

What Every Christian Can Learn From ORU Grad's Death on Mission Field

Major U. S. stock indices had the worst Thanksgiving week since 2011. For the week, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 4.4 percent, the S&P 500 index fell 3.8 percent and the Nasdaq fell 4.3 percent. Oil prices fell sharply, with the U. S. benchmark falling to \$ per barrel (down 10.8 percent for the week and 16.6 percent year-to-date).

Continued weakness in the tech sector led the general stock market fall. The FAANG stocks (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google-Alphabet) moved into bear market territory by falling more than 20 percent below their highs. Concern about a weakening global economy, a strong U. S. dollar, China and higher interest rates in the U. S. added fuel to the fire. More analysts are believing the U. S. economy is slowing (not contracting) because of these concerns.

Market sentiment is fear-driven and is becoming increasingly disconnected from the current economy. CNN business has created a Fear & Greed Index which attempts to measure the amount of fear and greed in the markets. The index is currently indicating extreme fear. Of the seven components, only market volatility is neutral. The other six components (stock price strength, safe haven demand, put and call options, stock price breadth, junk bond demand and market momentum) are all signaling extreme fear.

In emotional markets, courageous, rational decision-making can pay dividends. Unfounded or exaggerated fear creates buying opportunities. Unfounded or exaggerated greed presents selling opportunities. Wise investors will evaluate their current portfolios, keep their shopping carts handy and take

courageous and rational decisions when justified.

These are extraordinary times. A recent Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) report indicated that 327 million Christians live in countries where they face persecution for their faith and another 178 million face discrimination—505 millions of our brothers and sisters. Sixty-one percent of the world's population live in countries where religious freedom is obstructed or denied.

Thirty-eight countries were found to have significant religious freedom violations. About half of these countries fell in the “persecution” category and half fell in the less severe “discrimination” category. Religious freedom violations became worst in about half of the countries. The only countries improving were Syria and Iraq with the significant weakening of ISIS.

We, our families, our churches, our communities, our nations and the world need courageous and Spirit empowered-followers of Christ who are willing to model and share our Savior's love, regardless of the consequences. The early church grew from a mere 120 disciples to worldwide influence because of courageous, consecrated and empowered disciples.

Much of the world was saddened with the news that a courageous young man by the name of John Allen Chau had been martyred attempting to share the love of Christ with an unreached people group. He was a graduate of Oral Roberts University. John had a heart to reach the people of North Sentinel Island with the gospel.

The people of North Sentinel are primitive and known to be very hostile to outsiders. Some fishermen who accidentally drifted ashore in 2006 were killed. The exact numbers on the island aren't known for sure, but estimates range from 50-100. As a people, they have never accepted anyone outside of their community.

Dangers and relatively small numbers of people did not deter John. In his last letter to his parents, he wrote, "You guys might think I'm crazy in all this," and "But I think it's worth it to declare Jesus to these people." In his first attempt to reach the people of North Sentinel, he was approached by armed natives, with bows and arrows at the ready, as he shouted, "My name is John, I love you, and Jesus loves you." His first attempt was not successful. His journals indicate that he was scared and didn't want to die, but he still returned. In his last communication, he wrote "Please do not be angry at them or at God if I get killed." John planted seed with the North Sentinel people. His story of courage and sacrifice will inspire millions.

The apostle Peter faced a test of courage. Jesus had been arrested and taken to the house of the high priest. Peter was in the courtyard to see what would happen. He was asked three times if he had been with Jesus, and three times he denied it. When the rooster crowed, Jesus turned around and looked at him. Peter went outside and wept bitterly (Luke 22:54-62).

But that was not the end of the story. After the crucifixion and the resurrection, but before Christ returned to the Father, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received power from on high (Acts 1:4-8). Immediately after Pentecost, Peter gave a sermon where he boldly laid the responsibility for the blood of Christ (their messiah) on the people—3,000 were converted (Acts 2:14-41).

Shortly thereafter, Peter and John were entering the temple, when they healed a lame beggar in the name of Jesus. The commotion caused quite a stir, and they were arrested. Appearing before the same Sanhedrin which had caused the Lord to be crucified, they boldly declared that they would continue to teach and speak about Jesus. Before the same people where the courage of Peter had failed a few weeks earlier, he was boldly declaring Jesus. They were released. What happened? The disciples had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and were

endowed with courage.

Not satisfied, Peter wanted more boldness. Upon release, he and John went to their companions and prayed for boldness, healings and signs and wonders. In response, the earth shook, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness (courage).

We might not be called to witness to the people of North Sentinel or the Sanhedrin, but we are called. The people of our churches are called. We all have influence with some, but do we have the consecration? Do we have the courage? Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone? Are we willing to obey our Lord, regardless of consequences? {eoa}

Dr. James Russell *is a professor of economics at Oral Roberts University.*