

Eritrean Christian Escapes Imprisonment

Discrimination.

Harassment. Torture.

Depending on

which estimates you believe, at least 200 million Christians around the world

are enduring some form of persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ.

One such

Christian—we'll call him "Benji"—just escaped Eritrea, an African country where

Christian persecution is common. Benji is a staff member for Strategic World Impact, an international missions organization headquartered in

Oklahoma. The 23-year-old now holds refugee status in a neighboring country.

"For

over three years Benji faced incredible suffering as a result of his faith,"

says Kevin Turner, president of Strategic

World Impact. "Beatings, mock executions, and food

and water deprivation were common during his ordeal, along with his captors

often demanding him to renounce his faith in Christ."

Benji

was arrested and jailed in deplorable conditions, which included confinement in

metal shipping containers and caves with metal bars placed at the entrances.

Benji survived off of two pieces of bread and one cup of tea per day. He lived in tight quarters with nearly 300 other men, some of whom died in the face of harsh conditions.

Benji eventually fled the country by foot, enduring Africa's searing heat and deadly hyenas. Strategic World Impact found him in a nearby country. He was treated for typhus, malaria and severe malnutrition.

Located just north of Ethiopia, Eritrea has a documented history of persecuting religious minorities, in a country where only four religious groups—Islam, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Evangelical Church of Eritrea—are formally recognized by the government. Christians of other denominations, particularly evangelical Christians, regularly face discrimination and even imprisonment.

Turner, who has testified before the United States Congress several times about persecution and human rights violations around the world, says that Benji's story is not uncommon. Strategic World Impact is currently working on his release to assist him in beginning a new life.