

BORN IN PRAYER

Frontline Fellowship was born in prayer. The vision for our mission – to assist persecuted churches, evangelising in war zones, serving in restricted-access areas – grew out of the daily Bible study and prayer meeting which I led during my time of military service. For two years we met, almost every night, around the Word of God, spending extended times in prayer. Sometimes we prayed through the night, in prayer chains. Often our Bible study and prayer meetings lasted for three, four or five hours at a time.

It was while praying through the *Operation World Intercessory Handbook*, on an all-night prayer chain, that the Lord impressed upon my heart what Patrick Johnstone had written about Mozambique: That Mozambique was the least evangelised country in the Southern Hemisphere and that there was less than one Bible for every thousand people in that Marxist nation.

Something stirred deeply within me, and my heart leapt at the challenge. There on my knees at the front of the chapel in our military base, I knew that God was calling me to take Bibles and the *Jesus* film into Marxist Mozambique. As I shared this vision with some Christian friends and family members, they reacted skeptically.

Mozambique was a communist country, a war zone, an enemy of South Africa. Terrorists were using Mozambique as their launching pad to plant landmines and car bombs in South Africa. The South African Air Force and Special Forces were undertaking military raids into Mozambique.

As I prepared for my first mission to Mozambique, the Lord confirmed His call through many passages in my daily devotions: “*The LORD said to me, ‘Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!’*” Jeremiah 1:7-8.

“*Get ready now...and cross the River Jordan into the land.*” Joshua 1:2

It was early in 1982 that I crossed the border from Swaziland into Mozambique on a 250cc off-road motorbike with a thousand New Testaments in Portuguese and four reels of the *Jesus* film. In so many ways God protected, provided and guided. This was a faith mission. I did know a word of Portuguese; we had no contacts in Mozambique. I only had R10, not even enough money to purchase petrol to drive out of Mozambique again. Yet the Lord led us that first night to someone who became our host, and translator. By the next morning he had gathered a large number of Christians from numerous churches together for us to minister to, and by the next day someone at the British Consulate permitted us to use their 16mm projector.

That was the first of many faith missions into Mozambique. But for God’s grace and answers to prayer we could not have possibly succeeded. Time and again I saw that *where God guides He provides*. God’s servant is God’s responsibility. If you are too busy to pray...then you are busier than God wants you to be. Nothing is beyond the reach of prayer – except that which is beyond the will of God. Prayer is the foundation for all spiritual work. The will of God will never lead

you – where the grace of God cannot keep you. And God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him.

There were a number of occasions when I was arrested and detained, in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Sudan. On each occasion the situation was very serious and could have become quite disastrous. However, in answer to prayer, on each occasion, the Lord opened prison doors and set the captives free. In July 1984, my brother, Derek, and I were on a mission trip through Zimbabwe into Mozambique. We were detained and escorted out of Mozambique and detained in Zimbabwe and interrogated by CIO investigators. On both occasions the Lord gave us wisdom in our answers, and grace in the eyes of the authorities to set us free.

In October 1987, I was imprisoned in Zambia along with three other Frontline Mission volunteers. These 16 days locked up in Zambia involved six interrogations for me, with one interrogation lasting for six hours. The tension between South Africa and Zambia at that time was intense, and sometimes it looked as though we were mere pawns in a political game being played. Nevertheless, by God's grace, in answer to international prayer and pressure, the Zambian government was forced to set us free.

In October 1989, exactly two years after my Zambian prison experience, I was leading a team of eight missionaries on a mission to Mozambique. We were captured by Frelimo troops, transported by Soviet MI-8 hip helicopters, and ended up in solitary confinement in the Machava Security Prison in Maputo. I had just been married six months before. My wife, Lenora, was the only one back at our mission headquarters in Cape Town to mobilise international prayer and pressure on our behalf. The situation was most serious because of the *Mozambique Report on eyewitness testimonies of Frelimo atrocities* which I had published. I had received warnings from the communist government in Mozambique including from the Ministry of Justice, Department of Religious Affairs which bluntly stated that should I return to Mozambique, I would be killed.

My writings and documentation on the systematic slaughter perpetrated by the communist Frelimo government in Mozambique had received worldwide distribution, even being read into the congressional record in the US Senate and in the Parliament in Norway. Now I was in Frelimo's hands. By God's grace, my capturer's confused my identity leaving out my surname on all their records. I was continually referred to as Peter Christopher (On my passport the surname was on the second line!) Despite banner headline articles in South Africa and Zimbabwe declaring: "*Baptist Minister Is Frelimo's Top Captive*", international prayer and pressure secured our release before these reports made their way back to Mozambique and beyond the translator's table.

Shortly after I was converted to Christ early in 1977, I remember a missionary from Overseas Missionary Fellowship urging us to pray for God to open the doors to Red China. Even as we prayed my heart was filled with unbelief – How could a communist country like China ever be open to the Gospel again? Yet, shortly after Mao Tse Tung died, his little Red Book became discredited and the doors to China have been gradually opening since – revealing a huge church of many millions of Chinese Christians.

When I first started praying for Mozambique, in 1981, it was firmly closed to the Gospel. Many of my friends thought I was foolish to enter Marxist Mozambique on my motorbike, laden with a thousand Gospels and Bibles and the *Jesus* film. Yet, God opened the doors time and again and we managed to deliver tonnes of Bibles and relief aid and show Christian films to thousands of people through that war-torn country.

When we first started delivering Bibles and medicines to Christians suffering in Angola, we heard the Angolan Christians praying for God to intervene. They told us how the dictator Agestino Neto had declared: “Within twenty years will not be a Christian left in Angola. I will have eradicated Christianity!” While Christians were praying for God’s deliverance, Neto died in mysterious circumstances on an operating table in Moscow. His successor Dos Santos showed a marked lack of enthusiasm for continuing Neto’s wave of church burning.

In 1986, as Samora Machel’s brutal persecution of Christians in Mozambique intensified, we published *The Mozambique Report* which has now been updated and re-published as *In The Killing Fields of Mozambique*, and launched a campaign of prayer for the suffering Christians there. Although there seemed to be no hope – we continued to trust God to intervene and stop the bloodshed. Suddenly, in October 1986, the dictator’s Soviet Tupolev crashed in the midst of a storm. A month earlier, Machel had publicly cursed Christ and challenged God to prove His existence by striking him dead. When, after sixty seconds nothing had happened, Machel declared: “God is dead! But I am alive!”

Now the persecutor was dead and God was plainly shown to be alive. Although much suffering continued, Mozambique officially renounced Marxism and allowed some measure of freedom to many churches, especially in the cities. And missionaries were at last allowed to evangelise in Mozambique. The atheist persecutors of the Church finally had to acknowledge defeat, and have even returned many confiscated churches.

When I first saw the Berlin Wall in March 1988 and the crosses in memory of those who had been shot in the back, while fleeing from socialism – I wept. I prayed, as did so many others, that God would break down this evil structure – even as he had demolished the walls of Jericho. Yet, how amazed I was when our prayers were answered in 1989, and millions poured across the border for their first look at the other half of their city and country.

When my wife, Lenora and I visited Romania in early 1989, we experienced the oppression of communism and witnessed the tyranny of Ceausescu. Along with millions of others – we prayed. And before the year ended we saw Ceausescu executed, the communism symbols smashed and God’s Word openly proclaimed in the public squares of Romania. Bibles flooded in and many Romanians came to Christ.

Albania had declared itself the first fully atheistic state in 1966. Yet, in answer to prayer, the communist government of Albania was forced to back down, and renounce communism and atheism. In 1992 and 1993 I had the opportunity to minister in Albania and see many people openly embrace the Christian faith.

For over 22 years, Frontline Fellowship has been working in restricted-access areas, frequently having to smuggle Bibles illegally across hostile frontiers into Marxist or Muslim areas. Sometimes we've had to charter aircraft to fly in no-fly zones, to deliver Christian contraband to islands of beleaguered brethren such as the Christians in the Nuba Mountains of Central Sudan – an island of Christianity in a sea of Islam. We have had to trust the Lord for protection in defying flight bans in countries where they maintained a shoot-on-sight policy. The government of Sudan posted on their official Ministry of Foreign Affairs website an article, which referred to me by name. It plainly stated that “Peter Hammond should expect to be bombed...to be shot on sight.” It even gave the reason for this. The article stated that my writings made me “an enemy of the state.”

Indeed, I have endured artillery and aerial bombardments in Sudan, at Church services. On one occasion the Sudan Air Force dropped eight bombs around a church where we were holding services on Sunday morning. All eight bombs landed within a hundred metres of the church, one barely seventeen metres from where I was crouching. I had a few cracked ribs and was buried under the debris flung up by the explosion, but otherwise I was unharmed. On this and many other occasions we have seen Psalm 91 fulfilled. The Lord is our shield, a mighty fortress. We praise God for His grace, mercy, provision, guidance and protection on so many ministry trips, over 22 years.

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