

PART I: EXPERIENCING EXPULSION AND EVACUATION

Loved by God through Expulsion, Grief and Loss: Personal accounts from five couples who were expelled from Morocco in 2010

Compiled by Don Little

In May 2010 my wife Jeanie and I took nine Houghton College students to Morocco for a three-week May term semester educational tour. We arrived in the midst of the biggest set of expulsions of workers that country has known since the end of the colonial era. While the students did a three-day trip to the desert led by a colleague, Jeanie and I visited a number of those who were being impacted by this dramatic set of summary expulsions. Many of the friends and colleagues with whom we had served in the country up until our departure twelve years earlier had been expelled. Though we were only visiting Morocco for a few weeks, we sensed the shock, fear, alarm and confusion that so many workers were dealing with during those difficult months.

The worker who had organized part of our student tour was expelled the day before he was scheduled to lead us on a three-day outing into a tiny Berber village in the Middle Atlas. We met two days before he left and he gave me the name of the van driver and the Berber family hosts and explained the itinerary to me. And away we went on our own. The Berber family that hosted us lived only a few miles from the Christian orphanage that the government had suddenly shut down just weeks before our arrival. They spoke of that event with great sorrow and puzzlement.

Earlier this year, when I spent two weeks back in Morocco ministering to colleagues from across the country, I was struck by the extent of the continued ramifications of the 2010 expulsions on both the church and on the worker community. Since the expulsions fewer of the current, often younger, workers have much contact with the local church in many of the cities (in contrast to the norm prior to 2010). The size and vitality of the local church has been shaken. In one city, where there had been five fairly strong house fellowships, those five churches are struggling to survive and are much smaller than they were.

In May this year, Jeanie and I again took nine Houghton College students on a three-week tour of Morocco. Every one of the half dozen workers with whom we were privileged to meet referenced the lingering effects of the expulsions. They had all weathered the storm and were still serving faithfully, but their sense of

vulnerability and exposure was greater than before. As one worker shared about the challenges they were facing in the city that had its five strong house churches deeply shaken, I was reminded of what happened following the government crackdown on the Moroccan church in the 1980s. This resulted in several worker expulsions and the shutting down of most of the house churches in the country. The struggles they face now are so similar to the struggles my generation faced when we first entered the country in 1988.

I believe that the ongoing impact of those expulsions thirty years ago on the work of the church in Morocco provides a sobering context for the stories you are about to read. The six accounts which follow were written by people who were friends and colleagues of ours when we lived in Morocco. When asked to contribute to this article some were initially very reluctant to revisit the shock, pain and grief of that period six years ago. Yet all reported that the exercise of remembering and recounting what they had gone through was helpful. In some cases, recalling what God has taught them through the entire painful experience was even healing.

As we envisioned this issue of SEEDBED, I felt strongly about giving those who have gone through traumatic events related to living in volatile times in the Muslim world the opportunity to share what it was really like, with vulnerability and transparency. I offer no commentary or interpretation. These deeply personal stories speak for themselves, and I trust that you will also hear, as I have, the voice of the Spirit speaking through them.

It is our hope and my prayer that as you read the various journeys on which God has taken our brothers and sisters you will be moved, challenged and inspired to trust your lives and the future of your ministries into his hands afresh. As you read these stories, do pray for them and for those who continue to serve the purposes of God in Morocco. Pray too for our Moroccan brothers and sisters who experience uncertainty and potential threats daily.

Some Sort of Acceptance with Sadness

by Betsy

Steve had a small group ministry with four or five men on Sunday evenings. Sometimes he would preach in our expat church. During the week he would teach English. I would visit women with another lady on our team. I was studying the local dialect and I also visited a girls' detention centre and an orphanage once a week.

Steve was always aware that we could be asked to leave. Being in the Arab world for so long, he never assumed it couldn't happen. I had the opposite view but it soon began to change.

One afternoon a neighbour (also a worker) stopped by the police station to pick up his visa. Three of us waited in his car for his return. He told us they were not renewing it. That's when we realized something was wrong. Sometime late when one of our teammates was met by an undercover policeman and taken to the station, I knew it was over for us. We were surprised at first but did not feel despair. When our teammate was taken to the police station, Steve and I were home in the U.S. visiting. As soon as we read the e-mail from our teammate saying he had to leave, we expected that we would also have to leave. We felt it was just the beginning of more workers being asked to leave Morocco.

It soon turned out that many were asked to leave. However, most of the wives were allowed to stay to pack up and say goodbye. Since I was in the United States at that time, I prepared to fly back to Morocco. Communicating through e-mail, it was decided that on my arrival seven of us would meet at a small restaurant for dinner. To me it felt a little like high school graduation. We were all there to say goodbye and to have one last good time before we were all busy packing. We also had a picture book that others had put together. There were pictures of workers past and present in all the different locations around Morocco. We wrote messages to each other and signed our photos. It reminded me of the yearbooks we had in high school with messages like: 'Hope you get all you want in life and that you will be happy.' Or, 'I will always remember you and I promise to keep in touch.' In high school we said the same kind of things. But then time gets away from you and people you knew well fade from memory as they take on other endeavours. Death comes too: one died from cancer (she was with us at dinner that night) and another in a motorcycle accident. So there is some sort of acceptance along with sadness because nothing remains forever down here.

We are now in the Gulf. Steve is the director of a small school teaching English to locals. I go to many weddings and try and meet women and share where I can. Steve occasionally misses Morocco, but he also likes it here. I do too. We have adjusted.

Expulsion – 'A Small Administrative Matter.'

by P. G.

The knock on the door came one morning. Two plainclothes policemen flashed cards furtively and handed me two blue slips of paper requesting that my wife and I visit the police station. 'Just a small administrative matter,' they said. Part of me had dreaded this moment for the whole twelve years we had been involved in evangelism and church planting in the country, but for most of that time it had seemed unlikely to happen. Since the sudden expulsions of colleagues two months earlier, however, we had been expecting it. After consulting via Skype, and hearing from other sources that several other people were in the process of being expelled

that day, we called a lawyer in the capital city who was already working on another expulsion case. He told us not to go to the police under any circumstances, but to come to his office. We took his advice and drove to the capital. Before the administrative court closed that day, we had submitted an appeal on the grounds that according to the law concerning foreigners, a resident can appeal against expulsion and ask to see the evidence against them and, in addition, someone legally resident for over 10 years can only be expelled if they are an imminent threat to national security. We stayed in hiding for a few days until we had a receipt from the court, which we posted to the police in our town. Then our lawyer said we could return home and they could not touch us until the judge had ruled on the case.

We had really just bought some more time (at a cost in legal fees of around \$1000) to pack and sort out our lives. This almost certainly helped reduce the sudden separation and trauma that others experienced. It was also nice to have a lawyer on our side, fighting for us. I think this also made the embassy take the case more seriously, and representatives attended the first court hearing and were able to see how the expulsions were not based on any evidence of law-breaking. Thanks to our legal appeal the police left us alone for nearly three more weeks, although we knew a future in the country was not possible. Even if we had won, they could still prevent us from returning after we left the country.

To be honest, I hoped for a legal victory. I believe that establishing legal rights in court is essential in the struggle against state persecution. Pardons from a president or king, and concessions under pressure from human rights groups abroad, are not the same as legal rulings. We also had a very strong case.

As it turned out, our appeal was answered with a statement that ‘in cases of imminent threat to national security, the authorities do not need to provide evidence’. In other words, if they call it terrorism, they can bypass the legal process and do anything they want. This also shifts it out of the realm of human rights. (Meanwhile the newspapers were presenting the expulsions as due to proselytism, not as a threat to national security.) As far as I know, the judge has never actually ruled on the case although I’m pretty sure he saw how ridiculous the legal argument was.

One of my main memories of this whole time was of extreme anxiety, feeling that I could be kidnapped by the police at any moment and taken to the border as others had been. About three weeks later as the weekend neared, we noticed that our house was being watched and we took the precaution of locking our passports in the safe of a local business that would be closed for the weekend. On Saturday, we were indeed picked up separately and taken to the police station, but without the passports they were again unable to expel us. We felt powerless, but so were they! We made our own way to the border a week later. The extreme anxiety that I had lived with for weeks stopped the moment we crossed the border.

I think it is fair to say that I was more anxious thinking constantly about what *might* happen than when things actually *did* happen. As promised by the Lord, I felt I was given peace and the words to say when sitting in the office of the chief of police and spending a day in detention at the police station.

A lot of the anxiety was because of fears and worries about the future, including selling possessions and transporting what remained. It is certainly true that if we had gone as Jesus sent out his disciples with no possessions, we would have had much less to worry about. However, we had spent twelve years investing our lives in credible tent-making identities and with this came a number of possessions. In addition, having committed our lives to serving in the country, we had no other plans or even ideas for the future.

I am pretty sure that persecution that involves physical abuse would be much worse than what we experienced. I think most people in the mission and supporters at home probably think the same. After all, we were only expelled. Based on the minimal support we received after the events, I feel that expulsion may not be viewed as ‘real’ persecution. But perhaps all persecuted people feel they do not receive the support they need. I can now appreciate why some local believers became bitter or drifted away following persecution.

One question I have is whether our structure that focused so strongly on being team-based was the best structure for providing the support we all needed. When the first person from our team was expelled I was unable to help them, partly because they were not in the country anymore and partly because I was in desperate need of support myself. When you are facing persecution yourself, it is very hard to give support to others. You need someone who is not preoccupied by their own worries. After leaving, we were able to arrange a week at a Christian counselling centre near Geneva. They are trained and experienced in dealing with worse traumas than ours and this was quite a helpful time.

While we had not experienced trauma of the horrific kind, there was quite a lot of practical loss involved: home, permanent separation from teammates and national friends, a good job and the income from it, and loss of what we had tried to build over twelve years. For our children there was the loss of the country they were born in. When we resettled in England, I also realised that I had lost my original career as a secondary school teacher. I was unable to return to teaching in a school because I had been out of it for too long. It took me two years to get back into full-time work. For this, I am glad that I had maintained and developed a career in EFL during my time on the field. Otherwise, my CV would not have helped me in the secular world of work. I am also glad that I had not created a big stir on the internet. I say this with the benefit of hindsight, though. At the time, I wanted publicity as a way of putting pressure on Morocco, but Google is used extensively by prospective employers before they interview and any scent of a criminal record would bar you

from most jobs in the UK. (There was no criminal record in our case as they bypassed the justice system altogether.)

I don't have many regrets, either about any ministry that may have led to our expulsion or the events themselves. I hope that in the twelve years we were there we made the most of opportunities we had and I am glad we were expelled for having done something that merited it (even if we never found out what that was). One thing, however, is that I wish I had driven to the airport to see off my dear colleague in the first wave of expulsions. I was too shocked and afraid. I think this is one of the big problems with persecution in this context—we fear the victim may be 'toxic' and so we avoid contact at a time when they most need solidarity. As things turned out it became clear that associating with and supporting victims did not put people at risk themselves.

Overall, the greatest loss for me has been aspects of my faith. I have struggled to make any sense out of why God allowed all this to happen to so many of his servants and to his tiny church in that country. There are a few theological answers to individual questions, but when I take a couple of paces back to look at the wider picture of the Muslim world, I confess that I just don't get it at the moment. Had I stayed on the front line, I would probably have soldiered on faithfully, but now I feel as though I was made redundant. I hope I was working and praying for God's glory, but when these things happened, God's name, his church and his children did not appear to be glorified, particularly in the national press. We were totally powerless to do any of these things. Only God could have done something, and yet He did not.

The day our world fell apart

by S.H.

Thirteen years is quite a long time to live and minister in one place! Tourists might have thought Morocco was a democratic free country, but we knew differently. Yet the knowledge that our time in Morocco could come to sudden end did not stop us from setting down roots. We lived among the people, and with them, managed to host many big weddings and big gatherings in our home (up to 150 people). During the week our time was often spent one-to-one, pre-evangelism, evangelism, discipleship of new believers, and during the weekends we often had a women's meeting on Saturday, and a small home church which was birthed in our home. On Sundays, whether we were there or not, this small home church had the key to our house. They came in and the aroma of mint tea would fill the house. From the beginning we let them lead, offered the house, support, cakes and tea... it was their church.

Were we security conscious? Yes, we were, and so were all our friends! They came in one by one, left one by one, and hid their Bibles in the famous black plastic

bags. All of us knew that there was no real freedom and none of us wanted to tempt the devil!

It must have been brewing a while but, from our perspective, it happened ‘out of the blue’, on the 6th of March 2010, when the first lot of about six were made to leave immediately. Our country leader was among them. I remember feeling as if an earthquake had hit us that day! Our stability was shaken and we did not know what to think. One phone call that morning changed everything. The outside world suddenly became unsafe, hostile and insecure. From then on every week – on Thursdays, some others would have had the visit and be taken to the border!

May came and nothing happened to us, so we started to live again, even though we felt that it was on borrowed time. We thought maybe there is pressure from somewhere, maybe now their actions, which were illegal, were going to be stopped by somebody; maybe we were safe! Yet the feeling of being watched continued. We realised it was not just a feeling when we were visited on the 13th of May. A. was taken to the ‘prefecture’ and given forty-eight hours to leave.

Would it be an exaggeration to say our world fell apart that day? We had set roots, deep roots, and pulling them out would hurt so badly. Our boys were in shock. When I collected the youngest (age 13) from school for lunch that same day three men dressed entirely in black with black sunglasses were at our front door. My eldest (15) was at home already, and was trying through the intercom to convince them that his dad wasn’t home. I didn’t stop, but went for a drive and when we got back they were gone. So we went in quickly, fed the boys and took them back to school. Though we tried to comfort and reassure them, they knew it was the beginning of the end!

That afternoon A. could not teach, so he cancelled his lessons. He was so disturbed he came home and we were just there praying, holding our breath, and not even able to think. Then the bell rang and he was gone, taken, to the police station, by plainclothes policemen, held by both arms and made to enter an unmarked car, like in a movie! That was the end of the relative freedom—or impression of freedom—under which we operated and lived! Our phones were being listened to. In fact, sometimes someone would phone us and the police would answer our land line!

A. finally left on the 2nd of June. The church was in the middle of all this. They were so affected by it all. Even though many workers preferred to stay away for fear, the believers practically lived in our house. It was so heart rending seeing the tears of both men and women. Men sobbed when they came to say goodbye. They kept coming for seven more weeks while we packed and the boys finished their exams and the school year. I felt terribly worried about them. Yes, we were persecuted, but they were too, and unlike us, they had nowhere to run! During that time three men (believers) were questioned by the police and kept all night. They came to tell me the

following day. For them it was a victory since they were able to witness to the police all night.

One new couple from the UK had arrived in late April to work with us. They stood with me. I thank the Lord for them. Instead of me helping them settle in, they helped me pack, for ironically, they unpacked at the time I was packing. (Their boxes came in handy!) My memory of those seven weeks is that from morning to late afternoon whenever my Moroccan friends came by I had to wipe their tears, try to cheer them up, to be strong for my boys and for them. I had to take things to give away, destroy things no one wanted (many cassettes), and pack. It made me smile that we still made lots of cakes and tea for our visitors. It was such a busy time, in fact, that I had to wait until the evening to spend time with my boys without people around or business to attend to (cancelling telephone contracts, sorting out paperwork for selling the car, etc.). What was left then were a few hours at night to just go to him who 'gives and takes away'. A few moments to reflect on it all!

We finally left on the 15th of July, and at the airport passport control I was taken to the police office. After the man behind the desk made a few phone calls he asked for my new five-year residence card. I was then told that I am not allowed in Morocco again and repeated exactly what they told A. eight weeks before: 'You are a danger to the public order!' I wasn't expecting that. They were not expelling women, so why me? At that moment I was shattered. My boys' dream of coming back regularly were shattered. It makes me sad even today remembering the sadness in their eyes. I had realised that we three hadn't said definite goodbyes to anyone; we'd said 'See you in October!' My son Mark said, 'Mum let us pray!' I couldn't. All I could do was quietly sob. By then I had had enough, but my boys prayed for us.

We moved to Lyon, France on the 30th of July. The boys were trying to fit in a new culture, and one evening they came downstairs and said, 'Mum we want our lives back! Can't we have our lives back?' How I wished I could give it back to them, but we had to have a new beginning and start all over again from scratch!

A. arrived in Lyon six weeks earlier than us and had found a house to rent, schools for the boys and started to rebuild his life. He got a part-time job so we could get social and health security. He had also started going to different markets with others to meet North Africans so his ministry had started even before the boys and I had left Morocco.

As for me, it all finally sank in when we were kind of settled in a house. A. went to work each day and the boys went to school. Only then did I realise the impact that the expulsion had on me. With all that had to be done, I hadn't had much time to think about my new life. Day after day, for weeks and weeks, I was trying to find a purpose. But there was nothing. My life had changed terribly, from extreme busyness to complete emptiness and loneliness. I belonged nowhere. I had nothing outside my little family.

I was so tired of trying to think of ways to meet people—all without success. One morning alone in the house yet again I was praying and asking the Lord if he didn't want me to serve him anymore! I asked if he would send me again! My Bible reading that day was Mark 6 where Jesus sent out his disciples two-by-two... I stopped and cried out to him, 'I don't know how to live without ministry anymore Lord! Please lead and show me what you want me to do! Will you not send me again?!' I carried on reading and came to Mark 6: 30-31: *'The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."'* That verse spoke so loudly that my heart was burning in me and I knew it was God's answer. I knew it because we were exhausted emotionally and physically. God was giving me a break! Our supporting churches were demanding news, they wanted to be sure we were in the right place, that there was ministry again for us...

After that morning I stopped trying to find something to write to them about. I decided to spend special times with him. I had become aware that my sense of value had shifted from being completely in God, to being in what I did for him... Now I was stripped of everything. I had to find my value again in him, and him alone. That was a wonderful year, during which things slowly started happening. Soon enough the Lord started opening doors. I was able to choose, not in order to fill my time, but to seek his guidance and leading.

Now, six years later, the Lord has led me to cross paths with many women who need to hear the gospel, or be discipled, or be listened to. Of course, with the existence of the local church here ministry takes a different form. Church planting has a different colour and shape. As we had to learn to work with North Africans in Morocco, we've had to relearn here how the North Africans and other Muslims think and live. Today, the Lord is working in a mighty way here in Lyon! Praise be to him.

Throughout it all I can see God's hand in it

by A.H.

I will not be retracing what my wife S.H. has said so eloquently but will give some of my own thoughts.

There were certain convictions that we always held which influenced how being expelled would affect us. In some ways, like any traumatic event, we look back now and see both the good as well as the negative impact of being expelled. Of course nothing is a surprise to God and he had some good things in store.

- We always held to the fact that as foreigners we were guests in the country and as such our behaviour should reflect that. We tried to instil that in our

boys by teaching them not to criticise the country, not to say ‘Moroccans are this or that’ etc. Now we live in another country and the same should be true. So we didn’t feel animosity towards the people when expelled.

- We made every attempt to integrate into the country by learning the language well and respecting the culture. Constantly improving our Arabic was a priority to us.
- Any ministry with North African Christians was to be on a common level. Our aim was to empower them and not to disempower.
- We lived as if Morocco was our home but always conscious that one day that situation could change. So, there was always the ‘if we had to leave, what would we do and where would we go’ in our minds. This meant that when the time came to leave we were able to re-build our lives elsewhere.
- Knowing God is sovereign, that he and our home churches sent us on mission, there was never a question of blaming God.

One thing I will never forget was being harassed by the police for at least a week. I would be called to the police station and asked to wait for hours on end only to be told that the police chief was not available after all and I could go home. Even then God gave his grace and good humour to accept what was happening. Certainly there were times of tension and stress but I can see God’s hand in it all. The whole situation was a time of testing for the church we were part of and we lived through it together. That was comforting. I know that other people faced expulsion in a different way.

As I’ve tried to express above, I think that being expelled didn’t at all change our call or weaken our faith. Perhaps it strengthened it. What was the short and long-term impact on me and our family? Whilst the effect on S. and I was significant, we did move into new areas of ministry and saw the move to France as a continuation of ministry. Both of our boys were challenged in moving into a very different culture. We made every effort to get integrated into a good Evangelical church and we now feel well-integrated and are very involved. Perhaps this would be so wherever we are because of these same values and attitudes. For our boys the move has had various effects which we are working through even today.

Here in Lyon, our ministry continues. I now accompany John in the markets in the mornings. Moving to a European country put a big stretch on our financial support so we both have to do some English teaching. The challenge is to balance the two. I was able to move into an existing ministry with John which has been a big boon. S. has developed a great ministry amongst the North African women in town. So although we miss the ministry in Morocco, and the brothers and sisters we shared our lives with, there is a sense that God is using us.

We have recently started a monthly service in Arabic with the French church we attend for the Syrian and Iraqi refugees that the church has supported or who have started to attend the church. Here we see how God has put us (more particularly S., with her gifts and experience) in the right place at the right time. In fact, the experience we had in Morocco of supporting a small group of Christians is now being echoed in Lyon.

Expelled by order of higher authority

by Mark and Beverly Dean

My wife Beverly and I, with our two children, spent fifteen years in Morocco involved in church-planting and business. Our ministry involved outreach to those in our sphere of influence, following up Bible correspondence students and eventually discipling church leaders. Over the course of our time in Morocco we were blessed to see numerous groups of believers come together and the emergence of house churches in our city. In addition to leading our local ministry team, I also took on the area leader role, overseeing forty-five people on nine ministry teams around the country.

During the year before my expulsion in March 2010, there were three different incidents in which the authorities raided groups of local believers (along with a few foreigners) meeting for weekend spiritual retreats. In each of these cases the local believers were questioned and released and the foreigners were expelled from the country. As a result, we were well aware of the increase in the concern and surveillance by the government towards Christian activity in the country.

One Saturday afternoon as I was walking into a café to meet a friend, I was met at the door by two plainclothes policemen who escorted me to the police station. I was questioned for about two hours about my life history and activities during my time in Morocco. At the end of this time I was told I was going to be escorted to the Spanish border that night and expelled from the country. I tried to negotiate to stay longer to arrange my affairs but they insisted that I needed to be out of the country by Sunday noon. In the end I was allowed to go home for the night with a police guard at my front door. I was escorted to the airport the next morning and was on a plane to France by noon. Beverly and my daughter, who was two and a half months away from graduating from high school, decided to stay behind so our daughter could graduate and Beverly would have time to take care of our affairs. Our son was already in his first year of university in the USA.

Although I was able to remain calm through the whole incident, I was shocked by the speed at which everything happened. Since there was no accusation from the authorities before this event and I was not caught in illegal activity at the time they picked me up, I communicated my surprise to them that I was being expelled. They gave me no reason for my expulsion, only that they had been ordered by higher

authorities to expel me and that they were just doing their job. I asked why I wasn't given my due process in court and was told, 'We aren't accusing you of committing a crime. We gave you residency and we can take it away.' I discovered later that the country's own law states that anyone who has been a legal resident in the country for ten years or more could not be expelled without judicial due process.

While I had prepared myself for this possibility for many years, my initial response as I was leaving the country was sadness and disgust with the people who would so quickly rip apart a family like this with no prior warning. As I landed in France I learned that at least seven other foreign Christians from around the country had also been expelled. As I thought about this and began to process the finality of what had just happen, my sadness turned to anger and a desire for vengeance on the country's authorities who were seemingly getting away with a grave injustice against the Gospel.

After a few days in France, I spent the next three months in England waiting for Beverly and our daughter to join me. During these days I spent a considerable amount of time helping prepare and coach others who were subsequently expelled from the country. This brought a sense of personal satisfaction as I felt in a small way I was able to stand against the injustices that were happening.

During these early days after my expulsion the Lord drew me to Psalm 37 which had been a passage He used to encourage me in my early days in Morocco. Gradually the Lord began to change my heart so as to delight in him, commit my future to him, trust him and wait patiently for him. He also used this passage to help me refocus on the fact that even though the wicked plot against the Lord, He laughs because He sees their day is coming. In other words, the Lord is in control and these events were not a surprise to him.

Beverly stayed behind for three months to clean up the house and enable our daughter to finish her school year. Initially she struggled with anger as well, until the Lord reminded her of his words when he faced injustice. From the cross He said, 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23). The very thing that would give the local people life—the Gospel message—was the thing they were trying to remove from their country. They didn't know what they were doing.

There were also moments she felt shame, especially around close local friends, who didn't understand why I had been kicked out of their country. In Psalm 31, God's answer to the shame that the enemy puts on us is that they themselves will be put to shame. The shame that the local government wanted to put on us will be the shame they are covered with when they stand before Almighty God one day. Understanding that truth turned Beverly's shame into prayer for the hearts of the accusers!

For quite a while after my expulsion Beverly struggled to be convinced that God was good. She didn't question God's sovereignty but was He good and could she honestly trust him again? Time spent in the Bible was life-giving and seeing God's heart in it convinced her of his unconditional love for her. Verses like 'He rescued me because he delighted in me' (Ps 18:19), 'Taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps 34:5), 'My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches' (Phil 4:19), 'God gives grace at all times, in all things, having all I need' (2 Cor 9:8)—all worked to show Beverly the heart of her God. If she could trust him today, she could trust him for tomorrow no matter what happened.

Three months after I was expelled Beverly and our daughter joined me in England and we returned to our home area in the USA, unsure of our next steps. Our home church asked us to take a few months to recuperate before making any decisions. Still feeling a strong calling to minister to Muslims, the Lord eventually led us into a ministry to diaspora Muslims in a major urban area in the USA. Through a café, an international student housing project and a community development project directed towards immigrants, we have been greatly blessed to see the Lord open new doors of ministry for us to the Muslim community.

Although we never imagined God would give us a desire to live and work in the USA, we are as content as we were in Morocco to be where God has placed us. As we often say, God moving us out of Morocco and into this ministry in the USA is not his plan B for us but his plan A. Someone wisely shared with us that 'we need to know that it is God who closes doors, not governments.' God had another place he wanted us!

Coming into this context after living in the Arab world, and having the cultural and linguistic abilities that come with it, has opened some great doors of opportunity for the Gospel. In many ways we now have more opportunities to speak the Gospel to those from least-reached Muslim countries than we did living in the Muslim world. In addition, we have had the joy of mobilizing the church to reach Muslims alongside of us, thus multiplying our efforts to reach the unreached.

One of the greatest lessons that has come out of these events is the clear understanding that as children of God's Kingdom we are only pilgrims on this earth. Therefore, no matter where he places us geographically we want to be faithful to steward what he has entrusted to us to make disciples of the nations. This helps us to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. We are so thankful for his sufficient grace in our lives as we navigate challenges like these.

The Kingdom that will never be shaken

by Ray

Only an hour before I had left our home for my ballet class. What happened in the next twenty-four hours would forever change the course of my life.

When my husband Caleb was picked up by the police that beautiful warm spring day, he had no idea that he would never again see our home of 20 years. In a few hours he would be forced on a plane, expelled from the country he so loved, where he had served the Lord and its beautiful Arab people for twenty years.

There was no warning. Even though Caleb had been in jail previously and had been threatened with expulsion a few years before, we had no idea that black storm clouds were gathering! And then everything changed! In one day our world came crashing down.

Caleb was led away by the police. What was going on? Frantic phone calls to police stations and our embassy yielded no information of my husband's whereabouts. The following day I was informed by the embassy that my husband had been put on a plane by the authorities. I was stunned! I later found out that he had spent the night in a police van and the following morning was dragged through the airport by eight policemen. As Caleb protested loudly against this illegal procedure, a doctor was summoned to administer two shots of sedatives, after which he was rolled on the plane in a wheelchair. He arrived in his home country with only the clothes on his back.

I spent the next month in a surreal daze. I was shocked and confused. Alone with our four children, the awful realization slowly started to sink in; life as I had known it for 23 years was over. The knife had dropped. For the first time in my life I was actually afraid, especially for the safety of my children. Would we have to pay the ultimate price?

Even though it was probably the toughest month of my life, something strange happened. Jesus showed up! 'You'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.' My 'normal' had collapsed and in that instance Jesus proved trustworthy. He proved to be the solid foundation he claimed to be. I felt his presence as never before. Sometimes I felt I was floating. 'Angels' appeared out of nowhere, supporting, comforting, feeding and protecting us. What a beautiful thing is the body of Christ surrounding a hurt soul, like white blood cells rushing to the site of an infection. I realized that even though people can strip away many things from me, no one can strip away my most precious treasure, the Lover of my soul.

In some ways I am still trying to cope, trying to make sense of it. Sometimes, in quiet moments of reflection, questions bubble to the surface: 'What was that all

about? Why? Was it all a waste? What am I doing here?’ God had clearly called me there as a young adult, not *here*. My adopted home was such an integral part of my life. It was the home I knew intimately and loved deeply, where I met my husband, gave birth to my children and immersed myself joyfully in the language and culture. Home forever, I thought.

And then, silence. A white sheet. An empty schedule. A crossroads, and no idea which way to go. A very strange thing happened: I tried to erase the previous twenty-three years from my mind. I didn’t want to talk about it. I didn’t want to cook Arab dishes. It was too painful to remember. The smell of coriander in the air would momentarily tie my heart in knots. Longing and grieving.

Well-meaning people would say: ‘You must be so happy to be *here*. Thank God you’re not *there* anymore.’ I would stare at them, stupefied. What do you mean, happy? I don’t *want* to be here; I want to go *home*.

One of the biggest lessons I learned is that life is about God and my relationship with him. I’m serving *him*; not my mission, not my field or people group, but *him*! My identity is not in being a missionary in a tough field. He saved me, I love him, I want to serve *him*. Therefore, it doesn’t matter *where* I am, but *whose* I am.

God also had some cleansing and purifying to do in me. We somewhat arrogantly prided ourselves of our plan to stay on the field until we died. God had different plans. He doesn’t conform to our schedule. He wants us to hold on tightly to him, in childlike trust, whatever may come. Could Jesus have meant it when he told us not to worry about tomorrow? It’s more about trusting God for today than trusting our plans for the next twenty years.

‘My Kingdom cannot be shaken’ (Heb.12:28). Everything else can! As I get older, I realize that this body of mine that has served me without trouble for so many years will also be stripped away one day. The signs are painfully obvious. We will be stripped from life as we know it! But he will be there, unshaken, receiving us into a new world. *He* will be there, and that’s all we need!

After a few months in our new home country, a seemingly unimportant event brought healing to my wounded heart on a deep level. It happened at a large mission conference. What should have been an exciting event turned into a deeply painful experience for me. As I aimlessly wandered between the booths, streams of tears suddenly started running down my face. Everybody seemed to know where they were going, what they wanted, where they belonged. I felt completely lost. A beautiful slide show on a screen caught my eye. The pictures reminded me of my lost home. A kind older man at the booth engaged me in conversation, and I poured out my aching heart to him. ‘I have brought an expensive gift to this event, and prayed for God to show me the right person to give it to!’ he explained as he gave

me something that I still treasure. This seemingly insignificant act of kindness to a troubled soul in a sea of thousands proved deeply healing for me. God in effect was saying to me: 'I see you. I love you. I care for you. You are not alone. You are not lost. You are safe in ME. Trust me!' A quote above my desk reminds me daily of this truth: 'I don't need to fear the waves, because I know the One who made the ocean.'

Probably the most painful and at the same time most liberating lesson I learned is that God does not need me. The work goes on. I am dispensable. It was God's work all along. I was invited to share in it. But it was never mine. A famous speaker once challenged us with the unusual question: 'What happens when you sleep?' Arrogantly I had believed that the world slept too. That everything stopped when I stopped. What audacity! God does not sleep. His work continues. *His* work!

For some reason he wants me *here* at this moment in time. I have the joy and privilege to love and serve him *here*, to enjoy his presence and share in his Kingdom. The Kingdom that will never be shaken! I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but I have the confidence that whatever happens, he is right beside me! *Nothing*, and *no one* can separate me from my Beloved.