

Along the Way

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, *EXTREME DEVOTION*, BY VOM INTERNATIONAL

"I want to talk to you about an unusual gift," the father told his beautiful, black-haired daughter. She smiled with anticipation, knowing how special it was to hear him share important lessons about God. Her wise father loved Christ, and everyone who knew him was touched by his kindness and compassion.

The father opened a worn Bible and began sharing the lesson: "This gift is found in Philippians 1:29, which reads, '*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake....*' Something 'granted' to us is a 'gift,'" her father explained. "The two gifts in this verse are *belief* and *suffering*. Suffering that results from our belief in God is a precious gift, the value of which will only be fully realized in heaven."

The daughter smiled. "Thank you, Papa," she said while reaching up to hug him. "I understand." The young girl knew that her father was preparing her for the trials they may face as Christians living in China, where governing officials frequently arrest pastors and church members, shut down places of worship, prohibit bookstores from selling Bibles, and forbid children from attending church.

Her father, who worked alongside a mission organization to deliver Bibles in provinces across China, regularly reminded her of the risks associated with his ministry work. "But we must never pray against the leaders of our government, nor call down curses on them," he added. "Instead, we need to remember that God is in control of our lives and oversees those who serve the government. Therefore, we must pray that



regardless of what happens to us, our lives will always be pleasing to Him.”

That evening, the girl sat across from her father on the living room floor to help pack bags full of Bibles, which would soon embark on a long journey to a remote community of believers. Despite the risks of the ministry work, the daughter grew full of excitement at the thought that these Bibles were going to be received by people who, for the first time in their lives, would have their own copy of God’s Word.

**“I want to talk to you about
an unusual gift...”**

That same young girl eventually grew up and became the wife of a pastor who has been arrested over ten times because of his ministry activities. During one of his imprisonments, he was beaten so badly that he almost died. Thankfully, he has recovered from the resulting injuries.



Today, this Christian woman and her husband continue to face intense opposition for their faith in Jesus. Yet, the persevering couple are willing to carry on their ministry work because they know that Godly suffering is a gift. Like the woman’s father, they have won countless souls for Christ in Communist China. And despite the constant threat of arrest, interrogation and imprisonment, they continue to faithfully serve God.

TABLE TALKS DISCUSSION

In the story, the young girl’s father explained that the gifts of *belief* and *suffering* are a package deal. Not only are the two impossible to separate, but each of these gifts also serves to strengthen the other. If we have been given the gift of belief in Christ, then we will want to follow Him. Following Jesus Christ may at times involve taking risks, going against popular trends, being misunderstood, and even enduring physical or emotional pain. Yet, it’s encouraging to know that suffering for Jesus can lead us to know Him in richer and more meaningful ways.

- 1. When you come up against challenges, do you tend to give up easily? Are you willing to persevere? Ask God to help you to trust Him during difficult times, and to view your challenges as opportunities to grow stronger.**
- 2. Does it surprise you to learn how difficult it is to live as a Christian in the most populous nation of the world?**
- 3. In China, children are forbidden from attending church with their parents. Why do you think officials made such a law?**
- 4. There is a dire need for copies of God’s Word in China. How many Bibles do you have in your home? What impact do you think equipping more Chinese believers with God’s Word would have on the nation?**