

03 January 2006 International YWAMer

Reflections on Dealing with Death

The "eternal weight of glory"

By John Dawson, International President

This letter is reprinted, with permission, from an email update sent out by John Dawson.

Dear Friends and Family,

Several people have said to me that this is a defining moment for YWAM. I agree. Uppermost in my mind is our response to the death of our missionaries in Nigeria. Is there something about this that could underscore the values that God wants to reveal through YWAM's almost fifty-year story?

One of the women killed was American Brianna Esswein from California. Being briefly in the US, I had the privilege of meeting with her parents, Dan and Mary Kay, and her sister, Christina and brother, Matt. This is an extraordinary family, full of Christ. As I have investigated the life of their beloved Brianna, I have become convinced that her short life is a gift to this generation. She was in many ways similar to Jim Elliott, her hero, one of the five young American missionaries who were killed by the Auca Indians in the 1950s. Although only twenty-five, she had completed a medical degree in California and graduated from Wheaton after studying missions. She had also worked in several countries, making a great impact on all who knew her because of her Christ-like qualities.

How do we deal with the death of such people, excellent, brilliant missionaries with their best years ahead of them? Think of the more recent deaths of Tony Lima in Brazil and Elisabeth Mbewe in Zambia. They were already people of immense fruitfulness and responsible for young children both in ministry and family. What is the heavenly perspective?

Brianna was deeply involved with Focus on the Family and Youth For Christ before coming to YWAM, so I was able to join with the leaders of these organizations in piecing together her story, and eventually honoring her at a memorial service. Just before she died, Brianna wrote a Christmas letter from Nigeria, which is a mature and powerful statement on the compassion of Jesus for suffering people. Her life message was fully formed. Her vision and godly character shines. Those of us at her memorial service had the sense of a life completed rather than a life cut off. We discovered that though attractive and vivacious, she had decided that she would not marry and though her life may be short, she was going to be totally dedicated to missions.

Her story humbles and instructs me the more I reflect upon it, and I feel a solemn duty to expand the influence of her life. On the first day of 2006, I preached the first of what will be many sermons with my "Brianna file" open in the pulpit. Her diaries and letters reflect the theme of her memorial service, "To live is Christ, to die is gain". I was most impacted when her mother showed me a journal scrapbook that Brianna had compiled. On one page was a beautifully presented collage of a bride in her gown, and on the opposite page a representation of a banquet, surrounded by paragraphs of adoration for Jesus and anticipation of entering His presence.

Do you follow one of those one-year Bible-reading programs like I do? If you do,

you read Revelation 22 on December 31st and Genesis 1 on January 1st, truly a good foundation for 2006. God is the author and finisher of all things and His intent is that we enjoy the pleasures of His presence as we pass through this brief earthly apprenticeship. However, "the eternal weight of glory" that Brianna now enjoys is far superior to the temporary graces that give joy to this life. She is no longer separated from her Savior; she has lifted the veil and gazes upon Him. Her mother and sister both wore white lace outfits at her large memorial service to indicate identification with Brianna's ultimate desire fulfilled. Truly the family of God is amazing, transcendent lives that point unwaveringly to the inimitable perfection of the "Bright and Morning Star," Christ Jesus.

I believe that the story of each one of those who have died or were injured in Nigeria, Brazil and Zambia will instruct us as we serve and honor them and their families. The fact that so many were nurse midwives is significant and that so many nations were represented in sacrifice and suffering. "Lord, honor their lives by multiplying the fruit of their labor," we pray.

My travel schedule just happened to give me access to Brianna's family, but the other people's stories are equally compelling and need to be told in the nations affected. Speaking of that, I am grateful for the maturity and dedication of the many YWAM leaders who have mobilized to deal with the situation in prayer, generosity and service, particularly Peter and Shirley and the Perth staff. Thank God for such people. The whole of the Mission and its supporting family salutes them. Brianna's parents told me, "YWAM has been amazing," and had nothing but praise for YWAM Australia and the international leaders who they dealt with.

2005 was a traumatic year. I woke up in the middle of the night on the 1st of this year in a state of travailing prayer. "Lord have mercy on us," was rolling through my spirit over and over again. This gives me hope. Psalm 18 reveals to us that the cry of His little ones produces a mighty response. What He inspires us to pray, He answers with certainty. Julie and I feel overwhelmed, but time and again we are carried by grace and, in fact, not overwhelmed.

God gives strength and wisdom for the little things as well as the great matters, laboring under a car with a flat in a downtown LA parking lot in the dark, searching for my lost cell phone in the mud the morning after a New Year's event, struggling with the implications of my daughter's recently diagnosed dyslexia as we look at the travel schedule in Asia...so it goes on. Jesus has an answer for everything, answers that come one day at a time. Our apparently small lives and our daily choices have eternal implications. Our souls find rest in spite of all that would make us fearful. As I have reflected on the turbulence of this season, ten deaths since the beginning of December, plus the report of five recent occasions that YWAMers have been held hostage while their places were looted in Brazil, four points of action have become clear to me:

1. To get on our faces before God, humbling ourselves. The fact that we still breathe is a function of God's mercy. Run to the Father's embrace.
2. Because of an eternal perspective, we can still enter into confident even joyous worship. We will not be robbed of our birthright which is the joy of the Lord, our strength.
3. To renew our generosity and compassion for the hurt and grieving, our own and the world's and to renew our passion for the Kingdom of God. To witness death is to gaze into eternity. Let's choose to be re-energized by the vision and callings we

walk in. My life is brief, my Lord is worthy, His eternal Kingdom is what I yearn for, this is where hearts will ultimately be healed and justice, beauty, liberty and order converge in the presence of the saints of all ages, including the ten heroes who have graduated in the last few days.

4. War on each other's behalf. Do you hear the sound of the trumpet? Put on faith. Take the scripture into your spirit. Declare the purposes of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. We may seem like lambs led to the slaughter, but in the deeper wisdom of God we are really companions of the Heavenly Host. God has a hook in the enemy's jaw and He is drawing him out into the open to dethrone him. We are commanded "not to fear" many times in the Scripture. Therefore we resist the spirit of intimidation and put on strength. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "No one who waits for me will be ashamed." (Isaiah 49:23)

Love always,
John Dawson