

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING YOU'VE EVER BEEN THROUGH?

For me, it is actually a pretty short list... a very sick child, betrayal from a close friend, the death of my Mom & Dad... there's got to be more but I can't think of much that competes with those.

MY STORY:

I am a "Child of the Sixties." What does that mean?

- As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a special treat. On weekends, our parents would load us into the family wagon in our pajamas, stop by the local Piggly-Wiggly, and head to the drive-in theater for a night at the movies.
- We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cabinets, and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets. We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.
- We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then rode down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.
- We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day. No cell phones.
- We played dodge ball and sometimes the ball would really hurt. We got cut and broke bones and broke teeth and there were no lawsuits from these accidents. They were accidents. No one was to blame but us.
- We did not have Play Stations, Nintendo 64, X Boxes, video games at all, 99 channels on cable, video tape movies, surround sound, personal cellular phones, Personal Computers, Internet chat rooms, but we had friends.



1962 Ford Falcon Wagon

We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rung the bell or just walked in and talked to them. Imagine such a thing. Without asking a parent! By ourselves!

- Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Some students weren't as smart as others so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade. Tests were not adjusted for any reason.
- This 60's generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem solvers and inventors, ever. The past 50 years has been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility.

I grew up in a world where we didn't have much... but seemed to have what we needed and never seemed to complain. As an adult, I have more than my parents did and my children have more than I do. I am comfortable and that is a problem if you are a Jesus follower!

“WHERE ARE THE JESUS FREAKS?”

That's what I heard from the Lord this past Sunday evening. As the Seahawks were somehow squandering their considerable lead, the Holy Spirit drops the question into my heart, “**Where are the Jesus Freaks?**”

I immediately thought of the **Jesus People Movement** of the late 60's. Those were my high school years, so I remember them quite well. Although I wouldn't become a Jesus follower until some 10 years later, I remember that there was a big fuss over all these Hippies who were turning to God in droves. I never knew any of them personally, but I remember them making quite a splash.

"Jesus freak" was a term used to describe the non-traditional Christians of the Jesus Movement. "Freak" here means enthusiast, and although the term was originally used by outsiders, believers in the movement adopted it as their own.

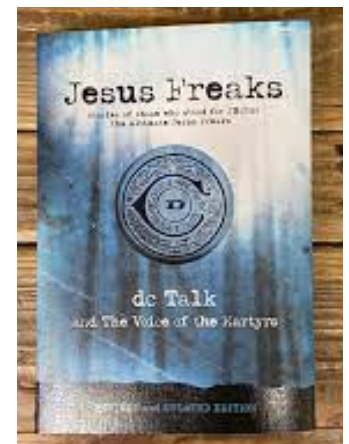
The Jesus Movement was a revival of sorts in the late 1960s and early 1970s that started among the counter-culturalists on the West Coast. It originated with hippies who were unfulfilled in the drug-saturated, free-love culture and found more meaning in Jesus' teachings on love and peace. The movement was fairly Pentecostal in nature, emphasizing healing, signs, and miracles.

Jesus freaks, then, were the hippies, druggies, bikers, and others who combined aspects of their old lifestyle, like communal living and modern music, with their Christian faith. The Jesus Movement was influential in bringing fresh music to traditional churches as well as the development of Calvary Chapel and Vineyard churches, but for the most part died out in the 1980s.

The term "**Jesus freak**" is still used today in a lesser degree (usually a negative connotation). It means anyone who is enthusiastic about following Jesus and is not afraid to show it (Luke 9:26). It is also a popular song from the Christian group **DC Talk** and the title of their book on Christian martyrs. That was where my attention went last Sunday night when the Lord broke into my Seahawk lament. I remembered the book, never read it, so I picked it up and have been saturating myself in it all week. It has become a deep dive into an area I knew very little about: **Martyrdom**.

THE BOOK... JESUS FREAKS: *Stories of the who stood for Jesus - the ultimate Jesus Freaks*

When you open up this book, you will learn about some of the biggest Jesus Freaks of all time: those who stood out from the crowd enough to be called martyrs. If Jesus was willing to give His life for me, and if these people, these martyrs, were willing to give up their lives



for Him, how much does it take for me to truly dedicate my days on earth to Him? ~ **Michael Tait**, DC Talk vocalist and current member of the Newsboys, *Jesus Freaks*

Real faith in Jesus seems to make people uncomfortable. Even in the open-minded artistic world, lyrics about faith in Jesus can be considered offensive. I guess that's what the world calls a "Freak"—someone who commits to something wholeheartedly, without apology or compromise. ~ **Toby McKeehan**, DC Talk lead singer, better known now as Christian rapper TobyMac, *Jesus Freaks*

Jesus Freaks are more than hippie kids and rock and roll. They are the dedicated followers of Jesus Christ who place His name above any other need or desire. ~ **Kevin Max**, dc Talk singer,, songwriter and poet, also known as Kmax, *Jesus Freaks*

As you commit to being a Jesus Freak, you are committing to see things differently. You are committing to see "enemies" as people Jesus died for and who need to hear about His love. You are committing to see obstacles as opportunities for God to shape you and for God to advance His kingdom through you. ~ **Voice of the Martyrs**, Founded in 1967 by Richard (1909-2001) and Sabina (1913-2000) Wurmbrand, *Jesus Freaks*



MAR·TYR noun \mār-tər\ [from the Greek word for "witness"]

1. One who chooses to suffer death rather than to deny Jesus Christ or His work.
2. One who bears testimony to the truth of what he has seen or heard or knows, as in a witness in a court of justice.
3. One who sacrifices something very important to further the kingdom of God.
4. One who endures severe or constant suffering for their Christian witness.
5. A Jesus Freak.

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT? These believers were absolutely sure of eternal life. They were willing to obey Christ no matter the cost. They were convinced that they were not ending their lives but exchanging their lives on earth for a life with their Lord in heaven.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Jim Elliot, Speared by headhunters in Ecuador while serving there as a missionary, 1956

Thomas

Jerusalem

A.D. 34

The disciples traveled throughout the known world to preach the gospel and Thomas was chosen to go to India and North Africa. Although he dreaded living among these savage tribes, God strengthened him, and he was able to convert many in these countries. Around A.D. 70, he went to Calamina, India, where the people worshiped an image of the sun. Through the power of God, Thomas destroyed the image and put a stop to their idolatry.

The sun god's priests were furious. They accused him before their king, who sentenced him to be tortured with red-hot metal plates and then thrown into a glowing furnace. To the amazement of all, the fire did not hurt Thomas—he was



still alive in the midst of the furnace! When the priests saw this, they were so angry, they threw spears and javelins into the furnace at him. One of the spears pierced his side. He fell there dead.

- *You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. ~ Peter the Apostle, Crucified upside down in Rome, A.D. 65 (1 Peter 1:8–9)*

Wang Yi

China

2018

On December 9, police raids shut down the Early Rain's school, seminary, and all other operations. Over the next three days, over one hundred church members were arrested, including Pastor Wang Yi.

A few days later, the pastor's "Declaration of Faithful Disobedience" was published, which he had asked to be distributed if he were detained by authorities for more than forty-eight hours. "I firmly believe that Christ has called me to carry out this faithful disobedience through a life of service, under this regime that opposes the gospel and persecutes the church," his declaration read. "The goal of disobedience is not to change the world, but to testify about another world."

Pastor Wang Yi was given a nine-year sentence on December 30, 2019, for his boldness and leadership of Early Rain, the longest sentence given to a house church pastor in more than a decade.

- *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ~ Paul the Apostle, Beheaded in Rome, A.D. 65 (Romans 8:28)*

Richard Wurmbrand

Romania

1945

It was a year after the Communists had seized power in Romania. The government had invited all religious leaders to attend a congress at the Parliament building—over four thousand attended. First, they chose Joseph Stalin as honorary president of the congress. Then the speeches began. It was absurd and horrible. Communism was dedicated to the destruction of religion, as had already been shown in Russia. Yet bishops and pastors arose and declared that Communism and Christianity were fundamentally the same and could coexist. Out of fear, they were filling the air with flattery and lies. It was as if they spat in Jesus' face.

Sabina Wurmbrand could stand it no longer. She whispered to her husband, "Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ." Richard knew what would happen: "If I speak, you will lose your husband." Sabina replied, "I do not wish to have a coward for a husband."

On Sunday, February 29, 1948, Pastor Wurmbrand was on his way to church when he was kidnapped by a small group of secret police. He tells what happened next:

I was led to a prison thirty feet beneath the earth where I was kept in solitary confinement. For years, I was kept alone in a cell. Never did I see sun, moon, stars, flowers. Never did I see a man except the interrogators who beat and tortured me. Never did I have a book, never a bit of paper. When after many years I had to write again, I could not even remember how to write a capital D. To make the feeling of isolation worse, the prison was kept completely silent. Even the guards had cloth shoes so their steps could not be heard.

When we were first put in solitary confinement, it was like dying. Every one of us lived again his past sins and his neglects of duties. We all had an unimaginable pain in our hearts thinking that we had not done our utmost for the Highest, for the One who has given His life for us on the cross. I was in the depths of this remorse and pain, when suddenly, the wall of

the jail began to shine like diamonds. I have seen many beautiful things, but never have I seen the beauties which I have seen in the dark cell beneath the earth. Never have I heard such beautiful music as on that day.

After years of solitary confinement, we were put together in huge cells, sometimes with two hundred to three hundred prisoners in each cell. I will not tell you the whole truth, because you could not bear to hear it. But this I will tell. Christian prisoners were beaten, then tied on crosses for four days and four nights without interruption. The Communists then stood around them, jeering and mocking, "Look at your Christ, how beautiful He is, what fragrances He brings from heaven." Then they kicked the other prisoners, forcing them to kneel down and to adore and worship this besmeared living crucifix.

Then worse times came, the times of brainwashing. Anyone who has not passed through brainwashing can't understand what torture it is. From five in the morning until ten in the evening, seventeen hours a day, we had to sit perfectly straight. We were not allowed to lean or rest our head. To close our eyes was a crime. Seventeen hours a day we had to hear, "Communism is good, Communism is good, Communism is good. Christianity is stupid, Christianity is stupid, Christianity is stupid. Nobody believes in Christ anymore, nobody believes in Christ anymore. Give up, give up, give up!" For days, weeks, and years, we had to listen to this.

Finally, the worst came. Communists torture those who believe in God. With red-hot iron poker, with rubber truncheons, with sticks, with all kinds of methods, Christians were tortured by the Communists. And then the miracle happened. When it was at the worst, when we were tortured as never before, we began to love those who tortured us. Just as a flower, when you bruise it under your foot, rewards you with its perfume, the more we were mocked and tortured, the more we pitied and loved our torturers.

It was in prison that we found the hope of salvation for the Communists. It was there that we developed a sense of responsibility toward them. In Communist prisons the idea of a Christian mission to the Communists was born. We asked ourselves, "What can we do to win these men to Christ?"

In 1965, friends paid the Romanian government a ransom of \$10,000 so the Wurmbrand family could leave the country. They traveled to Scandinavia and England before coming to the U.S. In May 1966, Richard testified in Washington, D.C., before a U.S. Senate subcommittee, stripping to his waist and revealing eighteen deep torture wounds. In 1967, the Wurmbrands formally started their mission to the Communists: Jesus to the Communist World. Today, this ministry is known as The Voice of the Martyrs and is still dedicated to serving persecuted Christians around the world.

• *It seems God is limited by our prayer life—that He can do nothing for humanity unless someone asks Him. ~ John Wesley, Founder of the Methodist movement*

✳ In AD 63, **James**, one of Jesus' younger brothers, was pushed off the temple roof. He survived, but both legs were broken. death. James, kneeling on his broken legs, prayed, "Lord, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." While he was praying, another man ran up with a big, heavy stick in his hand and struck James in the head. James died instantly from the blow, still in prayer.

✳ In 1527, 23-year-old **Patrick Hamilton** from Scotland was sentenced to death for passionately preaching the word of God. He was to be burned at the stake. When his executioners had difficulty keeping the fire lit, he used it as one last opportunity to preach to those who were standing near. "How long, O God," he cried, "shall darkness cover this kingdom? How long will You allow this tyranny of men?" At last, the fire consumed him. As he died, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

✳ During the Cultural Revolution from 1966–1976, two young girls, **Chiu-Chin-Hsiu** and **Ho-Hsiu-Tzu** from Jiangxi, Mainland China had decided to submit to death without renouncing their faith. Flanked by guards, the executioner came with a revolver in his hand. It was their own pastor! He had been sentenced to die with the two girls. The girls whispered to each other, then bowed respectfully before their pastor. One of them said, Before you shoot us, we wish to thank you heartily for what you have meant to us. You baptized us, you taught us the ways of eternal life, you gave

us holy communion with the same hand in which you now hold the gun. The pastor's heart was hardened. He shot the girls. Afterward he was shot by the Communists.

* In the 1950's, **Pastor Kim and twenty-seven of his flock** of North Korean saints had lived in hand-dug tunnels beneath the earth. Then, as the Communists were building a road, they discovered the Christians living underground. The officials brought them out before a crowd of 30,000 in the village of Gok San for a public trial and execution. The Communists said, "Deny Christ, or you will die." The Christians refused. At this point the head Communist officer ordered four children from the group seized and had them prepared for hanging. With ropes tied around their small necks, the officer again commanded the parents to deny Christ. Not one of the believers would comply. They told the children, "We will soon see you in heaven." The children died quietly. The officer then called for a steamroller to be brought in. He forced the Christians to lie on the ground in its path. As its engine revved, they were given one last chance to recant their faith in Jesus. Again they refused. As the steamroller began to inch forward, the Christians began to sing a song they had often sung together. As their bones and bodies were crushed under the pressure of the massive rollers, their lips uttered the words: *More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee Thee alone I seek, more love to Thee Let sorrow do its work, more love to Thee Then shall my latest breath whisper Thy praise This be the parting cry my heart shall raise; More love, O Christ, to Thee.*

- *For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. ~ Paul the Apostle, Written after having been imprisoned, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, and tortured numerous times by those who opposed him. (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)*

WHAT IS JESUS LOOKING FOR FROM US, TODAY? MARTYRDOM?

1. **"One who chooses to suffer death rather than to deny Jesus Christ or His work."** While I seriously doubt anyone in this room has had to make the choice to suffer death or deny Jesus, we are all making choices every day that testify to the depth and quality of our love for Jesus. (Deut 6:5) What we're confronting is the lens we look through. Do we care too much about what others think of us, especially when it comes to our walk with Jesus? Are we concerned that people will laugh at us because we seem to run everything in our life through the "Jesus Filter?" (Pr 29:25)

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

John the Apostle, Tortured and exiled to Patmos

2. **"One who bears testimony to the truth of what he has seen or heard or knows, as in a witness in a court of justice."** Truth isn't just what you read and understand, but what you believe and live out as well. (Eph 4:15) The martyrs we have been reading about were responding to and experience with God, not a verse from the bible. They heard his voice encourage them with his love. They saw him hanging from the cross. (1 Cor 1:18) They felt the pain of his suffering and responded out of gratefulness for what he had done for them. Those same experiences are available to us today. Why settle for religion when you can experience the Savior and be transformed? (Rom 12:2)

As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

Paul the Apostle, Martyred in Rome, A.D. 65 (2 Timothy 4:6–8)

3. **“One who sacrifices something very important to further the kingdom of God.”** Maybe we need a “values reset?” (James 1:22-27) What’s most important to you? What comes next? And after that? (Pr 19:1) We really have no idea the impact our culture has on us until we actually look inside ourselves to see what’s under the surface. Are honesty, integrity, humility, courage, tenderheartedness, joy, peace, and love important to you? How important?

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14–16 CSB

4. **“One who endures severe or constant suffering for their Christian witness.”** Not today, but is a time coming in the future when the world around us will not tolerate our devotion to Christ any longer? Does that sound far-fetched? Have you read the Bible? Now is the best time to consider the future and begin to make choices that will help prepare you for it. (*Remember as a young married person when they told you how much money you would save for you kids if you put a little away every month starting at their birth? Watch your toes!*) Can you current faith endure hardship? Maybe it’s time to seriously prepare for something we’ve never seen before? (Pr 6:6-11)

And they have defeated him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.

John the Apostle, Tortured and exiled to Patmos, Roman Empire, A.D. 97 (Revelation 12:11)

5. **“A Jesus Freak.”** Are these the words you would use to describe yourself? Here are a few one-liners from the book, *Jesus Freaks*:

- **Jesus Freaks** do not fret, but see all circumstances, even difficult ones, as a part of God’s redemptive plan for the people of the earth.
- The word martyr originally meant someone who tells what he has seen, an eyewitness. **Jesus Freaks** are people who have seen Jesus’ power in their own lives and just can’t help telling others about it. A favorite saying of a teenage girl who boldly approaches other teens is, “If you knew what I know about Jesus, I’d want you to tell me!”
- **Jesus Freaks** make the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. Patrick Hamilton preached in prison and at the stake. Do you make your opportunities count for eternity?
- What does a **Jesus Freak** do when betrayed by someone close to them? They show them God’s love.
- **Jesus Freaks** love their enemies. Others say it is too hard—impossible, in fact—which is true, unless God through His Spirit fills you with His love. It is not ever easy to pray for your enemies, but Jesus Christ commands it in Luke 6:27–28: “I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”
- **Jesus Freaks** understand that their lives are in God’s hands and live accordingly.
- Throughout history, **Jesus Freaks** have sung during their final moments on earth. To the astonishment of their tormentors, they joyfully raised their voices in praise to God.
- **Jesus Freaks** extend God’s forgiveness to others—even those who try to kill them.
- **Jesus Freaks** are “all in.” They are willing to accept whatever consequences obedience to Christ might bring.