while his captors attempted to persuade him of the merits of Communist ideology. In 2002, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. The citation notes: "The enemy was unable to break his indomitable will, his faith in God, and his trust in the United States of America."²⁹

Rowe on the other hand had a much different experience with spiritual resiliency, toughing things out on his own until events finally drove him to understand he had no where else to go. After two years in captivity Versace had been executed and another POW was now being

²⁹ The full text of the citation may be viewed online: "Versace, Humbert R.," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/3435/versace-humbert-r.php>.

taken away from the group for medical treatment. At that moment Rowe reflected on his personal inability to provide any further inspiration or leadership to the remaining captives:

... because I could offer them no solutions if I could find none for myself, I turned to the one positive force our captors could never challenge, God.

My religious background included Sunday schools, vacation Bible schools and church attendance as a youngster. I had never questioned religion nor had I ever really accepted it. It was something I lived with because that's the way things were done. There had never been a time of trial serious enough to make me consciously depend on a Supreme Being except when I felt some interest of mine was beyond my direct influence. Once I achieved what I had set out to do, God was given a pragmatic "thank you" and forgotten until my next need arose. My closest association with the development of faith came at West Point. Four years of compulsory chapel each Sunday, the idea of "having to go," failed to diminish a growing sense of peace and communication I discovered within the quiet majesty that was the interior of the Cadet Chapel. In the stillness of the Chapel I began to look at faith, not in terms of ritual and sectarian dogma, but as a very personal communication between one man and his God. After graduation, I had no time to develop that which I had begun, but evidently the foundation was still there.

I found myself returning to and drawing from that foundation in this situation where I was stripped of all material assets, leaving only the intangibles which form the core of our existence: faith, ethics, morals, beliefs. It had become a test of whatever inner strengths I possessed against the total physical control exercised by my captors. Were I to survive with my spirit intact, I could only turn to faith in the Power I believed to be so far greater than that which imprisoned me. For the first time in my life the words of the Twenty-third Psalm were a source of strength and consolation. From the loss of Dave on, I began to believe: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."³⁰

Those held in North Vietnam were typically held in larger groups. Though communication was limited among the men they were still able to devise clandestine corporate worship services. Jeremiah Denton began the tradition that occurred every Sunday after the morning meal and cigarette. The services began with three thumps on the wall signaling the prisoners to stand and recite the pledge of allegiance to themselves. After four thumps they would say the Lord's Prayer, and after five thumps they would pray individually. Though

³⁰ James N. Rowe, *Five Years To Freedom*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 231-232.

worship services were available, not everyone participated; Ray Vohden describes his experience: “For some time we practiced this wherever I lived, but once a guy told me that he thought this was ridiculous, and he just lay on his bed while all the thumping resounded through the building.”³¹

By 1970 however, the POWs were being afforded slightly more freedom and rallied together in their first corporate act of defiance: they organized an open church service on November 29. This initial attempt at worship drew immediate condemnation by the guards, but the men persistently requested another service and the senior ranking officers agreed to support the request. Jeremiah Denton describes another attempt on Sunday, February 7, 1971:

Several guards were outside the door as we began, and in a few minutes Bug strode into the room and Hawk behind him. Hawk told the choir to stop singing but they ignored him. Then Coker took up with the sermon, followed by Rutledge, who quoted from the scripture, and Risner who gave the benediction. Again and again Hawk demanded that we stop, but he was totally ignored. When Risner was finished, Ligon said, “Dismissed,” and everyone started to disperse. Hawk took Risner from the room, and Coker and Rutledge were also led away.³²

Risner later reflected on the role faith in God played in sustaining the POWs. He claimed it was more important than any other source of resiliency:

But as important as all of these were, none was more important than the fourth—faith in God. Before imprisonment many of us had been too busy to put God first in our lives. A North Vietnamese prison cell changed that. We learned to feel at ease in talking about God, and we shared our doubts and faith. We prayed for one another and spent time praying together for all kinds of things. Our faith in God was an essential without which I for one could not have made it.³³

³¹ Ray Vohden, *A Story of the Fifth Longest Hold POW in US History: First POW Released from North Vietnam*, (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009), 129.

³² Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr. with Ed Brandt, *When Hell Was In Session*, Reprint, (Lake Wylie, SC: Robert E. Hopper & Associates, 1982), Chapter Nineteen, no page numbers.

³³ Robinson Risner, *The Passing of the Night: My Seven Years As a Prisoner of the North Vietnamese*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 185.

Eugene McDonald offers a precious glimpse of how his faith in God allowed him to make sense of all he had been through:

I had been broken in that prison, brought to the very end of myself, allowed to suffer so I might know how to help those who would suffer around me. I had gone to Vietnam a respected churchman who had a healthy, ideal family—but had not the inner capacity, in God, or anyone else, to minister to the suffering of another person. For some reason, known only to the Lord, I had been chosen of Him to be that instrument for Him, and what I had gone through would bring a new sensitivity to the needs of others and perhaps an example of the goodness of God to them. Through my suffering, others could see proof that He would keep them in their hour of darkness as well...

I knew now what the apostle Paul meant when he said, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” These things are very real to me now. And Paul answers, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

The darkness of loneliness and pain was worth it all to enter into the knowledge of that fantastic truth.³⁴

The 1980’s: Terrorism Fuels Kidnappings

During the 1980’s terrorist groups around the world, especially in the Middle East, began aggressively seizing hostages to gain media attention. There was the kidnapping of individual targets of opportunity, as well as large-scale, pre-planned events such as the hijackings of entire airliners. In 1985 members of the Palestinian Liberation Front even seized a luxury cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro*, off the coast of Egypt and murdered American Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound retiree who was on board. Between 1982 and 1992 a total of 96 foreign hostages were taken from 21 different countries. Most of the victims were American and

³⁴ Eugene B. McDaniel, with James Johnson, *Scars and Stripes*, formerly published as “Before Honor,” (New York: A.J. Holman Company, 1975), 172-173.

Western European nationals. At least eight of the hostages died in captivity, including several who were murdered.

Benjamin Weir had been serving as a Presbyterian missionary in Lebanon for over thirty years when he was suddenly snatched from the streets of Beirut in May 1984 while walking with his wife. Weir initially resisted the kidnappers' efforts, but was overpowered and forced into their car. Though fear washed over him, he also immediately sensed a great assurance: "I felt that I was supported, cradled, in the dependable arms of God. He knew where I was. He knew the men in the car who had me in their control. He was aware of where the car was going and of what lay ahead. I could count on God. So in spite of my anxiety and fear, I began to relax."³⁵

During his captivity Weir found comfort and assurance by recalling verses of Scripture and hymns. To combat the hours of boredom he also relied on his imagination to find reminders of the sustaining presence of God:

Looking up, I examined an electric wire hanging from the ceiling. The bulb and sock had been removed, so that it ended in an arc with three wires exposed. To me, those wires seemed like three fingers. I could see a hand and an arm reaching downward—like the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Michelangelo's fresco of God reaching his hand and finger toward Adam, creating the first living being. Here God was reaching toward me, reminding me, saying, "You're alive. You are mine; I've made you and called you into being for a divine purpose." This insight startled me. It was a bolt of inspiration out of heaven.

What else? I began counting the horizontal slats on the shutters outside the French doors. There were 120. What could those horizontal pieces of wood stand for, so many of them? That's it! Many of them, a crowd! A cloud of witnesses past and present, who through crises and times of trial have observed and perceived the faithfulness of God. Recognizing that I am surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let me lay aside every weight and sin and run with patience the race set before me, looking to Jesus, the initiator and completer of our faith. He endured the cross with its shame on my behalf.

³⁵ Ben Weir and Carol Weir, with Dennis Benson, *Hostage Bound Hostage Freed*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 13.

This recital of the basics of my faith sent a chill through me. What a message! That's the guide I need. I desperately need patience in my present setting.

My thinking was being led by the classic statements of the Christian faith. There seemed to be a flow from these doctrinal streams of expression into my own situation.³⁶

Weir also found resiliency to endure captivity by reflecting on the reality of his spiritual identity as opposed to his present physical condition: "My physical mobility is limited. I am like a dog on a leash. However, I am not a dog, I am a man created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, with a capacity for spiritual and intellectual potential."³⁷ Though limited physically by his captors, Weir relished the freedom of his spirit and mind and continued to reflect on Scripture creating a theological perspective on his experience while still a captive. Weir asked his captors for a Bible numerous times and finally received an Arabic New Testament after thirty-five days in captivity, though his access to this resource was temporary – he was not able to take it with him when transferred to another holding area.

As political and denominational powers in the United States fought for Weir's release, he fought a fight of his own in the spiritual realm: "I continued to find a great sense of purpose in intercessory prayer for people I knew in Lebanon, Syria, and other countries. I also continued to expect that eventually God would bring about my deliverance."³⁸ When Weir was eventually held with other captives, the men requested, and were granted, permission to hold a religious service. Among those captives was another American, Father Martin Jenco, a Catholic Priest. The first week, Jenco led the rest of the men, who remained blindfolded, in a Mass. The following week another service was granted and this time Weir led according to the Presbyterian

³⁶ Weir, 28-29. Weir goes on to reflect on several other items in the room and shares the insights he gained from each.

³⁷ Weir, 36.

³⁸ Weir, 126.

Book of Common Worship with hymns and a reading from Psalm 103. “I missed my worship book. I had not memorized the Communion service as Father Martin had the Mass.”³⁹

The men continued asking for a third worship service and ten days after the service led by Weir, the guards not only allowed another service, they permanently moved the men into a shared room, a fact that Weir directly attributes to the worship. “[The captors’] job was to keep us alive and healthy. The worship obviously attributed to this goal.”⁴⁰

After 495 days in captivity, negotiators secured Weir’s release. He returned to the United States where he reunited with family and continued his service with the Presbyterian Church.

What began in the Middle East soon spread around the world as a popular way to gain attention for a group’s cause. In June of 1983 Ron Pontier, a freshly-minted pilot serving with Africa Inland Mission-Air, was captured shortly after landing on a remote airstrip in Southern Sudan; he was flying on his check ride and had been serving with the organization for only six months. Pontier was no stranger to African missions. His father had been a Bible teacher and church planter in Sudan, and his grandfather had arrived in Congo in 1928 with the famous missionary C. T. Studd.

Pontier was held with a multinational group including John Haspels, a Presbyterian missionary from Kansas and his family; a Canadian; Willem Noort, a Dutchman serving as a missionary nurse; and a West German. Pontier initially experienced deep struggles to make sense of why God would allow this to happen to him, a young pilot who had received so much training and was recently married – it didn’t make sense to let it all go to waste. Feeling convicted by God that he had made an idol out of his potential, Pontier surrendered his future to God and began to place an even greater value on the importance of heaven. Several of the other

³⁹ Weir, 153.

⁴⁰ Weir, 156.

hostages had similar experiences. “The giving up is what allows you to have peace in a situation like that.”⁴¹

Fearing for their lives, the hostages agreed to attempt an escape. Noort poured phenobarbital, a sedative, in the guards’ food; as the guards slept that night the men tried to escape. They were quickly found the next morning. Their enraged captors established a site for executing the hostages the following day, but early the next morning a Sudanese counter-terrorism force, advised and accompanied by American military members, overwhelmed the hostage takers and freed the group. It was the “first successful rescue” mission conducted by members of Delta Force, who were each presented with a Bible signed by the hostages.⁴²

Pontier was given three weeks off after his return. In retrospect he says it was a bad idea; he wished he had had something to do to keep his mind off the recent events. After about six months he was “pretty much over it” and was once again flying with AIM-Air, a mission he has continued to the present day.

Panama

In the final days and weeks of 1989, American forces launched an invasion of Panama in an effort to capture the nation’s leader, General Manuel Noriega. Noriega’s forces were also holding an American, Kurt Muse, in custody for his role in establishing an anti-Noriega radio broadcast. Muse had been living in Panama as the husband of a schoolteacher employed by the Department of Defense School System, an organization that operated school for the children of American military members stationed in Panama.

⁴¹ Ron Pontier, personal interview with author, October 17, 2009.

⁴² William Boykin, with Lynn Vincent, *Never Surrender*, (New York: FaithWords, 2008), 155. For a full account of the mission see Boykin 148-156; also, Eric Haney, *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America’s Elite Counterterrorist Unit*, Dell mass-market edition, (New York: Bantam Dell, 2003), 329-333 and Michael Smith, *Killer Elite*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2007), 81-86.

Muse's rescue played a central role in the invasion, for American forces were concerned that he would be immediately executed as a reprisal for the invasion. His rescue was therefore assigned to the Army's Delta Force, and Muse became the first civilian the unit officially rescued while operating as a whole instead of serving as advisors, as they had with the rescue of Pontier.

During his captivity, Muse was granted access to a Bible that he later used as a journal:

As it turned out, the one book that every prisoner was allowed to have, and whose presence was never questioned, was the Holy Bible; in Kurt's case, a five-by-seven King James Version printed on onionskin paper. The last twelve pages of Kurt's were blank. He didn't know if it was a printing anomaly or if it was intended as a space to write notes, but Kurt carefully tore out one page at a time as needed and wrote his diary in the smallest possible hand.⁴³

Later, when facing what seemed to be imminent death from his captors, Muse wrote a final note to his family on that same paper and wadded it up in a small ball which he placed in his pockets hoping it would be found when his dead body was returned to and searched by the Americans.⁴⁴ Though he does not appear to have placed much emphasis on religion during his daily life, Muse was able to make peace with God in the shadow of death. Believing that he was soon was to be executed, he describes being terrified, his mind running through various thoughts until he considered the Kingdom of Heaven and...

the reward that he prayed awaited him on the other side of this life. His faith had never come close to the relationship that Annie enjoyed with her Creator, but in that moment it occurred to Kurt with perfect clarity that death was not an event to be feared. Rather, it was the necessary next step in life, and as such it should be embraced as the natural order of things. God would not have put him here in this spot if this were not the spot where he belonged.⁴⁵

⁴³ Kurt Muse and John Gilstrap, *Six Minutes To Freedom*, (Kensington Publishing Corp: New York), 2006, 210.

⁴⁴ Muse, 248.

⁴⁵ Muse 247-248.

Muse was successfully rescued in a daring raid before he could be executed, but while escaping the helicopter he was being transported in crashed. He survived that incident along with the crew, and was loaded into a nearby armored personnel carrier which completed his evacuation.

Operation Desert Storm

Twenty-three American POWs were seized by the Iraqis during Operation Desert Storm, including 20 year old Army Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy, who became the first female American POW since World War II. Army Major Rhonda Cornum, a flight surgeon, became the second female POW of the war when the Blackhawk helicopter she was flying in was shot down during a search and rescue mission looking for a downed F-16.⁴⁶ All twenty-three survived their captivity and were returned to U.S. custody on March 4-5, 1991. After the war, Cornum spoke of being sexually abused by her captors, an experience she claims she was able to put behind herself as she remained in the Army until 2012, when she retired at the rank of Brigadier General.

The POWs were later studied regarding the efficacy of the training they received prior to captivity. The study's conclusion includes a direct quote from one of the captives who noted the value of spiritual resiliency: "Neither SERE training, nor cultural training, nor any combination thereof can completely overcome the fear and frustration that are fundamental to the condition of captivity. A personal faith system—a 'strategy [which] has to come from inside the individual' is also required."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Rhonda Cornum, and Peter Copeland, *She Went to War: The Rhonda Cornum Story*, (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1992).

⁴⁷ Mary A. Anderson, "Captivity and Culture: Insights from the Desert Storm Prisoner of War Experience," (Advanced Research Project, Naval War College, Mar 1996), 41.

Battle of Mogadishu

The Battle of Mogadishu was part of Operation Gothic Serpent, an effort led by the Joint Special Operations Command to capture Mohamed Farrah Aidid. It was America's deadliest battle since Vietnam with 18 Americans killed and 73 wounded. Reports for Somali casualties vary but reliable estimates indicate between 800-1000 were killed with approximately 4000 injured.

On October 3, 1993, U.S. forces successfully captured two of Aidid's top lieutenants, but encountered steadily increasing opposition from the Somalis which resulted in a fierce attack against a ground convoy and two MH-60 Blackhawks being shot down. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Michael Durant was the command pilot of Super 64, the second helicopter to be downed. Only four years prior, Durant had been in Panama as part of the invading forces; his unit conducted Muse's rescue though Durant himself was flying in a separate location at the time.

Durant was not an especially religious man, describing himself as a "casual Catholic" who had gone to church regularly as a child but only occasionally as an adult. As a pilot, he would pray occasionally in the cockpit or before an MRE and ask the chaplain for a quick blessing every now and then. But the Battle for Mogadishu began on a Sunday and while some soldiers gathered with the chaplain to pray, he says he and others were busy just praying for another mission to go on.⁴⁸

When the word came to launch on the fateful mission he didn't think of home or family and he didn't pray. Even as Durant lay on the ground injured, aware that his crew and his rescuers were dead, and waiting to be captured or killed himself, he did not pray or sob. He only

⁴⁸ Michael J. Durant and Steven Hartov, *In The Company of Heroes*, (New York: New American Library, 2004), 1.

thought of his son who would never know his father. Durant was eventually captured, but during the early moments of captivity a nearby gun battle made him assume he was about to be rescued and for the first time, he prayed pledging to become a faithful servant of God forever if he could just survive and escape. At this moment he also began to reflect on the Twenty-third Psalm and its famous line, *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*⁴⁹

On his seventh day of captivity he received a Bible in a Red Cross care package that he treasured, not as a source of spiritual instruction or comfort, but as a place for taking notes to remember his experience. Religion doesn't appear to have played a major role in his experience during captivity. Instead, Durant questioned how a good and loving God could allow something like this to happen to him and his friends.

When he was finally released after eleven days and returned to the United States, spiritual recovery took a long time as he battled with PTSD; eighteen months went by where he cried almost every single day. And then, slowly, spiritual strength began to return. While flying in a commercial jet over Florida one day, he was suddenly amazed by the beauty of the world. Realizing that it all could not have simply happened, he made peace with God:

I acknowledged the fact that I had blamed God for what all of us had endured in Somalia, rejecting the notion that a loving God could inflict that kind of pain on his children. But as I looked at the world again, I knew that He was responsible for all of its majesty, and I renewed my commitment to set an example for my children and to live my life the way I think He intended.⁵⁰

The small seeds of resiliency that had been planted earlier in life eventually grew to give Durant the strength he needed to stand firm.

⁴⁹ Durant, 61.

⁵⁰ Durant, 352.

NATO: Operation Deny Flight

Scott O'Grady was an Air Force F-16 pilot enforcing a NATO-established No-Fly Zone during the Bosnian war when he was shot down over Bosnia on June 2, 1995. O'Grady spent six days on the ground in unfriendly territory seeking to evade capture. From the moment he understood he had been shot to the moment he was rescued, O'Grady was in a constant state of prayer. "I never stopped praying while I was in Bosnia, day and night. If I'd used a calling card to reach heaven that week, I'd have run up one whopper of a bill."⁵¹

Though he had not been particularly devoted prior to the shoot-down, O'Grady instantly turned to God:

I felt the heat and pain, and for an awful moment I thought my end had come. So I did what many others have done in desperate situations: I appealed to a force greater than my own. In times of true emergency, you find that your connection opens up real quick – you don't need to dial an access code. *Dear God, please don't let me die now- don't let me die from this.* All of these events – the bang, the jolt, the pitch, the flames, my prayer – occurred within fractions of a second.⁵²

Later, on the ground, he tried to remember prayers he had been exposed to growing up in a strongly Catholic home: "I tried to say the rosary but lost track of the sequence without my rosary beads. I remembered another prayer, an old favorite. For me it captured God's infinite capacity for love and forgiveness: *Dear Lord, I am not worthy, but only say the word and I shall be healed...*"⁵³

He was eventually rescued by Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, but even the flight back to safety was harrowing: the helicopters were shot at by anti-aircraft and small

⁵¹ Scott O'Grady, *Return With Honor*, (Doubleday, New York, 1995), 123.

⁵² O'Grady, 29.

⁵³ O'Grady, 90.

arms fire on several occasions. The Marines took O’Grady out to sea where they landed on the USS Kearsarge. O’Grady received a string of visitors, “but the visitor who moved me the most - and stayed the longest - was the ship's chaplain. I told him what an incredible spiritual awakening I'd had in Bosnia and how God had kept me going. We prayed together, and I wept.”⁵⁴

O’Grady provides his own reflection on the whole experience:

I underwent a rebirth of my own. I walked though hell for six days. I should have been killed two or three times, but I kept on walking until someone said, “Scott, you’re not supposed to be here.” And He reached in and grabbed me with His hand and pulled me out.

That someone was God, and those six days in Bosnia were a religious retreat for me, a total spiritual renewal. I’m not recommending near-death experience for its own sake; it’s a ride I wouldn’t care to take again. But I will say that my time in Bosnia was completely positive-nothing bad has come out of it. From the instant that my plane blew up around me, and I opened my heart to God’s love, I felt the most incredible freedom-my joy was unbounded.

That day, five miles up, with death at my front door, I found my key to life. It took a mighty big jolt to open my eyes, but it was worth it; I knew I’d never be lost again.

I stayed on that spiritual high for a good week after my return. I could barely sleep; my mind was winning the Indy 500 and wouldn’t take a checkered flag. I had so much to think about and so much to tell the world – which is why I wanted to do this book.

My priorities weren’t turned upside down in Bosnia; I’d been reexamining them for quite some time before then. But they sure were slapped into line during that first week of June. By the end of it, I realized that only three things mattered in this world.

Number one was faith in God, the source of all goodness.

Number two was the love of family and friends. That love wasn’t something apart from faith, nor was it a by-product. It was faith’s fullest expression. We spread God’s love through caring toward others.

⁵⁴ O’Grady, 176-177.

Number three was good health, the physical foundation for faith and love.⁵⁵

O’Grady eventually left active duty but continued flying in the United States Air Force Reserve. He later attended Dallas Theological Seminary and graduated in 2007 with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies.

Captives Freed by War: Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer in Afghanistan

Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer arrived in Afghanistan to begin working with a Christian aid organization just months before the events of September 11, 2001. They sought to keep a low profile, offering humanitarian assistance and medical care and whenever possible and prudent, offering to share the love for Jesus that had brought them to Afghanistan. It was a dangerous and difficult time to be in the country ruled by the Taliban.

Despite their careful attempts to keep a low profile, the Taliban suddenly arrested Curry and Mercer one day as they showed *The Jesus Film* to a local family. Mercer noted: “There were days after my arrest and imprisonment by the Taliban in August 2001 when I wept specifically because I had waited so long to get to Kabul, only to be jailed four and a half months later with a potential death sentence hanging over my head and a global catastrophe erupting outside our prison walls.”⁵⁶

The ladies accepted the risks of serving in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban due to a sense of divine calling: “...we recognized that if the Taliban perceived us as having broken their law or crossed their line, we would have to be prepared to accept the consequences. In the

⁵⁵ O’Grady, 202.

⁵⁶ Curry, Dayna, Heather Mercer and Stacy Mattingly, *Prisoners of Hope: The Story of our Captivity and Freedom in Afghanistan*, (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 15.

end, we were willing to take the punishment because we really believed God had called us to Afghanistan.”⁵⁷

Once arrested, the women were interrogated by the Taliban and wrestled with difficult ethical questions such as: “How do I respond when I know people might die based on the way I answer a question? ... In the end, I did what I thought was best at the time. I wanted to protect our Afghan friends who were innocent of any wrongdoing. And I wanted any blame or punishment to fall on us.”⁵⁸

The Taliban eventually arrested everyone associated with Curry and Mercer’s organization and held them all at the same facility. This gave the group an opportunity to encourage and strengthen each other; they even had times of corporate devotions and worship, but the stress of the situation began whittling away at their unity. Mercer admits:

Ultimately, though, my struggle with fear and my inability to break through the despair strained my friendships with other SNI women. We fought among ourselves and tension escalated. At times I endured deep rejection, and so did they. For two weeks I stayed away from the daily worship and prayer meetings we held in our room. I felt hypocritical worshipping God with the others while our relationships were under duress. Instead, I spent honest time alone with God praying for deliverance from the fear.⁵⁹

The captives were granted a degree of freedom during captivity and were able receive packages from the U.S. Embassy and Curry and Mercer’s parents who had flown to Pakistan after receiving news of their daughters’ arrests. They also received a package from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and their captors purchased food for them from a local restaurant in the beginning.

⁵⁷ Curry and Mercer, 44.

⁵⁸ Curry and Mercer, 113.

⁵⁹ Curry and Mercer, 117.

As the date of their expected trial grew closer, the world was suddenly shaken by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Americans in Kabul suddenly found themselves in midst of a global crisis. As the American military began to retaliate, the captives were moved to a new holding area. Mercer wrestled with God as she continued to battle her fears.

I tried to hold on, but the more I tried, the more desperate and abysmal my existence became. I faced a crucial decision: Either I could quit wrestling with God and trust him, or I could continue fighting against fear's unyielding grip on my life and in the end surely die from the anxiety and grief.⁶⁰

Resigning herself to trusting God, she wrote in her journal,

Lord, all I can do is throw myself in your hands and say have your way. I am utterly desperate and I can do nothing, so I put my life in your hands. By now I've gone numb. It's as though I can't take any more, so I just have to shut down. God I trust you! Lord, you're my only hope. I resign now and ask for your grace to endure....⁶¹

As American Forces continued their invasion, the captives continued to be moved farther and farther from the capital, Kabul, but eventually their captors simply left them behind and fled for their own lives. American special operations forces eventually were made aware of their location and sent in helicopters, not so much to 'rescue' the group as to simply pick them up and bring them home. Once on board the helicopters, "another soldier bent down and said, 'I want you to know that since your first day in captivity on August 3, my family and I have never stopped praying for you.' No words could have been sweeter...I finally rested and worshipped Jesus."⁶²

⁶⁰ Curry and Mercer, 226

⁶¹ Curry and Mercer, 226.

⁶² Curry and Mercer, 298.

Curry, Mercer, and their fellow workers were taken to Pakistan and then returned to the United States. Mercer speaks at conferences about her experiences and in the wake of the Operation Iraqi Freedom she began serving in Northern Iraq among the Kurdish people.

Missionaries on Vacation: Martin and Gracia Burnham in the Philippines

Gracia Burnham was trying to plan a special overnight getaway to celebrate her wedding anniversary when, on the recommendation of friends, she booked a room for herself and her husband Martin at the Dos Palmos Resort on Palawan Island in the Philippines. Martin had been raised as missionary kid in the Philippines and now served there as a missionary pilot flying supplies to mission stations across the country. As a couple they had been together in the Philippines for fifteen years.

Their romantic getaway was violently interrupted in the middle of the night on May 27, 2001, as terrorist gunmen from Abu Sayyaf raced in on speedboats and took control of the ring of huts built on stilts over the water where the Martins were staying. Dos Palmos was considered a plush resort, and Abu Sayyaf intended to take hostages as a money making scheme to extract ransoms out of wealthy Filipinos or rich vacationers from China and other Asian nations. The two missionaries simply happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. As they explained their identity to their captors: “A cloud of disappointment came across Solaiman’s face. He had hoped we would be European—or at least American—business types, whose company would readily pay to get us back. Mission groups on the other hand, were (a) poor and (b) on record with standing policies against ever paying ransom.”⁶³

⁶³ Gracia Burnham and Dean Merrill, *In The Presence Of My Enemies*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003), 12.

The Burnhams had received training through New Tribes Missions, their sending organization, designed to prepare them for hostage situations. New Tribes even had a contingency planner on staff for just these kind of situations, but that class was back in the late 1980's and Gracia now struggled to recall: "What else had he said? I hadn't really been paying full attention that day, and neither had Martin. Kidnapping was something that happened to other people, not us."⁶⁴

A group of twenty was captured that night, ten men and ten women. Most were ransomed within a week, and several more within about a month. The Burnhams, due to their unique status as Americans and missionaries, two complicating identities, were not so easy to auction off.

The Abu Sayyaf was resorting to kidnapping in an effort to raise funds and therefore did not have the resources to take care of hostages while waiting for their release. Early on in captivity, the terrorists took the group to a local hospital, intimidated the staff, and broke into an empty room so some of the captives could take showers. That night a gunfight broke out as local law enforcement arrived. Gracia describes the unique ethical dilemma she faced:

As the wee hours of the night wore on, the fighting intensified, and we were moved into another room, this one with two patients lying in their beds. I'm embarrassed to admit what happened next. The other hostages promptly began to loot the room, taking everything from baby powder to soap to the patients' clothing. We had suddenly become as unscrupulous as our captors. The law of "I need this, so I'm taking it right now whether it's mine or not" held sway.

What's the difference between us and the Abu Sayyaf? I said to myself. *We're all stealing.* Someone held out a toiletry item to me. "I'm not taking that," I answered. "It's not mine. We're stealing from these people!" The other hostages continued to get cleaned up in this patient room, while the rest of us sat outside on the floor along the hallway. As I sat there, I pondered what I had just witnessed. Up to this point, I had assumed we hostages were "the good guys." Now I had to

⁶⁴ Burnham, 8.

admit that when you're only thinking of yourself and your own needs, you'll do just about anything.

What I would have hotly denied that night in Lamitan, of course, was the prospect that before the year was out, I would behave in much the same way.⁶⁵

In equally honest terms Gracia openly discusses the difficulties she had trusting God as their captivity dragged on.

Sometimes Martin would come and sit with me by the river. He'd say, "I just hate to see you giving up your faith like this."

"Oh, I'm not giving up my faith," I'd tell him. "I still believe that God made the world, he sent his Son, Jesus, and Jesus died for me. I haven't given up my faith—I'm just choosing not to believe the part about God loving me. Because God's not coming through."

"It seems to me that either you believe it all, or else you don't believe at all," was Martin's gentle reply.

... One day as I was sitting at the river, I thought about some of the things Martin had said. I realized that my depression and anger against God weren't doing anything to make our situation more bearable. In fact, they were only making it worse—for me as well as for everyone around me. I knew that I had no choice. I could give in to my resentment and allow it to dig me into a deeper and deeper hole both psychologically and emotionally, or I could choose to believe what God's Word says to be true whether I felt it or not.

That was a turning point for me. It was as if God were saying to me, "If you're going to believe that I died for you, why not believe that I love you? Why don't you let me put my arms around you and love you?"

And I did. I simply gave in and handed all my pain and anger over to the Lord right then and there. I didn't have a Bible or anyone but Martin encouraging me. But from that day on, the Lord somehow let me know in my spirit that he was still faithful.⁶⁶

The knowledge of God's faithfulness proved to be a necessary source of strength as the Burnhams' captivity wore on for a year and eleven days. During that time both local and

⁶⁵ Burnham, 88.

⁶⁶ Burnham, 151-152.

national elements of the Philippines government hunted their group with the assistance and advisement of the U.S. military. The Burnhams survived sixteen separate gun battles until June 7, 2002, when national forces finally cornered the small group. All three of the remaining hostages were injured in the final gunfight, including Martin, who was killed.

Gracia returned home to the United States and was reunited with her children, who had been evacuated immediately after the capture of their parents. She has written two books, one describing the events of the captivity, and a second reflecting on the healing process of life afterward. She is now a conference speaker and her oldest son Jeff recently followed in his father's footsteps, receiving an appointment to serve as a missionary pilot in Africa.

Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom

During the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, American POWs once again made headlines, and as in the first Iraq War, women were among their numbers. In a much-publicized story, a convoy of vehicles from the Army's 507th Maintenance Company was overrun on March 23, 2003.

The last thing Private First Class Jessica Lynch remembers about the initial attack is praying for help and survival.⁶⁷ After her capture, she was taken away by Iraqi forces and sexually assaulted for three hours before being taken to a local hospital for treatment of a broken back and two broken legs.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Rick Bragg, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 78.

⁶⁸ Bragg, 148.

During her stay in the hospital Lynch most often withdrew into sleep and dreams, not prayer, for strength. She thought most often of her friend and fellow soldier Lori Piestwa who was also present in the attack and drew strength from those memories.⁶⁹

American forces soon learned of her location and launched a raid to rescue her in the first successful liberation of a U.S. POW since World War II.⁷⁰ Lynch returned home from Iraq, left the Army, and began attending college. She recently graduated and is serving as a motivational speaker and substitute teacher in West Virginia.

Marcus Luttrell was part of a four-man SEAL team conducting reconnaissance in the mountains of Afghanistan in June 2005 when unarmed men compromised their position. After detaining the men and a difficult ethical discussion, the SEALs resolved to allow the men to continue their journey knowing they would likely report the Americans to the very Taliban they had been sent to observe.

The Taliban was indeed alerted and a massive assault was launched against the team. Despite their heroic resistance, three of the four team members: Matthew “Axe” Axelson, Danny Dietz, and team leader Michael Murphy, lost their lives. Luttrell was eventually able to withdraw from the fight and spent hours running and falling through the mountainous terrain seeking refuge. Suddenly the spiritual resources he had been exposed to in his youth became a source of strength.

Morgan [Luttrell’s twin brother, also a SEAL] and I were brought up to believe in the Lord. We weren’t compelled to go to church or anything, and to this day the family are not churchgoers. In fact, I’m the only one who does go to church on a somewhat regular basis. Sunday mornings when I’m home, I drive over to the Catholic church, where people know me. I was not baptized a Catholic, but it suits me, its beliefs and doctrines sit easily with me. Since I was young, I have always

⁶⁹ Bragg, 161.

⁷⁰ Darrel D. Whitcomb, “Rescue Operations in the Second Gulf War,” *Air & Space Power Journal* 19, no. 1, (Spring 2005): 99.

been able to recite the Twenty-third Psalm and several others from beginning to end.⁷¹

Isolated from friendly personnel, surrounded by enemy and fighting for his own life, Luttrell cried out to the one source of strength that he still had reliable contact with – God above – and prayer suddenly became an essential part of his efforts to survive, especially his memorization of the Twenty-third Psalm. “It was all I had, just a plaintive cry to a God who was with me, but whose ways were becoming unclear to me...I kept repeating the Twenty-third Psalm in my head, over and over, trying to stop myself from breaking down. I was scared, freezing cold, without shelter or proper clothes, and I just kept saying it.”⁷²

Luttrell was eventually taken in by an Afghan village and offered sanctuary for four days from Taliban forces that had encircled the village. U.S. forces were alerted to his location and launched a rescue mission that successfully brought him home. Upon his return Luttrell was recognized with the Navy Cross. He later left the Navy and is active today as a speaker and founder of the Lone Survivor Foundation.

Somalia: Entrepreneurial Kidnapping

Jessica Buchanan grew up the daughter of a devout Christian family but had something of a fitful relationship with God herself. While in her twenties she visited East Africa hoping to work with needy children, but on her first night visiting an orphanage in Sudan, a local terrorist group attacked and she was compelled to seek a safer alternative teaching school in Nairobi, Kenya. Several years later she had married a non-religious Swede and was serving in a

⁷¹ Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 43-44.

⁷² Luttrell, 267.

humanitarian aid organization in Somalia when she was kidnapped along with a Dutch co-worker on October 25, 2011.

The two had been abducted by a group seeking to extract a ransom for Western hostages. During captivity, Buchanan frequently thought of her desire to have a child with her husband and carry on with life once she was released and prayed regularly for protection and strength. Meanwhile, her husband Erik worked aggressively for her release and noticed the effect spiritual strength was having in the lives of others as they processed the events, particularly Jessica's father:

Erik looked around to see how others handled this terrible stress. In dealing with John [Jessica's father] it was clear that the depth of his spiritual faith held him up like a better set of bones. John Buchanan reeled from the blow, but right away his internal gyroscope ramped up and began to spin. It appeared to Erik that the man was stabilized by the internal workings of his faith... To Erik, John lived out the phrase "grace under pressure" while all of them hung by the hands of the clock.⁷³

Jessica's own prayer spiritual life was something more nebulous. Instead of addressing a personal god she speaks of making a more general appeal: "When it came to petitioning the universe, I learned I can scream bloody murder without making a sound. Without moving a muscle, really."⁷⁴ As Erik noted later, "Jessica's example had taught him to separate spirituality from the dictates of organized religion."⁷⁵

As captivity dragged on Jessica began to reflect on another difficult time in her life – the death of her mother, and to consider how her father's faith had influenced his response to the events.

⁷³ Jessica Buchanan & Erik Landemalm with Anthony Flacco, *Impossible Odds: The Kidnapping of Jessica Buchanan and Her Dramatic Rescue by SEAL Team Six*, (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 103-104.

⁷⁴ Buchanan, 126.

⁷⁵ Buchanan, 157.

He prayed, “God, I don’t understand this. I don’t understand you...but I chose to trust you. It’s the reason we played “I Don’t Understand Your Ways” at her funeral, a statement of acceptance of the unacceptable, of a higher purpose than we can comprehend.

When I lay on that sleeping mat and recalled that moment in his life, the darkest cave he had ever been in, I realized his choice was pivotal in his recovery. Not by making it easy, but by making it possible.

...I had seen for myself that he didn’t just say the words, “I don’t understand you, but I choose to trust you.” He lived by them. He went on from that moment, hour to hour and day-to-day, conducting himself the way he knew my mom would want him to do. I had already drifted from a lot of my childhood religious thinking, questioning various things, but that didn’t seem to have anything to do with the strength of spirit I saw revealed in that hour.

So during my time in the desert, at nights under the desert stars, I discovered that I took some of that strength from remembering my dad’s steady conduct. I echoed his words and willed them to be true for me as well, “God, I don’t understand this, but I choose to trust you.” Any degree of peace I was able to attain out there began and ended with that conviction. I planted my feet on it and put down roots.⁷⁶

Jessica’s stripped down ‘spirituality’ still had room for a divine being who was aware and able to influence events, though he might not choose to intervene. “I knew there were centuries of human history packed with tales of faithful people who were killed in the midst of praying for release and who found release only in death. Something told me not to bother praying for cosmic magic, I just focused on praying for my own strength.”⁷⁷

Spiritual strength sustained her as physical strength drained. Jessica’s failing health eventually triggered a decision by the U.S. President to launch a recovery raid. On January 25, 2012 after 93 days of captivity, U.S. Navy SEALs flew in under the cover of darkness and rescued Jessica and her co-worker.

⁷⁶ Buchanan, 146-147.

⁷⁷ Buchanan, 162.

After her release, Jessica and Erik moved to Virginia and had their first child. Jessica co-authored a book about her experience and is now on a speaking tour.

Chapter Three Commonalities

The purpose of this chapter is to note any commonalities in the experiences of those held captive or isolated. After a discussion of the real potential of capture or isolation for any American traveling abroad, the effects of various circumstances on the conditions of captivity are noted. Next we see that those who are held captive often hope for physical rescue or release but also frequently turn toward God for spiritual strength, though in the process they may battle questions such as “why did God let this happen to me?” This is true even of those who are only marginally devout at the time of capture or isolation, as they frequently reflect back on prior religious experiences to draw strength. Captives use prayer, Scripture, and music to worship and commune with God. Some also find fellowship with other captives and, when possible, conduct official religious services. Some are led through such a spiritual transformation in captivity that they are able to express love and forgiveness toward their captors. And finally, though captivity and isolation can be life-altering, after regaining their freedom many who have had such experiences have gone on to serve in their original occupations, with some even returning to the same or similar conditions as those where they were captured.

It Could Happen To Anyone

Sadly, the first thing that must be noted is the commonality of vulnerability among Americans traveling abroad. Though the number of those held captive or isolated remains a very small percentage of total travel, it is nonetheless possible for any traveler. The case studies in Chapter Two warn us not to trust in gender, as we see the stories of Rhonda Cornum, Gracia

Burnham, Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, Jessica Lynch, Jessica Buchanan, and numerous other women alongside those of countless men.

Age, rank, and experience, though valuable, are not 100% effective barriers as we see with the stories like those of Benjamin Weir, who had over thirty years experience in Lebanon when he was taken from the streets of Beirut, and Martin Burnham, who was raised as the son of missionaries in the Philippines and then served for over 15 years as an adult before being captured.

In 1965 James Stockdale had flown over 200 missions over South Vietnam. He held the rank of commander and was the senior pilot in Air Wing 16 when he was shot down on what he called a “milk run,” an easy mission taken on as an alternative bombing mission when the primary objective was unreachable. He claims to have known “the countryside of North Vietnam like the back of my hand.”¹

“As I slid (sic) toward that easy target, I’m sure I felt totally self-satisfied. I had the top combat job that a Navy commander can hold and I was in tune with my environment. I was confident- I knew airplanes and flying inside out. I was comfortable with the people I worked with and I knew the trade so well that I often improvised variations in accepted procedures and encouraged others to do so under my watchful eye. I was on top. I thought I had found every key to success and had no doubt that my [U.S. Naval] Academy and test pilot schooling had provided me with everything I needed in life.”²

Stockdale was shot down by anti-aircraft fire on that ‘milk run’ and became the highest-ranking POW held by the Vietnamese. He was held for the next seven years. “Rocky” Versace had only six weeks left in country when he volunteered to go along on a dangerous raid with Nick Rowe and was subsequently captured. By contrast, Jessica Lynch had spent only 20 months

¹ James Bond Stockdale, “The World of Epictetus: Reflections on Survival and Leadership,” in *War Morality, and the Military Profession*, 2nd Ed. Malham M Wakin ed. (Westview Press: Boulder, CO), 1986, 10.

² Stockdale, 11.

in the Army when she found herself on a convoy invading Iraq. Once again, neither experience nor the lack of it, is an entirely reliable insulator against the threat.

The threat of captivity or isolation also shows no respect to the elite status of a military unit, nor are only those serving in elite units susceptible. Lynch and five other members of the 507th Maintenance Company, as members of a unit not typically associated with direct combat, probably considered themselves unlikely to become Prisoners of War, and yet such was their experience. American military and political leaders have taken note of these shifting realities abroad. In a paper discussing the future of U.S. military rescue operations the authors state: “Historically, we have considered our military aircrews and special operations forces as those most at risk. Now we must assume that all of our people are potentially in danger worldwide. Our national leaders recognize this change.”³ *All of our people...worldwide*. Recent anti-terrorism training reflects this evolving understanding and now categorizes victims as susceptible on the basis of their location, association, or the opportunity they present.

A survey conducted by the author in association with this paper confirms that Americans traveling abroad sense this threat today. When asked: “Do you believe it was (is/will be) possible for you to be taken captive, wrongfully imprisoned, or to become isolated from friends or co-workers while traveling abroad?” an astonishing 84% of respondents answered “yes.”⁴

Certainly those traveling abroad as members of American military forces must have some expectation of potentially enduring such circumstances, but increasingly those serving in more peaceful roles are also facing these risks. Journalists were once thought to operate under a kind of internationally recognized immunity, but several reporters are currently being held in Syria by

³ Colonel Lee Pera, Paul D. Miller, and Darrel Whitcomb. “Personnel Recovery: Strategic Importance and Impact.” *Air & Space Power Journal* 26, no.6 (November–December 2012): 88.

⁴ For the full results of this survey, see Appendix One.

various groups as a result of their attempts to investigate the conflict between rebels and the government. The story of the capture and execution of Daniel Pearl in 2002 in Afghanistan gained worldwide headlines. Jessica Buchannan was working for an NGO in Somalia that was teaching landmine awareness when she was captured. Simply being overseas, regardless of the reason, puts Americans at risk.

Finally, it must be noted that only rarely is someone intentionally targeted for captivity on the basis of their own identity. Most military personnel were seized on the basis of opportunity, not personal identity. And though it may seem controversial to some, many of those missionaries who experienced captivity should be classified as victims of crime, not martyrs of religious persecution. That is, very few of these men and women were explicitly targeted for their adherence to the traditional creeds of the Christian faith; rather, they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, or were seized as an easily recognizable representative of the West in general or America in particular.⁵ It must also be noted that spiritual maturity is also no preventative, as if by simply growing in piety effectively insulates one from difficulty in life. As Carol Weir notes: “When Ben was kidnapped, I learned that the life of faith does not protect us from situations where we feel helplessness, loneliness, and the pain of suffering.”⁶

Essentially, captivity is like all crises – it could hit at anyone at any moment, and nothing entirely insulates one from it. And yet it is unlike other crises because it is typically endured alone or in a small isolated group; typically all one has available to endure the crisis is what he or

⁵ The *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* states that there is some “scholarly controversy” over why *martyr*, based on a Greek word for ‘witness’ came to be associated with suffering for Christ. However, it is clear that “In martyrdom the cause is primary, the dying secondary.” In other words, the cause was at the center of their suffering. For the early church, *martyrs* were not victims of ransom-seekers, thugs, or thieves. They were not caught in the crossfire of two regimes. They were hunted down and harmed for what they believed.

⁶ Ben Weir and Carol Weir, with Dennis Benson, *Hostage Bound Hostage Freed*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 34.

she brings into the situation. Therefore, personal preparation, spiritual strength, and resiliency when traveling abroad are even more important than when at home.

Environmental factors

An individual's experience of captivity or isolation is affected by multiple factors such as who is holding the captives, the nature of the captor's motives and means, and whether there are many captives or few. Differences in religious backgrounds between the captives and captors also often affect the captivity. Each of these variables can have a significant impact on the captive, though the captive is rarely able to exert any influence over them.

Captives may be held by groups which are described as either being constrained or non-constrained according to the terms of international conventions such as the Geneva Conventions. Captors may be legitimate governments who are signatories to these conventions and therefore are constrained to abide by their requirements for the treatment of captives. Increasingly though, non-constrained groups which have not bound themselves to any treaties or internationally recognized standards are holding captives. This category of non-constrained organizations includes revolutionary, terrorist, and criminal groups, which are at best, ignorant of international standards and at worst simply do not care. Captives held by a non-constrained organization can have no expectation of how they may be treated.

Organizations that take or hold captives typically do so because it furthers their organizational motives, and the nature of those motives can directly impact the experience of captivity. Those motivations typically include the desire to enforce local laws and customs, the desire to exert political pressure on another group or government, the desire for recognition, and the desire for monetary gain. Modern access to technology has added a new dynamic to the quest

for gain: recent captives in places such as Syria have reported being forced to surrender cell phones, email accounts, and electronic banking information and PINs as their captors steal the captives' identities and impersonate them online.

Related to the question of motivation is the question of means – does the organization have the material resources necessary to keep captives alive? Guarding, feeding, transporting, and providing medical treatment to a captive can consume precious resources in a small or poorly funded organization. Captives may experience maltreatment simply because there is no money available to provide food or care for them.

Interestingly, most groups are not motivated by the religious conversion of their captives. Nick Rowe and others held in Vietnam often endured long, grueling, political 'education' sessions – attempts at indoctrination with Communist ideology - but his captors always allowed religious freedom, and the Communists seemed to go out of their way to allow him, and provide for him, to celebrate Christmas.

None of the events reviewed for this paper included attempts at forced religious conversion. However, there are occasions when a captive withholds the nature of their faith from their captors. Such was the case with Richard Herzberg, an American Jew who was onboard TWA flight 847 when members of Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad hijacked the plane. Herzberg told his captors he was a Lutheran of German and Greek descent as the passengers were held captive for two weeks in June of 1985.

Even in cases where the most fundamentalist Islamic groups capture confessing Christians, the goal is usually to ransom the captives for money, to make a political statement, to showcase the captive as a sign of the group's ability to take hostages, or to simply expel the 'infidel' from their land. Conversion may be suggested to the captive and it may be implied that

the experience of captivity may be eased after conversion; instruction and training in how to pray might even be offered before execution so the departed can ‘go to Allah in peace,’ but religious conversion by itself is almost never the driving motivation for capture.

Hope for deliverance

“By 1972, after eight years of war, we were still fighting there without any real dedication to a cause—except withdrawal. Like warriors from earlier wars, we fought for each other. We kept that article of faith that if we went down, the Jolly would come for us. In fact, the rescue helicopter became the symbol of that bond or covenant. To the rescue crews, it was a call sign. To the rest of us, it was a prayer. To many, it was salvation. It was the bond.”⁷

Without a doubt the most common experience among those held captive or isolated is the hope of escape from the situation, whether that comes by ransom, rescue, or negotiation. Those who have suddenly lost control over their lives look for someone to restore that control to them. This is especially true of U.S. military personnel who have the expectation that their comrades will ‘never leave a brother behind.’ Recognizing that captivity or isolation is imminent, several even established timelines for how long it would take until freedom was restored. Stockdale determined he would have to endure for five years, though most choose smaller time frames, at least initially.⁸

Unfortunately, the process of recovering an individual or group is complicated by at least five factors. The first is knowing when and where to look: does anyone even know they are missing? Does anyone know where they could be expected to be? Are their captors talking? If the captors do not want to be found, it becomes incredibly difficult to determine where rescue efforts or negotiations should begin.

⁷ Darrel Whitcomb, “Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look,” *Aerospace Power Journal* 14, no. 2, (Summer 2000): 34.

⁸ Stockdale, in *War...*, 12.

The second factor is the status of the captive: is the captor a legitimate government that can be negotiated with? After the rescue of Jessica Buchannan in Somalia in 2012, President Obama warned the world: “The United States will not tolerate the abduction of our people, and will spare no effort to secure the safety of our citizens and to bring their captors to justice. This is yet another message to the world that the United States of America will stand strongly against any threats to our people.”⁹ However, Somalia was a unique case – the United States simply cannot conduct such rescue raids anywhere in the world. Sovereign nations are involved and they may or may not allow U.S. forces to travel through or operate in their spaces, even when groups opposing the legitimate national government are holding U.S. citizens.

In 2013, Americans being held in Algeria died because the Algerians insisted on performing their own recovery operation without accepting offers of American support. The rescue in Sudan of Ron Pontier and others was successfully accomplished only by linking Sudanese forces with American personnel and resources. And yet, the presence and training of American forces in the Philippines was not enough to prevent the accidental death of Martin Burnham. In each of these cases American forces were denied the ability to conduct a rescue unilaterally – local forces had to be involved and in many cases had to lead or actually conduct the rescue under the advisement of U.S. forces.

Such difficulties are even present during times of war when rescue forces are searching for U.S. military personnel. Whitcomb notes in a reflection on rescue operations during the Vietnam war: “The location of the survivor in relation to national boundaries can have a substantial impact on the relationship of nations, rules of engagement, and such matters as the need for overflight privileges. In Southeast Asia, we had different operation rules for South

⁹ Colonel Lee Pera, USAF, Paul D. Miller, and Darrel Whitcomb, “Personnel Recovery: Strategic Importance and Impact,” *Air and Space Journal* (November-December 2012), 107.

Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. *We launched no rescue operations for crews lost over China.*” (emphasis added)¹⁰

Another issue related to the status of the captive is their association with the U.S. government. Kurt Muse was rescued by Delta Force in Panama; when U.S. forces invaded he was a specific target for them to find and protect. In fact, he was the first hostage the unit ever rescued on its own, but Muse had a unique status: aside from any connection he may have had to U.S. intelligence agencies, he was also overtly protected as the dependent of a Department of Defense employee. His wife was a schoolteacher working for the DoD School System (DoDSS) on a U.S. military base and he was being held prisoner by a government the U.S. was now acting against. Other civilians such as the Burnhams in the Philippines and Ron Pontier in the Sudan were not covered by such a dependent relationship with the U.S. Government and therefore were in a different status for decisions related to rescue efforts.

A third factor related to rescue attempts is that of location: the greater the distance between the isolated or captured party and rescue assets, the more complicated rescue or recovery becomes, especially if U.S. rescue forces are expecting armed opposition. The planning for such operations can take days, weeks, even months in the most complicated scenarios. In other words, as much as everyone would like to see the knight come rushing in on a white horse, rescue should not be assumed as an immediate, automatic guarantee for those being held.

Similarly, a fourth factor is complexity, which characterizes many rescue operations; such missions are rarely safe or straightforward. Carney discusses the rescues of Navy F-14 pilot Devon Jones and an Air Force F-16 pilot during Desert Storm, then remarks:

There were other successful rescues, but most of the aircrews downed in the Gulf War were not rescued, for a variety of reasons. They needed better survival radios (and we required a voice transmission before we could attempt a snatch); there

¹⁰ Whitcomb, “*Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look*,” 30.

were few sightings of open parachutes (required before a rescue mission could be launched); many pilots landed in areas occupied by heavy concentrations of Iraqi troops and, as often as not, the Iraqis beat our rescue teams to the downed airmen.¹¹

Similar results were experienced in Vietnam: “until its inactivation in 1972, the [Joint Personnel Recovery Center] successfully orchestrated the recovery of several hundred Vietnamese and Korean soldiers but no Americans.”¹²

The United States conducted valiant rescue attempts during the Son Tay raid in Vietnam and during Operation Eagle Claw in Iran, but turned up empty handed each time after expending enormous amounts of national resources and effort. Rescuers can even find themselves in the tragically ironic situation of requiring rescue themselves. Rhonda Cornum was flying a rescue mission when she was shot down and captured during Operation Desert Storm. So too with Michael Durant in Somalia, where both of the downed helicopters had been designated as the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) birds for the mission.¹³

Finally, a fifth factor is the survivability of the rescue. In January of 1994, 20 rebels from the Marxist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) stormed a New Tribes Mission (NTM) compound and snatched Steve Welch and Tim Van Dyke in front of their families. The men were reportedly sighted several times as they were moved from location to location. The FARC sought an exorbitant ransom for the pair, which NTM refused to pay on principle. On June 19, 1995, both men were killed during a shootout between forces from the FARC and the Colombian military forces sent to rescue them.

¹¹ Colonel John T. Carney Jr. and Benjamin F. Schemmer, *No Room For Error: The Covert Operations of America's Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan*. Ballantine Books. (New York: NY, 2002), 228.

¹² Pera, et al. “Personnel Recovery: Strategic Importance and Impact,” 93.

¹³ Pera, et al. “Personnel Recovery: Strategic Importance and Impact,” 98.

Those held captive frequently worry, and with good reason, about their ability to survive a rescue attempt. Some, such as Muse, are accompanied by a guard with instructions to shoot them if a rescue is attempted, others are concerned about being accidentally shot by rescue forces as happened with Martin Burnham. Those aboard the Japanese hell ships were occasionally strafed by U.S. warplanes or sunk by U.S. submarines, as they were transported in unmarked vessels that gave no indication they were transporting POWs. Similarly, in World War II Germans transported POWs in rail cars that were not marked according to Geneva Convention requirements, and as a result the Allies occasionally bombed them.

Rescue is a complicated and dangerous event, and it is no guarantee for those who are being held. As much as captives want to trust in their fellow man, most soon discover they must look to other sources of hope and resiliency while waiting for deliverance to come. Though their paths differ radically, many turn toward God.

Finding God

The process of turning toward God in times of cross-cultural captivity is not automatic or smooth, and it certainly is not guaranteed. People respond to stress in different ways, so it is hard to tell in advance exactly what a particular person's response will be and what role faith will play. Some do not turn toward spiritual strength at all; some begin with intense faith and are left questioning why God would allow such things to happen to them. But many, perhaps most, eventually come to a settled place of confident assurance in God's presence and help in their times of deepest need. Some captives even make their first professions of faith during captivity, and several have gone on to enter the ministry full-time after their release.

In evaluating the ‘Ten Greatest Revivals Ever’ Elmer Towns notes that this phenomenon of religious revival among captives is not a recent, or uniquely American experience. He cites a historical example which...

began in a most unlikely place: among prisoners of war held in camps halfway across the world from each other. The Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa had pitted the Boers (Afrikaners), of Dutch ancestry, against the British. Some of the Boers taken prisoner were held on Bermuda (a British island colony off the southeastern coast of the United States) and some on Ceylon (an island in the Indian Ocean).

According to one observer, the Prisoner of War Revival, as it came to be called, was characterized “by extraordinary prayer, by faithful preaching, conviction of sin, confession and repentance with lasting conversions and hundreds of enlistments for missionary service.” With the return of the prisoners to their homeland, revival swept through South Africa as well, which was in the grips of an economic depression.¹⁴

This process of turning toward God does not follow any predictable timetables. Some of those who had a rather ambivalent approach toward God instantly turn toward Him in their time of need, as was the case with Scott O’Grady, the pilot shot down over Bosnia. While he was still descending in his parachute he began praying and relied on constant communion with God for the duration of his crisis. Others take some amount of time to exhaust other possibilities before determining that God is the only guaranteed source of strength, comfort, and direction in their lives. Nick Rowe was in captivity for two years before he finally describes coming to a place of declared need for Divine assistance.

For many, God becomes an intimate friend, a source of internal strength that cannot be taken away. Captors may control every other aspect of a captive’s existence, but they cannot control his or her spirit – the last, and greatest, front of resistance. A captive may be kept in isolation for days, months, even years, and yet still have the same access to God as he had when

¹⁴ Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2000),16.

he was free. Captives have found that in their darkest moments, at the loneliest times, and in their deepest hurts, Christ was there with them.

Surely this would seem logical for men and women of deep, abiding faith, but where do those who seem to have so little initial interest in spiritual matters turn to find this source of strength? Often it is found through reflection on past events. For many captives the severity of their circumstances encourages a thoughtful review of their lives looking for sources of meaning and strength. It is during these times of quiet contemplation that prior religious experiences suddenly take on renewed meaning.

Captives often cite memories of prior services attended; this is true whether they were originally engaged in the service or simply attending out of obligation. Rutledge shares a common sentiment:

“During these longer periods of enforced reflection it became so much easier to separate the important from the trivial, the worthwhile from the waste. For example, in the past, I usually worked or played hard on Sundays and had no time for church. For years [my wife] had encouraged me to join the family at church. She never nagged or scolded – she just kept hoping. But I was too busy, too preoccupied, to spend one or two short hours a week thinking about the really important things.

Now the sights and sounds and smells of death were all around me. My hunger for spiritual food soon outdid my hunger for a steak. Now I wanted to know about that part of me that will never die. Now I wanted to talk about God and Christ and the church. But in [the solitary confinement of a POW camp], there was no pastor, no Sunday-School teacher, no Bible, no hymnbook, no community of believers to guide and sustain me. I had completely neglected the spiritual dimension on my life. It took prison to show me how empty life is without God.”¹⁵

Many captives drift back to memories of growing up in a Christian home, or of Sunday School teachers who took a particular interest in them. Several captives of the Vietnam era recalled

¹⁵ Howard Rutledge and Phyllis Rutledge with Mel White and Lyla White, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies* (Old Tappan, NY: Fleming Revell, 1973), p. 34.

chapel services at West Point or the Naval Academy where attendance was mandatory until 1972. Luttrell reflected back on memorial services conducted by chaplains where he heard Psalm 23 repeated so many times.

As captives come to understand the reality of the God they have ignored, some struggle with feelings of hypocrisy.

I began to pray more fervently, and it embarrassed me that my interest in prayer was increasing. I felt like a hypocrite, since my recent actions didn't match my religious fervor. I felt guilty for using God only when the chips were down. Even so, I told myself it had to be better to pray than not to pray, and I started a prayer of thanksgiving. I was thankful that I'd gotten out of the camp, that I was moving along well, and, particularly, that I had escaped death in the explosion two days before.¹⁶

Many others ponder the difficulties of theodicy, the philosophic and theological question of why a good God allows evil. For some, such as Michael Durant, the question cannot be satisfactorily resolved in the moment and leads to a turning away from God that may be reversed over time. Others, such as Gracia Burnham, suffer a temporary re-casting of their concepts of God, continuing to believe, for example, that Christ died for the sins of man, but questioning the moral goodness or kindness of the God who is allowing them to suffer in captivity. Missionaries in particular may ask why God allowed this to happen to them when they have already given up so much to serve Him or may question why God would allow this difficulty to interrupt the work of ministry that could otherwise be done.

In most cases the passage of time heals the wounds of the soul, and though few find answers for all their questions, they find a way to balance what they know with what they don't understand and maintain a firm belief in God. There is a sense that, for reasons not now clear, God allowed this and He will sustain them through it.

¹⁶ George E. Day, *Return With Honor*. (Mesa, AZ: Champlin Fighter Museum Press, 1989), 10.

Sources of Strength

“Prayer was the only means we had to reinforce ourselves and it was the best.”¹⁷
– Nick Rowe

When captives turn to God for help, their relationship with the Almighty is typically strengthened and sustained by prayer, Scripture, music, fellowship, and religious services. Obviously, prayer, especially of the personal and internal type, is available to all, but the availability of the remainder is dependent upon the conditions of captivity and the attitudes and permissiveness of the captors.

Prayer provides captives and those who are isolated with the knowledge that someone really cares and is listening. Through prayer they find a way to share their struggles, vent their frustrations, and ask for help. God knows what is going on, and He is present, even if things don't seem to make sense.

I turned to prayer when my resources had been exhausted. My relationship with God was such that I'd try until I felt I could go no further or I was in need of special guidance. I didn't want to call on Him at every turn, and even though I asked for His guidance in all my actions, there were days of special need. Perhaps it was my acceptance of His presence and the predetermined path on which I walked that gave me the greatest comfort. I received comfort when none was indicated by my conditions, none was provided by the material surroundings. The quiet, inner calm which would settle over me was not a function of this earthly environment.¹⁸

Prayer takes on a number of forms among those held captive. Some remember set prayers from their particular tradition, others recall Scriptures and use it as a guide in prayer while still others use a conversational style. One of the most famous prayers, commonly referred to as The Lord's Prayer, provided a stumbling block for at least some captives, for it is especially difficult

¹⁷ Rowe, 267.

¹⁸ Rowe, 301.

to pray “forgive us our sins, *For we forgive everyone who is indebted to us*” when one is daily suffering at the hands of another. And yet, as the former POW E.M. Bounds notes: “Prayer succeeds when all else fails. Prayer has won great victories and has rescued, with notable triumph, God’s saints when every other hope is gone.”¹⁹

Another source of spiritual strength captives find is in Scripture. In most cases, captives reflected on Scripture they had previously memorized or were familiar with. Burnham, the missionary held in the Philippines, wrote:

“Another thing that helped my mental outlook, if not my body, was remembering Scripture I had memorized long ago. I would have given anything to have had an actual Bible, of course... One Sunday I found a piece of paper and began writing down all the promises of God that I could recall. My wording wasn’t verbatim in every case, but I came up with quite a few...”²⁰

The Scripture most commonly recalled is Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd...” Its reference to God as a kind shepherd looking after His needful sheep, even when they walk through “the valley of the shadow of death,” has proven comforting to numerous captives from Vietnam to Iran to Afghanistan. Bud Day prayed it every day and it was taught to every new prisoner at the Hanoi Hilton where it was also used in the POWs’ first church service.²¹ Luttrell called it the “Psalm of the SEALs” and Risner called it the “Prisoner’s Psalm.”²² Other favorite passages include Psalm 91; Romans 8:28; and the Beatitudes.

¹⁹ E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: CCEL, 2001), 29, e-book in the public domain.

²⁰ Burnham, *In The Presence Of My Enemies*, 198.

²¹ Robinson Risner, *The Passing of the Night: My Seven Years As a Prisoner of the North Vietnamese*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 216. Also, see Eugene B. McDaniel, with James Johnson, *Scars and Stripes*, formerly published as “Before Honor,” (New York: A.J. Holman Company, 1975), 82.

²² Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 267. Risner, 216.

Depending on the circumstances of their capture and the attitude of their captors, some captives have been able to bring Bibles into captivity with them. Curry and Mercer were actually allowed to return to their apartment and retrieve their Bibles. Others requested copies of Scripture while in captivity. Many times these initial requests were denied as Rowe experienced²³, but others received the Scriptures they asked for, as with Weir who received a copy in Arabic, which he could read.

However, Scriptures were not always used for devotional purposes. Durant used a Bible he received in a Red Cross care package as a space to keep a diary that he hoped would have intelligence value after his rescue. Muse similarly used the empty pages in the back of Bible found in cell to make notes and also to write his final farewell if needed.²⁴

Perhaps the most inspiring story is that of Jacob DeShazer. DeShazer was a bombardier who participated in the famous Doolittle Raid, a retaliatory attack on the Japanese after Pearl Harbor. The Raiders successfully flew over Japan launching a surprise attack and then continued on toward China where they eventually bailed out and were captured by Japanese forces that had invaded the Chinese mainland. In captivity DeShazer requested a copy of the Bible and received it. While captive, he made a permanent connection to the faith he had been exposed to as a child, and promised that if God got him out of the POW camps, he would return to Japan as missionary. True to his word, DeShazer returned with his wife and family in 1949 and remained there for the next 30 years as Free Methodist Missionary and was instrumental in seeing 23 churches planted.

²³ Rowe, 222.

²⁴ Muse, 248.

The third tool captives have used to build their spiritual resiliency is music. The connection between captivity and music stretches throughout the history of this nation. African slaves, themselves cross-cultural captives in America, developed entire genres of music through forms such as their spirituals. Going back even farther, the Psalms contain music composed during times of captivity and could be characterized as what we would call in modern terms ‘the blues.’ It should be of no surprise then, that music frequently plays a role in the lives of captives. According to Towns, “Praise is good for us because it keeps us from being pessimists. It keeps us from becoming bogged down in all the depressing circumstances of our everyday lives and focuses our attention on something greater than our present condition. Praise keeps us from being self-centered and negative.”²⁵ This is precisely how most captives appear to have used music.

Captives often remembered songs they had learned before their captivity. After facing significant opposition, the Japanese overran the Marines defending Wake Island on December 23, 1941, and captured the remaining men. The captives were held on Wake’s airfield for several days exposed to the elements; they sang “Christmas carols to cheer themselves.”²⁶ Buchanan recalled “It’s Gonna Be Worth It” by Rita Springer, a song that looks forward to the day we look back on our sufferings from a heavenly perspective and finally understand it was worth it all.²⁷ That perspective on the sufferings of the moment can be hard to attain though, as Burnham noted: “Music had always been such a big part of my life; I sang songs softly to myself all the time. Now, I found that I could still sing songs like “I Sing the Mighty Power of God” and other

²⁵ Elmer Towns *How To Pray When You Don’t Know What To Say*, Regal Books: Ventura, CA: 2006, 58.

²⁶ Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. (New York: Random House, 2010), 53.

²⁷ Jessica Buchanan & Erik Landemalm with Anthony Flacco, *Impossible Odds: The Kidnapping of Jessica Buchanan and Her Dramatic Rescue by SEAL Team Six*, (New York: Atria Books, 2013), 175.

majestic anthems. But I refused to sing ‘O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.’ I was really mad at God.”²⁸ Later though, Burnham’s attitude softened, and the selection of songs she felt comfortable singing expanded.²⁹ In a cruelly ironic twist, Marc Nikkels recalled Sudanese hymns he had learned from the same culture that later held him hostage.³⁰

Other captives wrote their own songs while being held. Quincy Collins, a fighter pilot shot down over North Vietnam in 1965, had been in captivity for four years when he composed the “POW Hymn” using red ink he had concocted from medicine in a diarrhea pill and a fish bone which had been whittled to a fine point to serve as a pen. Collins assembled a choir from other POWs in an effort to raise morale. The men practiced in the latrine while the guards were away. Curry and Mercer also refer to worship songs they composed while being held in Afghanistan.

Depending on the circumstances of their isolation or captivity, a fourth source of spiritual resiliency that may be available to captives is the fellowship of others. Fellowship was a cornerstone of the early church. Luke recounts, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Captives are often able to be a tremendous source of encouragement to one another. Companionship in general is beneficial, but specific spiritual benefits exist as well, as captives share their own strengths and experiences with one another. POWs in the Hanoi Hilton for example made a ‘Bible’ out of all the verses different POWs had memorized. Captives are able to pray for one another, conduct

²⁸ Gracia Burnham and Dean Merrill, *In The Presence Of My Enemies*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003), 151.

²⁹ Burnham, *In The Presence Of My Enemies*, 272.

³⁰ Marc R. Nikkel, "Hostages of the Situation in Sudan', 1987: Christian Missionaries in Wartime," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 71/2 (2002): 187-222.

services for one another, and counsel each other. Zamperini had very little spiritual knowledge when he found himself adrift on the sea in a small raft. However, his pilot had been raised as the son of a pastor and when he prayed, Zamperini would listen and learn.

A fifth source of spiritual strength, sometimes available to those held in groups, is religious services. Curry and Mercer describe regular times of informal worship and group devotions occurring as they were held in Kabul awaiting trial. These gatherings occurred openly in the yard of the prison. Rose and others held in Papua New Guinea organized similar services. Chaplains in the Philippines organized regular religious services in Camp O'Donnell where the POWs were held. Religious services were occasionally allowed in POW camps in Japan, but these were viewed as a privilege for the prisoners and could be cancelled at the whim of the captors. One POW described the makeshift chapel of a camp in Thailand housing POWs working on the Thai-Burma railroad:

There is beauty in this spot with the quietness of the river and the large stone of the altar with the simple bamboo table and cross built over it. Alongside is the little cemetery with some great trees. The altar rail and seats are provided by bamboo (two trunks) and these rise up theatre-wise. All around the green life of the jungle and the challenge of a little cross down by the river.³¹

The pastor of this small parish was Padre Parr. "His robes and communion kit battered, travel-stained and with water stains. Above this a gaunt, bearded spiritual face (at times I caught a distinct resemblance to a bedraggled, ill J.C. [Jesus Christ]), below a gaunt thin pair of legs and army boots."³² Shortly after this description, Padre Parr died.

³¹ E.E. (Ernest Edward) Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945*. (Melbourne, Victoria: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1986), 166. The entry is dated Sunday, 7 February 1943 and notes that a Church of England service was held at 1130 in the little riverside church. A Church of England pastor was able to officiate over the communion portion, but did not have the strength to facilitate the rest of the service. Observations are also made about the conduct of services for Christmas and Easter by the Church of England and Roman Catholic parishes each year of captivity.

³² Dunlop, 174.

Kapuan held services for those held in Korea. Formal worship services were prohibited at the Hanoi Hilton, though during the final year of captivity the prisoners rebelled and conducted worship anyway, eventually gaining approval for their conduct. In South Vietnam however, Rowe's captors regularly provided him with additional food on Holy Days such as Christmas.³³ Weir recounts holding ecumenical services among the prisoners in Beirut.

Not all who attended these services were permanently, or even temporarily, converted however. After attending a Roman Catholic service in the camps in Thailand, one prisoner noted, "I am perhaps less a Christian than even I was before the war, but I have been taught very soundly that one must believe in some religion, or sink into the terrible mire of utter selfishness and materialism, so I will always hesitate to say anything against religion."³⁴ The same author later notes that religion occasionally became divisive as prisoners complained that various denominations were competing for converts as members of the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, and Free Church had all organized services and welfare committees.³⁵

Recovery

Spiritual resiliency leads many men and women to the place where they are able to accept their experiences and forgive their captors. Though feelings of hatred, anger, and bitterness are common, they do not always persist. As Stockdale notes: "hatred was an indulgence, a very inefficient emotion. I remember thinking, 'If you were committed to beating the dealer in a gambling casino, would hating him help your game?'"³⁶ Instead, many captives who cite

³³ Rowe, 218, 250, 251, 295 also notes his captors' confusion over the differences between Catholic and Protestant traditions.

³⁴ Dunlop, 178.

³⁵ Dunlop, 312.

³⁶ Stockdale, War 18.

spiritual resiliency also speak of praying for their captors, and some have returned to meet those who once held them and share the love of Christ that has made such forgiveness possible. Many have been able to return to their previous lives, professions, and callings. Some even serve in the same or similar conditions and locations as their original capture.³⁷ Several captives went on to attain the rank of general or admiral. Harold Keith “Johnny” Johnson, a survivor of the Bataan Death March in the Philippines, eventually attained four stars and served as Chief of Staff of the Army. Robert Preston Taylor, a chaplain and fellow POW in the Philippines, went on to be promoted to Major General and served as the Chief of Chaplains for the United States Air Force. Among the Vietnam prisoners, four went on to be elected to Congress: Denton, McCain, Johnson, and Douglas B. “Pete” Peterson. On May 9, 1997, Peterson was also appointed as the first American Ambassador to Vietnam since the end of the War.

Missionaries have also gone on to serve in church leadership. Shortly after his release in Beirut, Benjamin Weir was elected moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1986, the denomination’s highest office.

³⁷ For example, Heather Mercer went on to serve among the Kurds in Northern Iraq shortly after the U.S. invasion. Captain Philips, who was captured by Somali pirates, continues to pilot large tankers through those same waters today. Ron Pontier still flies throughout East Africa, including Sudan where he was once held.

Chapter Four

Results, Recommendations, and Conclusion

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

- Romans 8:18

This research has shown that Americans traveling abroad have endured times of incredibly trying captivity and isolation. Could the same misfortune plague future travelers? A survey administered in conjunction with this research shows the overwhelming majority of Americans traveling and residing abroad today believe the answer is yes. They also believe that spiritual strength will be a highly prized asset in enduring such a deprivation and are eager to learn more in preparation. In this final chapter, I present conclusions and recommendations regarding what their preparation and training should include.

Survey Results

According to a 2010 briefing conducted by the U.S. Department of State, Americans take 60 million trips abroad each year with up to 4.5 million Americans being present overseas at any given time.¹ In 2014 the author conducted a survey of one hundred seventy-eight of those travelers to assess their views on the potential outcome of their trips. An overwhelming 84% of respondents believe that it is possible for them “to be taken captive, wrongfully imprisoned, or to become isolated from friends or co-workers while traveling abroad.” And yet, only a third (32%) received any training about that possibility before they left the United States. A few (11%)

¹ Teresa Mendel and Peter Platukis, “Office of American Citizen Services and Crisis Management Bureau of Consular Affairs,” Lecture, Private-Sector Security Overseas Seminar, Arlington, VA, September 11, 2008.

engaged in self-study about the subject, some (17%) received training from an outside agency, while most (72%) of the respondents who actually received training received it from their employer.

Only half (51%) of those who received training were able to say that their instruction included “any study of role religion or spirituality has played in helping others endure captivity.” Yet, nearly all of the respondents (91%) said religion/spirituality is “Very Important” to them today, and slightly more (93%) believe it would be “Very Important” to them if they were to become captive or isolated. When asked if they would be interested in receiving additional information about the “the role religion and spirituality have played in enabling others to endure periods of isolation, captivity, or imprisonment overseas,” the majority of respondents replied affirmatively (64%).

Clearly then, there is a demand for more information on the spiritual aspects of captivity and isolation. The following sections provide recommendations on how to provide that information through general preparation and specific training.

Recommendations for General Preparation

1. Prepare Today for the Challenges of Tomorrow

Captivity and isolation are like all crises in that they could hit without warning at any minute, and nothing (i.e. location, experience, rank, etc.) insulates us from it. But, they are unlike other crises in that they endured alone or in a small isolated group. Therefore, personal preparation and resiliency are even more important, as it is possible that the only resources available for enduring the crises will be those that already exist within the individual. For this reason, the best preparation an individual can undertake prior to traveling overseas is to simply increase his or her own general level of spiritual strength or what might be called their ‘walk

with God.’ This simple action provides immediate benefit to the individual in ways too numerous to list as they become increasingly aware of their relationship with God and discover more about His nature.

One of the significant lessons of the historical survey of captives is the importance of prior experience in enduring the current reality. Time and again those in captivity or enduring isolation reflected on songs already sung, verses already memorized, and services already attended, from which to draw strength and insight for their current challenges. If resiliency is the ability to bounce back after a crisis, *and* the ability to bend without breaking, then the best time to develop it is before the event. As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This stands in stark contrast to most currently available resources and counseling strategies, which tend to focus on recovering after the event. Yet this is in line with what is commonly understood about physical training and preparedness, where extensive practice and training is used to prepare for upcoming contests.

Jesus taught that what comes out of us is a reflection of what is going on inside, saying “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34), thus highlighting the importance of a healthy and holy internal condition when facing crisis. There is no greater way to cultivate this kind of spiritual strength than through dedicating daily time to spiritual practices that develop a vibrant relationship with God. The good news is, the practices recommended for those at risk of capture or isolation are the same as those which are recommended to all Christians; potential travelers should place a strong emphasis on daily time in the Word, regular attendance of worship services, and personal discipleship.

Captives frequently recalled verses and sections of Scripture in the midst of captivity that they had heard or memorized long before. Those preparing for travel should also be encouraged

to memorize Scripture, meditate on it, and pray through it as a normal part of their devotional life so that God can use these seeds that were planted in peace to bring forth fruit that will sustain the individual in a time of famine. As D.A. Carson notes, “In godly repetition and retelling, we must plant deeply within our souls the glorious truths about God and what he has done that we will otherwise soon forget.”² Unfortunately, Americans are not memorizing in the ways they used to – we rely more and more on the ability to just “Google it”, and this trend may have negative effects on the ability of Christians to accurately remember Scripture in times of future captivity. This tendency must be recognized and intentional effort must be directed toward storing up God’s truth internally. Though any efforts at memorization are to be commended, particular attention should be directed to those sections of Scripture identified in Chapter Three as having been helpful to previous captives.

2. Develop a Life of Prayer

A strong emphasis should also be placed on cultivating a life of prayer. Those who have faced long periods of isolation have discovered that they are never truly alone, for they can always turn to God in prayer. In his book *How To Pray When You Don’t Know What to Say*, Elmer Towns includes the following helpful guidance:

*Ask God to prepare you for any future emergency. Technically, you can’t prepare for an emergency, but you can get the right mental attitude to deal with an emergency when it comes. So ask God to build you up so that you can better handle times of crises in your life.*³

It is far better to gain confidence in one’s ability to speak with God, and confidence in knowing one has been heard, in times of peace so that one can rest on this confidence during tumultuous times.

² D. A. Carson, editor, *Worship by the Book*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, 33-34.

³ Elmer L. Towns, *How To Pray When You Don’t Know What To Say*, Regal: Ventura, CA, 2006, 113.

3. Pursue Fellowship

Christians must also pursue times of fellowship with other believers. Those who have been held captive or become isolated often spent large quantities of time reflecting on their relationships. It is important that these be maintained in a spirit of love, appreciation and where necessary, quick forgiveness, lest the remorse of a fractured relationship plague the captive.

These general recommendations for personal preparation may be undertaken by anyone, anywhere, at any time, regardless of intent to travel abroad and completely independent of the nature of or reason for their travel. Adherence to these general guidelines will produce a spiritual maturity that will benefit individuals in daily life as well as in crises large and small experienced at home or abroad. However, when possible, they should also be supplemented with specific training.

Recommendations for Specific Training

Currently, training in the subject of captivity and isolation is available to some who travel overseas, though typically this training is limited to those considered ‘high risk for capture’ by the military, such as pilots, intelligence personnel, and special operations forces. Some missionary organizations, corporations, and other organizations also offer limited training to their personnel. However, this training typically instructs students to prepare for the possibility in primarily physical ways, making recommendations like: maintain physical fitness; keep your personal finances in order; and know your itinerary and communicate it to others. Training may also include information on how to interact with one’s captors and respond to questioning.

This type of information is certainly essential, yet spiritual strength is at least as valuable. As Proverbs 18:14 notes, “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, But who can bear a broken spirit?” Spiritual strength gives men and women the ability to endure far more physically

than they could ever achieve without it. Typical approaches to enduring captivity think of the situation in predominantly physical terms and therefore offer predominately physical approaches to survival. The physical aspects of the training should be retained, but they should also be supplemented and reinforced with information that addresses the distinctly spiritual aspects of captivity.

This training may be provided by a pastor, chaplain, or a para-church organization, though self-study will likely still prove beneficial if it is the only option available, as this information should be offered to as many travelers as possible, regardless of other training received. This specific training should cover three main areas: theology, history, and biography.

1. Address the Goodness of God (Theology)

Unfortunately, most people's theology fails them just when they need it most – in times of crisis. Most Christians would benefit from additional theological instruction on the nature of God and our experiences with him, especially in light of crises that hit them. Theologians and philosophers have long struggled with the question, “How can a God who is good and all-powerful allow such so much pain and suffering in the world; doesn't this mean that either He is not good and allows it, or He is not all-powerful and cannot stop it?” The question becomes especially acute when the inquirer is presently suffering.

Therefore, those who will potentially face suffering in the form of captivity and isolation should receive specific training from a theological perspective. This training should be both simple and solid. It should be anchored in the Bible as most people, in the midst of suffering, are not looking for the finer points and delicate nuances of an academic argument.

Training should reinforce themes such as the nature of God and His goodness. It should be pointed out that, even when the Christian suffers, he does not suffer alone because the Holy

Spirit is our comforter and dwells in us (John 14:16), “that He may abide with you forever.” Though He might not feel near, believers have the promise that He is, and that the Son and the Father dwell within them as well (John 14:23). Additionally, not only does God stand with the Christian in the midst of his or her trials, but He allows only the ‘right’ trials to come their way. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13). If they can’t handle the present trial, He promises to deflect it. He also prepares them beforehand so they are ready when trials come.

2. Address the Value of Endurance and Hope in Trials (Theology)

This instruction should also stress the value of endurance, especially in difficult times. As the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (2 Tim 4:16). Perseverance in the faith is a common theme in Scripture – even when faced with difficulty, trials, or pain, the Christian is encouraged not to abandon the faith but to cling to it, to remain faithful, and to expect God to do great things. God is always more concerned about the process than the product, and therefore it might be valuable, it might even be His will, that Christians endure hard things so that He can use both the experience and the individual after the fact.

Above all, those at risk of captivity or isolation should be encouraged to be relentlessly hopeful in God. They must be constantly optimistic, believing in a great God who can get them through this and eventually out of this.⁴ As Paul notes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

⁴ McDaniel speak of this in elegant detail based on his own experience after years of abuse in Hanoi: Eugene B. McDaniel, with James Johnson, *Scars and Stripes*, formerly published as “Before Honor,” (New York: A.J. Holman Company, 1975), 61.

(Romans 8:18) We do not always receive an explanation of why we suffer, but we have the promises of the past and hope for the future to buoy us through the storms of the present.

And finally, specific training must address the issue of personal responsibility. Captives are not responsible for what happens to them or perhaps even why they are enduring this trial; they are only responsible for their personal reaction to the events.

3. Highlight the Historical Perspective (History)

Specific training should also be provided in light of historical examples of captivity and isolation. Travelers should be shown the historic faithfulness of God in getting people through similar situations, including examples from throughout Biblical History, with special emphasis placed on how enduring difficulty often deepened an individual's or group's walk with God. Teach them that others have walked this path before and emerged stronger on the other end.

This instruction can begin with the nation of Israel and its long history of captivity and proceed through the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul is frequently held against his will by the Romans. It may then move on through the history of the Christian Church, which has experienced tremendous waves of persecution and oppression throughout history, always emerging stronger, more vibrant, and visible after the persecutors themselves have fallen into obscurity.

Travelers should be taught that even the most zealous missionary, certain of God's direct calling on their life, is still vulnerable to captivity and isolation, and that experiencing such hardship should not be automatically interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure. In fact, it may be a sign of spiritual opposition and an indication they are actually on the right track.

Based on the historical examples highlighted in Chapter Two, travelers should be shown what spiritual activities have proven helpful for prior captives. They should be informed of the

value of personal prayer, worship, recalling scripture, and even requesting copies of the Scriptures. If held with a group, they should attempt to establish fellowship with other captives to provide mutual encouragement and, when possible, establish corporate prayer and worship services.

Training should also include a review of how people have historically responded to captivity and isolation, highlighting the fact that past performance is no guarantee of present response. Some of the most timid individuals turn into stalwarts and some of those who have done so well in the past wither and fold. They also respond on different timelines – some instantly draw near to God for strength and direction while others wander aimlessly from a spiritual perspective for days, months, even years, though most eventually settle in communion with God. Finally, encourage them with the truth that captives often emerge from captivity and return to a vibrant life, especially if they are resting in the presence of God in their lives.

4. Recommend the Stories of Those Who Have Gone Before (Biography)

The theological and historical aspects of training should be buttressed with biographical readings of those who have gone before and successfully endured similar situations. In biographical retelling, today's travellers will hear the lessons of theology and history applied in personal terms. It is one thing to hear a professor recount the arguments of theodicy in a classroom setting, it is quite another to read a theologian like Dietrich Bonhoeffer writing from a prison cell and saying: "I believe that God both can and will bring good out of evil. For that purpose He needs men who will make the best use of everything. I believe God will give us all the power we need to resist in all time of distress. But He never gives it in advance, lest we should rely upon ourselves and not on Him alone."⁵ Such voices bring an authenticity and

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers From Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 27.

kinship that is valuable to the reader both in the face of captivity and, if necessary, in reflection during and after captivity.

Conclusion

Since the founding of the nation, Americans have found themselves traveling abroad. During their travels a small but significant number of them have been taken captive or become isolated from their companions. In those periods of isolation and captivity, when most, if not all others sources of hope and strength are gone, many turn to God for comfort, direction, and the will to carry on. Even those who have had little prior religious devotion suddenly find themselves experiencing the presence of God in the “valley of the shadow of death” as Psalm 23, a favorite of many captives, says.

A survey recently conducted by the author demonstrates that Americans traveling overseas today believe they are also at risk of becoming captives or isolated during their travels. Some of them receive training from the organization they will be traveling for or with, but this training often centers on the physical and mental aspects of survival and neglects the vital spiritual component. Most respondents agreed: spiritual vitality is important to them today, they believe it would continue to be so in captivity, and they would like to receive more information about the role faith has played in helping others survive.

Unfortunately, few resources are currently available to those travelers who would choose self-study, or to those would prepare lessons or briefings for them. This study was designed to begin the process of filling that gap.

In turning to the Scriptures one finds that both the Old and New Testaments offer guidance regarding captivity and the experiences of the people of God while being held by their enemies whether as a nation or as individuals. Moving forward historically, the autobiographies

of Americans who have previously endured captivity or isolation help us understand how the principles and experiences of those in the Bible still resonate today.

From these sources we learn several things. First, captivity or isolation could happen to anyone. It doesn't matter how long a missionary has been serving on the foreign field, or how elite a military service member's unit is, disaster could strike anyone, at anytime. Male and female, young and old, devout and disinterested, individuals and groups – all demographics have at some point succumbed to captivity or isolation, and therefore, all need to be prepared; fortunately, the majority of those currently traveling overseas, or preparing to do so already understand this reality.

Second, the experience of captivity is a very personal event with countless factors affecting its nature and duration. Environmental factors such as the number of people experiencing captivity or isolation and their backgrounds, the motives and resources of the captors, and differences in demographics between captives and captors will all affect the experience of captivity. Many positive factors can be involved here, for example: one captive who has interest in God but has never attended church may find himself imprisoned alongside a missionary or the child of pastor who is able to answer many questions.

Third, while most captives hope for deliverance, at some point they often begin to doubt whether it will come or whether they will survive it, especially if military force is required. This then leaves captives searching for another source of hope until freedom arrives, something that will get them through even if it doesn't get them out. This is where many deepen their relationship with God.

Fourth, though some do not turn toward a more intentional relationship with God, many in captivity or isolation do. This may take place quickly, within moments of the crisis, or may be

the final conclusion that a captive comes to after years of trying to struggle through on his own. Some struggle with questions like “Why would God allow this to happen to me?” but these often come to terms with their struggles and move toward God even without a complete answer.

Fifth, having turned to God, captives then use several means, depending on their availability, to maintain that relationship. The most common means, and also the most accessible, is prayer. Even those who held in isolation and deprived from all other human contact can still spend hours each day in regular conversation with God. Some captives also have access to Scripture, either a copy they brought into captivity or received while there, memories of sections previously studied, or verses and stories learned from fellow prisoners. Worship music also proves to be a valuable tool for many as they recall songs they sang before captivity or compose songs about their present experiences. Those who are fortunate enough to have the company of other Christians find that fellowship is an incredibly powerful source of strength as captives minister to and encourage one another. Occasionally this culminates in the opportunity to engage in a worship service, which provides an enormous boost to the soul.

Sixth, reviewing the Biblical precedents and historical examples shows us that many people recover quite well from their situations and go on to lead somewhat ‘normal’ lives post-captivity. Those who make it through occasionally struggle after their return to America, but many go on to advance professionally and some even return to serve overseas again.

Armed with these insights, individuals preparing themselves for travel, or those preparing to train them should focus on increasing a general level of daily preparedness involving three components. First, because crisis often strikes with little advance warning, we need to make the most out of today for today we are digging the wells that we will drink from tomorrow; now is the time to encounter Christ and grow in our relationship with Him. Second, the discipline of

personal prayer must be cultivated. Since God is always with us, we must know how to talk to Him at all times. Learn to lean on Him in peace and then discover He's still there in crisis. And third, get connected to other Christians. This fellowship will help develop the two components listed above and will also create a community of those who care about the individual if he or she eventually becomes captive or isolated. This community of believers will intercede in prayer on the captive's behalf, work for his or her release, and provide the captive wonderful memories to reflect on during times of loneliness and doubt.

Those whose travel overseas is imminent are recommended to also undertake four specific steps prior to their departure. These including developing a greater understanding of God's goodness, even in light of suffering. In theological terms, this is called theodicy. Before leaving American soil, the traveler should have a working answer to the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people." To this should be added reflection on the value of endurance and hope, especially in trying times. Historical reflection should also be encouraged introducing those who will travel to the stories of those who have gone before, the issues they have faced, and where and how they found strength. Biographies, especially those included in this research, should form the basis for a recommended reading list.

Having thus prepared, the international traveller is better positioned to endure potential trials and buoy those with whom they might experience a crisis. In some cases the individual's preparation may even equip them to minister or testify to their captors.

But what should be done for those who are not particularly devoted? Military Chaplains and others who serve a diverse group should determine a few simple points they want to make and drive them home repeatedly. The case of Marcus Luttrell, the SEAL who was the 'Lone

Survivor' of an assault on his team, provides an illustration of this approach.⁶ As Luttrell fled from his pursuers, he continually reflected on Psalm 23, which he states he had learned by hearing it repeated so many times by chaplains at memorial services. The case of Bud Day, who felt so hypocritical for suddenly turning to God in crisis, though he'd never made time for the Almighty before, should also be recounted. Chaplains should inform their audiences of the openness of Christ, that is, His willingness to receive any who come to Him, even those who suddenly flee to Him in time of need. Chaplains should also make it clear that even if people are not currently very religious, this does not preclude them from turning to Christ for spiritual strength in their moment of need.

Although the chance of any American traveling overseas becoming a captive or isolated is thankfully small, it remains real. History has shown us that our worst nightmares can come true, at times when we least expect it, and that every traveler is vulnerable. But history has also shown that a great, omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, and compassionate God is watching over those who experience such trials. He offers to be present with them in the midst of their sorrows, to comfort them when no one else will, to hear their prayers, dry their tears, and in many cases, bring them safely home. This knowledge should encourage everyone who faces any kind of trial, great or small, at home or abroad. God is real, and He is present in the hour of our greatest need.

⁶ Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007).

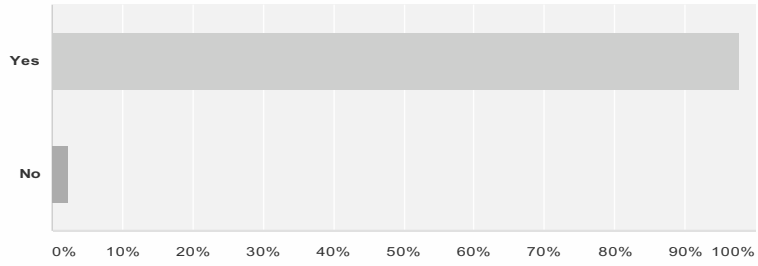
APPENDIX A

Research Questions and Results

Thesis

Q1 Are you an American citizen?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 1

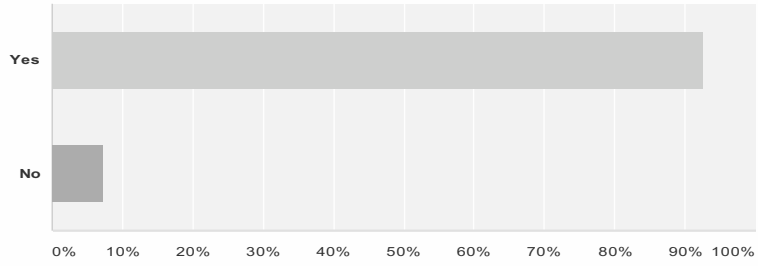


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	97.80%	178
No	2.20%	4
Total		182

Thesis

Q2 In the past ten years, have you traveled to any country outside of the United States, are you currently traveling or residing outside the United States, or do you intend to do so in the next twelve months?

Answered: 176 Skipped: 7

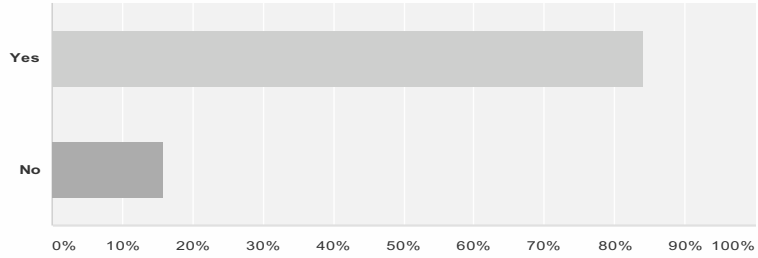


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	92.61%	163
No	7.39%	13
Total		176

Thesis

Q3 Do you believe it was (is/will be) possible for you to be taken captive, wrongfully imprisoned, or to become isolated from friends or co-workers while traveling abroad?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 19

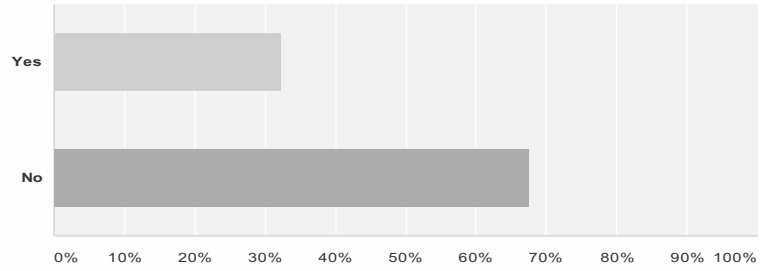


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	84.15%	138
No	15.85%	26
Total		164

Thesis

Q4 Did you receive any information or training regarding the possibility of being taken captive while traveling abroad prior to leaving the United States?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 19

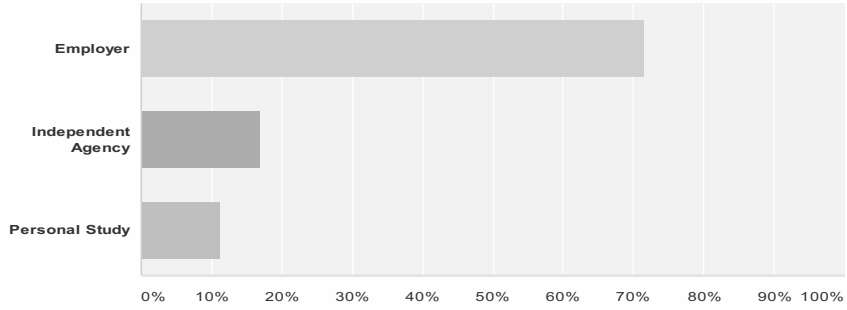


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	32.32%	53
No	67.68%	111
Total		164

Thesis

Q5 Who did you receive that information or training from?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 130

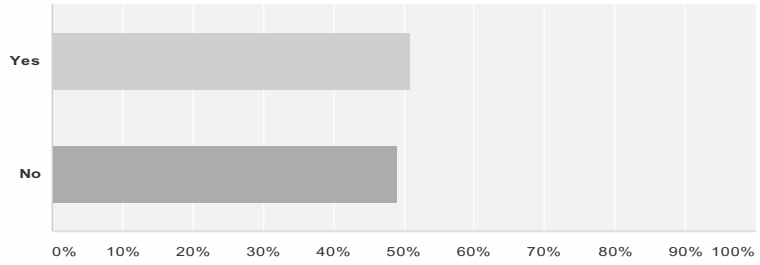


Answer Choices	Responses
Employer	71.70% 38
Independent Agency	16.98% 9
Personal Study	11.32% 6
Total	53

Thesis

Q6 Did the information or training you received include any study of role religion or spirituality has played in helping others endure captivity?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 130

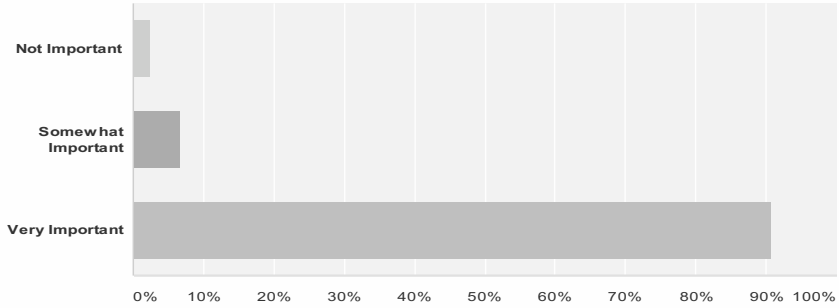


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	50.94%	27
No	49.06%	26
Total		53

Thesis

Q7 How important is religion/spirituality to you today?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 19

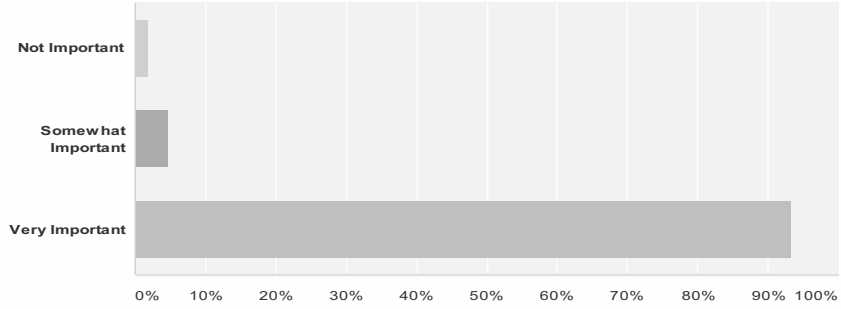


Answer Choices	Responses
Not Important	2.44% 4
Somewhat Important	6.71% 11
Very Important	90.85% 149
Total	164

Thesis

Q8 How important do you believe religion or spirituality would be to you if you were taken captive in a foreign land?

Answered: 164 Skipped: 19

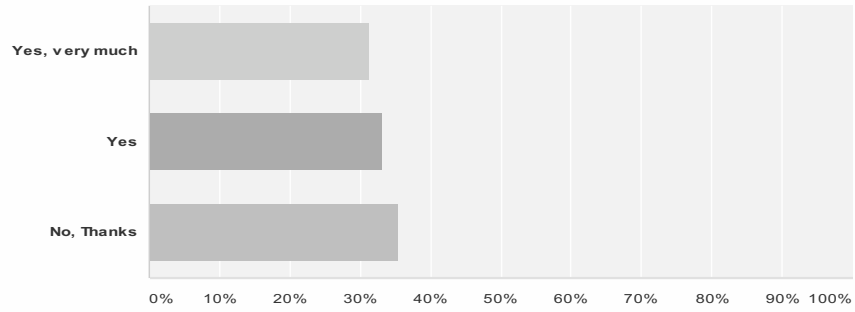


Answer Choices	Responses
Not Important	1.83% 3
Somewhat Important	4.88% 8
Very Important	93.29% 153
Total	164

Thesis

Q9 Would you like to receive information on the role religion and spirituality have played in enabling others to endure periods of isolation, captivity, or imprisonment overseas?

Answered: 163 Skipped: 20



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes, very much	31.29%	51
Yes	33.13%	54
No, Thanks	35.58%	58
Total		163

APPENDIX B

Survey/Script Information

Greetings Traveler!

My name is Jeff Schlenz, and I am working on my doctoral thesis project at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. My topic is *A Lonely Faith: Learning Spiritual Resiliency From The Isolated, Captive, and Rescued*. It's a study of the role religious faith has played in helping Americans who endured such conditions while traveling abroad. It's not a pleasant thought, but history has shown captivity is a real possibility for those in the military, business, journalism, and missions.

I am hoping you might answer a few questions for me regarding your international travel. I am trying to determine how Americans prepare for traveling and/or living overseas by assessing their expectations of the potential of captivity and its spiritual dynamics.

If you are over the age of 18, and are willing to help me in my study, please click on the link below that will take you to no more than 9 questions about your experience. This survey will take about 7 minutes of your time. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required. After completing the survey, please consider forwarding the link to other travelers. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in completing this brief survey.

Jeff Schlenz
Pastor
Calvary Chapel DC Metro
www.calvarydcmetro.org

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 18, 2014

Jeff Schlenz

IRB Exemption 1822.031814: A Lonely Faith: Learning Spiritual Resiliency from the Isolated, Captive, and Rescued

Dear Jeff,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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