

North Africa: Change in the weather

October 23, 2015

We had been meeting with a family of Sudanese refugees for a few weeks. The husband had been in contact with several Christ-followers, but we were unsure whether he had become a Christian. We know his wife already had committed her life to Jesus. A Christian worker connected with them and had been mentoring her one-on-one for a few weeks by this point.

However, they were—and still are—experiencing a lot of persecution. When the woman's brother in Sudan found out that she had switched from his religion to following Christ, he threatened both her and her husband. The brother traveled to our city to find them, take her home against her will and possibly kill her husband for his failure to prevent her conversion.

A dangerous conversion

The woman refused to go back on her decision. So, the family decided to move to a different apartment where her brother couldn't find them. She ran into him by chance getting off a bus, but the people around her defended her and the brother ran away. We are unsure whether he went back home after this or still is in the city looking for them. She can't ask the government for help, because she could be thrown in jail for her decision to convert to Christianity. So, they simply remain in hiding.

Despite all this, she has still wanted to tell everyone she knows about Jesus. But her husband discouraged her and got angry when she wanted to share her faith, because it was dangerous and everyone already was treating them so badly.

The Christian worker who had been discipling her had been praying about how to mentor her husband. So, she asked my partner and me if we would be willing to do it. She offered to translate for us so we could sit down and talk with him.

When she asked us, I could feel my spirit leap with joy. I had been praying for this opportunity since the first day we met this family. For our first meeting, we wanted to talk about persecution because of all that was going on in their lives. We were unsure about where the husband was personally in his relationship to Christ, but we still felt led to discuss this subject with him.

After some time thinking and praying, we decided on four Scriptures to study: Psalm 69, John 15, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, and Philippians 4:1-9. Through the first two Scriptures, we wanted to show there would always be persecution when we stand on truth and follow God. The third would show how we are to act in response to this persecution. The last was to give an example of one way we can achieve this attitude and mindset in the midst of persecution.

We started out simply spending time with him, his wife, and their kids before we began our meeting with him alone. We first asked about what's going on in his life. He immediately opened up to us about all that was going on. He told us of his struggles and the persecution his family was facing, which he called "bad weather."

Life's 'bad weather'

We wondered if he really had committed his life to Christ yet, so my partner decided to ask him who Jesus was to him. He answered that he loved Jesus and agreed with all he said, but acknowledged he has been holding back from fully committing. He was ashamed and embarrassed to admit it was due to the "bad weather" in his life. He said he wanted to wait

for “good weather” before he fully committed.

Even though he was not yet a Christ-follower, we still felt led to talk about persecution. The difference was that now we were doing so knowing we were talking to someone who was holding back because of persecution. He was quiet the whole time as he listened to the Scriptures as we read them. One of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do was to look into his eyes, with tears in mine, and tell him the truth is he may never get out of this “bad weather.”

We finished our Bible reading and talked a lot about how to find peace in times of trouble. I told him when I am afraid or worried, I close my eyes and picture the cross. I picture Jesus on the cross, and I see the blood running down his face, his arms spread wide, and yet the love in his eyes. When I do this, I told him, all my worries and fear just fade away in the surpassing love found in this image. I told him to do this when he feels overwhelmed by this “bad weather.”

After we finished, I asked him if he thought there was one final step that he wasn’t taking, one final step that was holding him back. He said there was. So I asked him if he wanted to take that final step together. By the grace of God, he said yes. We explained that it is not a prayer that saves him but a commitment to follow the Son of God with his whole heart and to make him Lord of his life. We told him to pray to God however he wanted about whatever it was that he felt was holding him back and then to let go of whatever that thing was.

‘How do we share this news?’

He prayed a gospel-centered prayer, admitting his brokenness and weakness and asking for God to deliver him as he confessed his faith in Christ— the kind of prayer that shows the presence of the Holy Spirit within him. It was the kind of prayer where a person prays about things he

has never been taught. Afterward, he sat with his wife and told her about his decision. He said he was not in agreement with her convictions before but now he was. We could see the weight lifted off of his wife's shoulders. After this, he asked, "How do we share this news now with people?"

We finished by talking to them about now being baptized as a symbol of their decision and they were both very excited. We wanted to give them a couple of weeks to understand its significance. Sometime soon, I will get the incredible opportunity to baptize my new brother in Christ and then see him baptize his wife. I have never felt such an incredible purpose in my life as I did this night. When we finished talking with them, we all sat back and drank tea. We all felt the change in the feeling of that little apartment. There was a newer greater presence residing there. If you ask me, there was a change in the weather.

C.G. is serving in North Africa with Go Now Missions. His full name and exact location are withheld due to security reasons.