

Intense Demonic Battle Meets Gospel in Central Asia

Lizzie Francis* huddled in the back seat and watched as the gang formed around the pickup truck.

She clutched her friends' two toddlers as one of the men, flanked by his brothers, got out a gun and waved it at his neighbor, yelling obscenities and threatening to end his life.

The neighbor had been parked in the street in his way when his family came back from a picnic in the countryside. At the picnic, Lizzie had been their guest for the day, for the eating, laughing, dancing ... and now gun-slinging.

"They are incredibly hospitable," Lizzie said of the people in the Central Asian city where she lives. "But the darkness is under the surface all the time, just waiting to come out."

As she prayed over the little boys, one of the sisters—Lizzie's closest friend in the city—swiped her brother's gun and slipped it quickly into Lizzie's hands.

"Hide this," her friend said. "He won't come after you if you have it."

They wouldn't dare hurt a guest.

She slipped it in her purse and turned to head toward the house.

And as she did, he tackled her friend facedown in the muddy street just behind her, beating her with his fists over and over and over.

"I could only watch as it happened. I didn't know what to do," Lizzie said. "They need **Jesus** so desperately. Until they know Him, they will never know how to love even their own family."

Alex Franklin*, who lives among the same people group, said it's like tea—the people have been steeped in darkness for so long that they can't become pure water without a miracle.

“Islam has had a stronghold in the culture there for 1,400 years. If you've been told a lie long enough and loud enough, you eventually believe it,” he said. “But even more of a stronghold than the religion is the culture—it tries to stifle and shut out anyone who speaks the truth.”

Some days the darkness presses on Lizzie so hard she literally feels a weight on her chest.

Some days it manifests itself in other ways.

“We went recently to visit a woman who was genuinely asking questions about the gospel—something that rarely happens here. While I was trying to share, her children were acting so badly—being violent and unruly in a way that we knew was much more than just misbehavior,” Lizzie said.

After a lot of struggling, the 5-year-old son sank his teeth into Lizzie's friend Jane* as she was playing with him. She rested her hand on his shoulder and prayed over him silently.

“I **prayed** in Jesus' name for whatever was in him to get out. And right as I finished praying that, without saying a word out loud, he turned slowly and glared at me, as if he knew exactly what I was praying,” Jane said.

Alex said the believers who live there know that wherever they go, the darkness will lash out.

“We don't have the home-field advantage here, so we expect the crowd to be whooping and hollering against us,” he said. “We take faith in knowing that He has won the victory.”

The move of the gospel among the people of that city is slow and hasn't been going for very long, Alex said. “The darkness is smothering sometimes. It's also physically hard on people

who come here to share—many in the past died of diseases. And the mothers often struggle emotionally until they break, because culturally they are kept in the house much of the time.”

Lizzie, Alex and several others have shared the **gospel** over and over and over. Few show interest. One friend who has heard Bible stories until she knows them by memory will seemingly get close to believing, then back away, Lizzie said.

“She will ask questions and read the Word even to the point of exposing herself to persecution from others,” Lizzie said. “But then she’ll ask me not to talk about Jesus in front of her, because she sees flames in front of my face when I do. There’s a real battle going on for her soul.”

And for the souls of the others there, but God is winning the victory, she said.

As Lizzie and others share, some hear and do believe. Some have given everything to Jesus and been forsaken by their families, imprisoned or even murdered.

“Jane and I were invited recently to the home of some friends. The husband is a believer, but the wife is not,” Lizzie said. “It wasn’t long before we realized a normal visit wasn’t what she had in mind.”

In front of the two guests, and in front of her own children, the wife began to berate the husband for his faith in Jesus.

“With a crazy, demonic look in her eyes, she forced him to say that he followed Jesus while she recorded his confession,” Lizzie said. “Then she turned to him and said, ‘I hope you die the same kind of death as this Jesus that you love.’”

It’s dark there, but faith persists, Alex said.

“Our encouragement is Scripture—we know that some day people from every nation, tribe and tongue, including these people,

will praise Him around the throne,” Alex said. “God is calling people out. It just is taking a while.”

**Names have been changed.*

Ava Thomas *is a writer/editor for the International Mission Board based in Europe.*