

## From Persecution to Praise

by Zhirko Rzgar Abdul

**M**y name is Zhirko Rzgar Abdul. I was born in Kurdistan, Iraq, and was raised by my parents who are both deeply religious Muslims. I finished the twelfth grade in 2013, and during that time I met some American Christian missionaries. They invited me to church and to their home Bible studies, and after four weeks I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior. I kept this belief in my heart secretly because Iraq is run by an Islamic community, and it's hard to change one's religion. I did not even let my family know about it.

I continued to privately attend their church and learned how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As I grew in my faith, I began studying the Word of God with friends with whom I had secretly shared my conversion. They too were converting to Christianity and growing in their faith.

I stored pictures of our church family and my Bible study notes on my laptop. In September 2017, one of my family members noticed these pictures of my church family on my laptop and began to ask questions about them. I was terrified at what might happen next. My parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins all gathered in our home the next day. They yelled at me and mocked me, saying, "How could you convert to Christianity?" "You're no longer in the generation of the prophet Mohammed, and God will never forgive you. You will go to hell because you believe that Jesus is God!" They said, "You're possessed by a Christian demon!" My



Zhirko Rzgar Abdul

uncle brought me a Koran and said, "Kiss it and repent!" I refused, so he began to beat my head and slap me.

Tears began to stream down my face. I could no longer defend myself. Fortunately, my brother and cousin took pity on me and held my uncle's arms back so he could no longer hit me. "He's a sinner! How could you defend him?" my uncle said. He threatened, "We'll shed your blood if you continue to practice Christianity!" My parents had no reaction. They stood by my uncle, ashamed of me.

That same day, my cousins took me to their house in order to cast the "Christian demon" out of me. They got a stick and made me lay on the floor. They beat the bottom of my feet 40 times in order to hurt the demon so that it would leave me. My cousins began to read the Koran to me out loud as a way of defeating this so called "Christian demon." This went on for

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## Persecution to Praise

days. It was the most terrible experience of my life.

I had to make a decision: would I go back to Islam and be at peace with my family, or would I declare my faith in Jesus Christ and face the consequences? I chose Christ! But for my life's sake I fled from my family and my country to follow God's will for my life. During that time God gave me these verses from Matthew 5:10–12: **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

The next two years were fraught with many trials and difficulties, learning to survive in Brazil, Guatemala, and other South American countries. Finally, on February 6, 2019, I entered the United States for the first time. I was held in San Diego, CA, at Otay Mesa Detention Center for nearly nine months. It was there that I first learned of Christian Library International. I received a book with a stamp inside that challenged me to write to them and enroll in their Bible studies. Well, I did enroll and began to grow as a disciple of Christ. I experienced the Lord's presence often as I worked through each lesson. I praise the Lord for this ministry, the Bible ministers, and (Executive Director) Kathleen Skaar for their faithfulness to helping me learn who God is.

On October 16, 2019, I was released and have been granted religious asylum to stay in the US. CLI, I encourage you to keep on doing the will of our Heavenly Father and one day you will hear Him say, "Well done!"

# Transformed

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18*

Have you ever been mistaken for Jesus? In other words, are you reflecting His character and image? Most of us might have to answer, "No, not even close!"



Kathleen Skaar, Founder

The truth is we're a work in progress. The Bible tells us that we're on a journey and with each step in the Lord, we're *being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.*

The journey started with the Old Covenant. The Law was rigid and fixed, but was still glorious. It taught us obedience from a standard of rules and regulations. The Old Covenant was designed to lead us to the New Covenant. The New Covenant brings us into relationship with God through Jesus' death and resurrection. Our obedience comes from our surrendered hearts. We love God and want to obey and follow the plans He has for our lives.

God's foremost plan for us is to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:21). When we trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are born again. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and leads us in prayer, convicts us of sins, comforts us, opens up Scripture for us, and empowers us to carry out God's daily instructions.

With such awesome help, why do we fall short of resembling Jesus? The answer lies in His Lordship. The Spirit works in our hearts but doesn't take away our freedom. We are free to choose Jesus in some areas of our lives, but not all. We may even give control of one or more aspects of our lives to other little gods, such as sports, movies, acceptance or popularity, security, shopping, games, recreation, travel, sex, greed, gluttony, leisure, selfishness, unforgiveness, pride, etc.

Some of these little gods may seem innocuous enough, but anything that takes precedence over Jesus will be harmful to our transformation and glory. He must have full authority. Remember, we have choices all day long to follow the Spirit's nudging or the other gods in our lives.

Zhirko, in our cover story, surrendered all for the sake of Jesus. He could have gone back to Islam and been at peace with his family. Instead, he followed his Lord Jesus, accepted the rejection and persecution and then escaped to another country. He didn't compromise the truth.

Is there any area of your life that has not been surrendered to Jesus? The staff and I have prayed for Jesus to take over every aspect of our lives. We surrender all—with the help and empowering work of the Holy Spirit. **Will you join us? If you have prayed to give yourself fully to God and not hold anything back, please email or write me of your decision. We look forward to seeing Jesus in you and you seeing Jesus in us!**

## Leaving a Legacy

By J. Mahaffey

I've been donating Christian materials to Christian Library International for many years. I heard about the ministry from an article I saw in a Christian magazine years ago. I had some religious books to donate at the time and so the journey began. I've shipped a lot of boxes of Christian materials to them over the years and also sent monetary donations to help

cover the costs of shipping. I've enjoyed finding great books and Bibles on sale at local Christian bookstores knowing the inmates would be blessed by them.

CLI has been blessed by God over the years and has been a blessing to me. I've seen it grow in the number of employees, the amount of prisons they serve and, best of all, the number of inmates who've made decisions to accept



Christ as their Savior through the materials, Bible study lessons and Gospel tracts. I look forward to receiving *The Shepherd* newsletter during the year with an update on how God is blessing the inmates, how many decisions for Christ have been made, and also how the community supports the ministry.

Several years ago when visiting North Carolina, I purposely visited their location in Raleigh and was able to meet several of the employees. It was a joy to see where my donations of books and money were

going and what great work they are doing.

I recently prepared my will and made a decision to leave a portion of my estate to Christian Library International to further their ministry for years to come. I encourage anyone looking to support a great ministry to consider CLI. Consider them when preparing your will or making your year-end donations.

I've enjoyed my relationship with CLI over the years and look forward to a long relationship with them in the future.

## National Prayer at the Prison Gate

By Tim Curington

Each year on the first Saturday in December, Christians across the country gather to pray. This is our Christmas gift to inmates. Inside and outside of prisons, people cry out in intercessory prayer for inmates, their families, their victims and families, prison personnel, and elected officials. This rally is called the National Prayer at the Prison Gate and it is the signature event of CLI as we honor God and call on Him to help those affected by the prison system.

In Raleigh, the day began with breakfast, hosted by Capital Community Church and a keynote address from NC State Senator, Bob Steinburg. Senator Steinburg challenged the audience by saying, "We should always ask God to place a hedge of protection around those who seek to protect the public at large from imminent harm. We should pray for the inmates, that God will soften their hearts to His message of faith, hope, and love. We should pray for correctional staff as they

are the ones who are putting their lives at risk day in and day out." He concluded with a word of hope for those in attendance saying, "My prayer is that those lives that you seek to touch are turned around with a brand new heart and a brand new spirit."

Patricia, a local inmate, was granted permission to attend the breakfast and gave her testimony. As a woman and mother, she inspired prayer for women who are incarcerated. "Pray that we learn our self-worth, importance, strength, and permanence with God. Pray that we learn it's okay to cry or be alone. Pray that we realize that in order to have the strength and compassion to help others, we need to have strength and compassion in God."

Groups of prayer warriors disbursed from this inspiring meeting to pray for one hour in front of correctional centers all across the Raleigh area. In addition to this, CLI partners in many other states huddled together in their churches, homes, and at prison facilities to do the same.



### Inmate Letters: Praises from Prisons

"Today is National Prayer at the Prison Gate. I sat here in my bunk and prayed. I prayed for staff and inmates, my family and friends, and for those who came to pray for us. I felt the Spirit in me the whole day. I want to thank you all for praying for us. God bless you!"  
[John, Delmont, NJ](#)

"We have a prayer circle going on in our pod every night now, and we're going to start a weekly Bible study using the CLI "Who Is God" Bible study. Pray for me that I will be able to be a light in the study group. Pray that I will accurately and boldly represent Christ and His gospel."  
[Daniel, Whiteville, TN](#)

"Dear CLI, I got half of my pod to pray with me on December 7th for National Prayer at the Prison Gate. We joined those who prayed on the outside from 10-11:00 AM."  
[Robert, Meadowview, VA](#)

"I need to express my heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the inmates for your generosity in donating free books for the inmate population."  
[Chaplain Ranney, Comstock, NY](#)

"I work as a clerk for the MacDougall Correctional Institution's chaplain, and I wanted to say thank you for the shipment of Christian books you sent to our library. Your ministry is greatly appreciated, and your books are being put to good use. The chapel's library is open to the entire yard and is a good resource for Christians of all levels of maturity. I have personally used many of the books you have sent. May the Lord richly bless your ministry."  
[William, MacDougall C.I., Ridgeville, SC](#)



# God's Grace 2019

God has been at work in prisons in 2019. His grace becomes so evident to us when we take a step back and see the growth and fruit of the work God is using each of us to accomplish. We are thankful to each of our partners, board members, and staff members who have selflessly and willingly given of their resources to propel the work of this ministry forward. Take time to praise God for His blessings as you read through these numbers:

**2,340**  
Decisions for  
Christ

**9,420**  
Inmate Letters  
Answered

**15,600**  
Bible Study  
Lessons Reviewed

**160,366**  
Christian Books  
and Bibles Sent

**17,149**  
Volunteer Hours

**\$762,567**  
Cash income

**\$1,348,220**  
Gifts-in-Kind Donations

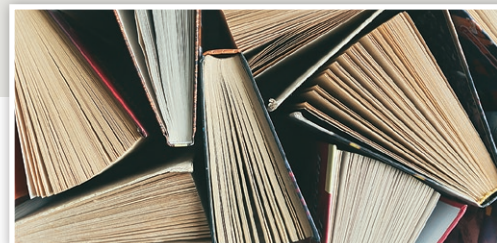
**\$2,110,787**  
Grand Total of Cash Income  
and Gifts-in-Kind Donations

## Host a Book Drive

One of the greatest ways that anyone can get involved with CLI is through hosting a book drive at their church or Christian school. Christian radio stations are also a great resource for getting the word out.

Just recently CLI was contacted by a Christian radio station in Pennsylvania who wanted to host a Bible drive, but they needed a place to send the Bibles once the drive was over. They announced to their listeners that they would be collecting used Bibles for the coming two weeks and asked donors to contribute a dollar to help with postage to mail the Bibles. CLI received over 450 Bibles from this simple initiative, and there was no cost to the radio station.

Churches can place a box and banner in their front lobbies to collect gently used Christian books and Bibles, and then ship them or drop them off to our local distribution centers in Raleigh, NC and Buford, GA.



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In recognition of our compliance with Standards of Responsible Stewardship, CLI has been accredited by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.



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