



Love
in the face
of **ISIS**

Seven Prayer Strategies for
the Crisis in the Middle East

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Chosen

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This book is dedicated to the memory of
all the courageous men, women and children
of the Middle East
who loved the Lord
and followed Jesus, even unto death—
and for their families who remain,
who love them still

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yet in all these things
we are more than conquerors
through Him who loved us.

For I am persuaded that
neither death nor life,
nor angels nor principalities nor powers,
nor things present nor things to come,
nor height nor depth,
nor any other created thing,
shall be able to separate us
from the love of God
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:35–39

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Foreword

I am honored to write a foreword for Lorraine Varela's *Love in the Face of ISIS*. One of the top reasons I am honored is that Lorraine's pastoral leader, whom I trust, was the first person to call my attention to this book. Lorraine is respected in her community of believers. That commands my respect. Another reason is Lorraine's grasp of the subject. She has visited with some of those most affected in this evil war zone and is showing us the Jesus way to respond.

From the time I picked up Lorraine's book and began to read, I was captivated by her insights into the challenges faced by those in the wake of ISIS, but I was also encouraged by her loyalty to the Word of God and the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus told us to love our enemies and to bless those who persecute us. These are not just nice words for church liturgy. Jesus is calling us to a lifestyle, a lifestyle that many of our brothers and sisters being tortured and often killed for their faith are demonstrating, and the only lifestyle that will conquer evil and call millions into the Kingdom.

Love in the Face of ISIS is a call to the war room of prayer. Jesus and His disciples constantly call us not to fear, but to walk confidently forward in faith. When disaster strikes, we are not called to gather food and guns and head for the bunker; we are to go into the storms to rescue those who are lost.

“Do not be anxious about anything,” Paul wrote from a Roman jail, “but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6 NIV). Only then does God’s peace prevail.

Not only is ISIS displaying the grossest evil on the world stage, but it is also televising some of today’s strongest saints. The Lord wants all of us to learn the lesson: Even in the midst of persecution and martyrdom, His way works! Love conquers! The apparent winner is not always the real winner. Those who have died often produce a harvest of souls. The Gospel of Jesus is more powerful than the strongest enemy. Many young Muslims are turning away from Islam and to Jesus because of the atrocities being paraded. They are turning from a god of hatred and destruction to a God of love and acceptance. Lorraine understands this and is calling the Church to move against the tide of fear and hate into the battle with love and prayer. Remember the promises! Pray for His presence—in the lives of both the killer and the killed. Pray for an increase of dreams and visions through which multiple thousands are turning to Jesus.

In Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the weeds, He told His friends that both righteousness and wickedness would ripen side by side as we move toward the final great harvest at the end of this age. Our propensity is to focus only on the rise of wickedness. Lorraine reminds us that as the bad news, the darkness, deepens, the light will grow stronger.

We Bible readers often quote the words of Revelation 12:11, that we overcome the enemy “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of [our] testimony,” but we may not always include the last phrase, “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (NIV).

If you are grieving over the victims of ISIS, read Lorraine’s book. If you are challenged by Jesus’ admonition to pray for your enemies, read Lorraine’s book. If you would like to send financial support to those suffering from the Middle East crisis, listen to Lorraine. She’s been there and knows some of the people. If you feel that your prayers need jump-starting to the next level, or if you want to have some model prayers that can be lifted to the heavens in Jesus’ name, read and respond to Lorraine’s call to action.

Don Finto, founder and director emeritus, Caleb Company;
author, *Your People Shall Be My People*

Acknowledgments

This book was a miracle in the making from start to finish. I am delighted to give credit where credit is due! And so, with heartfelt appreciation, I say “Thank you” to:

My husband, Gabriel, who has supported me through every step of this process, from the beginning of this assignment to our unforgettable journey through Jordan—you caught the vision and made it your own. This book is the fruit of your efforts as well.

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My prayer team, family, Pastors Hylan and Rita Slobodkin and Beit Tikvah community, who constantly encouraged me through prayers and words of life. I cherished every word.

My beloved Jesus, for depositing Your book into my spirit and making my heart like Yours.

Introduction

Why Love?

Love in the face of ISIS.

This phrase seemed to come out of nowhere as it connected deeply with my spirit. A moment earlier I had been focused on worship, surrounded by my congregation as we sang to the Lord. I knew immediately it was a word from God—and I knew it was to be His title for this book.

It was a hard word to receive. The very premise assaulted my emotions with the conflict it presented and the answer it implied. I began to pray and ask the Lord why He chose these words for the title.

Instead He asked me, “What is love? *Who* is love?”

It was then I realized the significance of these words.

God, who is not only the source of love but who *is* love, inserted Himself into this conflict by directing my attention back to Him. As I substituted His character attribute of love with His name, the title read *God in the face of ISIS*.

That is powerful!

Setting Your Eyes on Jesus

As you begin to take up this assignment to pray over the crisis in the Middle East, it is crucial that you keep your eyes focused on the One who is Love, and not let your heart become weighed down by the horrific forces of evil. Through prayer, you are able to assume an offensive position to defeat the enemy as you come into agreement with the purposes of God—the God of love, of mercy and of justice.

God reveals Himself through His various names and titles throughout Scripture to direct your attention to His character. Each name and title complements the others to give deeper insight as you discover the nature of the One you serve. Here are a few of the ways He makes Himself known through His name:

The LORD Is There (see Ezekiel 48:35)

The LORD of Hosts (see Isaiah 47:4)

The LORD Is My Shepherd (see Psalm 23:1)

The LORD Is My Banner (see Exodus 17:15)

The LORD Will Provide (see Genesis 22:14)

The LORD Who Heals (see Exodus 15:26)

The LORD Is Peace (see Judges 6:24)

Each one of these attributes is meaningful and necessary as you use your authority as a believer to pray over the situation in the Middle East. In chapters 3 through 9, you will find strategic guidelines on how to pray through these seven names of God and release His purposes to meet the needs of those who have been—and those who are—persecuted for the sake of the cross.

God also manifests Himself through His Son, Jesus, who is God incarnate, God in the flesh. Each name and title of

God was fulfilled in the life of Jesus when He came to earth. Scripture reveals Jesus as:

God with Us (see Isaiah 7:14)

The Power of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:24)

The Good Shepherd (see John 10:11)

The Deliverer (see Romans 11:26)

The Bread of Life (see John 6:35)

The Resurrection and the Life (see John 11:25)

The Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6)

It is through the name of Jesus that God comes to bring life to all who will call upon Him. His name brings light to darkness, setting captives free. His name is majestic in all the earth, and His name is Lord of all.

The name of Jesus is the name above every other name—*far* above the name of ISIS.

Who Is ISIS?

On June 10, 2014, ISIS—the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—stormed onto the world stage through its hostile takeover of Mosul, Iraq, a city of more than one and a half million people. As jihadists, with their black flags, advanced on the city, the Iraqi army turned and fled for its life, leaving behind an arsenal of weaponry and military machinery as spoils for the militants as well as a city wide open for a brutal attack. By the end of the day, the borders of Mosul were flooded with 150,000 people attempting desperately to leave the city and find safety¹—numbers that would grow rapidly, as more than 600,000 people took flight.²

This was just the beginning of the torment and chaos. Within the month, the Islamic extremists targeted the Christian population of Mosul, demanding that believers convert to Islam and pay a religious tax (called *jizya*) for alleged protection to stay, or else leave the city and thereby forfeit everything they owned. Christians who refused these options “will have nothing left but the sword,” read the ISIS statement, a threat made by letter that was also broadcast via loudspeakers from mosques for the people to hear.³

To mark Christian-held property, an Arabic letter that stands for the word Nazarene (*Nasrani* is a pejorative term in Arabic for *Christian*) was spray-painted onto the homes and businesses of those known to believe in Jesus.⁴ With the deadline for the ultimatum fast approaching, most Christians who had initially remained in Mosul now chose to flee. Some fled on foot to the nearest town of Qaraqosh eighteen miles away, many with just the clothes on their backs.⁵

It was not always this way.

Christianity thrived in Iraq for two thousand years, ever since the apostle Thomas arrived to bring the good news of the Gospel to the people of this historic, biblical region. Iraq—home of the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia and later the Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms—was the birthplace of Abraham, the land of exile for Ezekiel and Daniel, and the mission field of Jonah the prophet who brought God’s message of repentance to Nineveh, now known as the city of Mosul.

It is in Iraq that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow with life, and it is there that one day a highway will be built for the Egyptians and Assyrians to worship the Lord, joining with Israel to be a blessing in the earth (see Isaiah

19:23–25). Israel is the only nation that has more biblical history and prophecy recorded in Scripture than the nation of Iraq.⁶

But within this land of future peace and unity, recent decades have witnessed unimagined violence. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has not concealed its desire to rid the Middle East of Christians and the influence of Christianity. By doing so it is following in the footsteps of successful campaigns, including pogroms, that have purged many Middle Eastern nations of their Jewish populations. In 1948 Iraq had a vibrant Jewish population numbering 150,000. By 2013 fewer than a dozen aging Iraqi Jews remained. Most traces of Jewish people living in Iraq have all but disappeared.⁷

In the same way, in 1947 Iraq had a thriving population of some 4.7 million Christians. At the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the Christian population was estimated at 1.5 million people. By 2013 that number had dwindled to 300,000. Since ISIS swarmed in to establish its self-proclaimed caliphate in June 2014, a record 125,000 Christians fled within the first twelve months, leaving only an estimated 175,000 Christians. And their numbers continue to decrease.

It is not just Christians who are targeted, however. Within the borders of Iraq and Syria, ISIS continues to persecute, torture and kill those of any faith that do not adhere to its extreme ideology—including other Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.

In August 2014 more than 35,000 Yazidi people—a religious minority group that blends elements of Christianity, Islam and the ancient Persian faith of Zoroastrianism—were forced to flee to Mount Sinjar or face slaughter by ISIS troops.⁸ ISIS massacred more than two thousand men through

horrific deaths on the mountain, while many of the women and girls were forcibly taken as wives and slaves. It was a humanitarian crisis that drew the world's shocked attention to ISIS once again.

The swift mobilization of ISIS has given a clue to its deeper roots. This new enemy has been revealed as the resurgence of an old adversary: al Qaeda. That earlier terrorist regime, led by Osama bin Laden, struck fear in the hearts of Americans with the attacks of September 11, 2001, killing nearly three thousand people and catapulting America into a decade-long war on terror.

ISIS has, in fact, changed the face of terrorism. Determined to establish an Islamic caliphate—territory dominated by the spiritual head of Islam and Muhammad's successor—ISIS has utilized highly visible acts of barbaric violence, doubling as a recruitment tactic to attract a flood of new jihadists, many from foreign countries.⁹ Through its brazen declaration on June 29, 2014—"The Caliphate is established!"—ISIS accomplished what other radical Islamic factions had only dreamed to do, thereby demanding the allegiance of Muslims worldwide.¹⁰

ISIS, the richest terrorist organization in history,¹¹ promotes its own brand of utopian society through media-savvy propaganda, keeping its goal firmly in sight: to cleanse the world of all who disagree with its ideology.

Love Overcomes Evil

Twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians were marched to their deaths in February 2015. Hooded ISIS captors cloaked in black led the Christian men dressed in orange jumpsuits, hands bound behind their backs, along the sandy beach at

the ocean's edge. Their gruesome executions were captured on a video that carried these words: "A Message in Blood to the Nation of the Cross." The kingdom of darkness was sending a challenge to the Kingdom of light. And as with the kingdom conflict culminating two thousand years ago in Calvary's cross, darkness thought that it had won.

The ISIS message was strong in images and in words—a message rooted in deception, justifying the beheadings of Christians who "have been carrying the cross delusion for a long time, filled with spite against Islam and Muslims."¹² If these captors had known the One who is Love, they would have recognized that to their last breaths these people of the cross lived out a very different message—a message Jesus taught them: to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute you. A message that love is stronger than hate, that good overcomes evil.

Darkness did not win. It was at the cross that Jesus disarmed principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them (see Colossians 2:15). Love triumphed over death. Love triumphs still. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

What is love? Love is giving. Love is serving. Love is sharing with those in need. Love is carrying someone else's burden as you lift that one up in prayer. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Love is an active, tangible demonstration of God's heart on display.

As love comes to stand in the face of ISIS, you can partner with the purposes of God. Love your brothers and sisters as

you carry their burdens in prayer before the Lord and help financially to meet their tangible needs. But also love your enemies, as you pray that they might know the Love that is coming after them.

Love wins.