

## FEBRUARY 2022

***11 And they overcame and conquered him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, for they did not love their life and renounce their faith even when faced with death.***

### ***Revelation 12:11***

Dear Friends,

Deeply moved by the events surrounding the 9/11 attacks, the Groenewald family from our church in Pretoria, South Africa, moved to Kabul in Afghanistan in 2003. Dad Werner, formerly one of our pastors, established a humanitarian organization called Partnership in Academics and Development (PAD) while Mom Hannelie, a medical doctor, worked at a clinic in Kabul. Despite being aware of the danger of raising their two children, Jean-Pierre, then five, and Rodé, then three, in a region dominated by the Taliban, the Groenewalds believed that they had received a clear calling from God. For the next eleven years the family faithfully served the Afghan people with the love of the Lord. Werner taught English and offered leadership and community training courses. Hannelie was completely devoted to her patients, most of them women and children.

The authorities had received information that the Taliban planned an attack somewhere in Kabul on November 29, 2014 – they were though uncertain of the exact target. Dr Hannelie and several other doctors from her clinic were asked to be on standby at a UN meeting in the city which could possibly be the target of the Taliban attack.

At home on this Saturday afternoon, Werner was gathered in the basement with several Afghan Christians, while Jean-Pierre (17) and Rodé (15), were keeping themselves busy in their bedrooms in the upper story of their home. It was then that three heavily armed Taliban insurgents swept into the house, killing, and destroying as far as they went. They set the house ablaze destroying all the family's documents and other possessions. A four-hour battle between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces ensued.

In the meantime, Hannelie arrived in their neighborhood to discover that none other than their own home was the Taliban target. She hid away in the basement of her neighbors until the fighting died down after which she had to watch the bullet-ridden bodies of Werner, Jean-Pierre and Rodé being carried out of their house. Two Afghans had also been killed and several injured.

Without any travel documents, Hannelie could not leave Kabul. She was also not prepared to leave without the bodies of her loved ones. Not receiving the necessary help from the authorities, this brave woman of God had no other choice to do the embalming of her loved ones' bodies herself.

The family and their home church asked me act as spokesperson – time and time again when I related the story to the media, I teared up, being so aware of the terrible loss Hannelie and their extended families had suffered!

More than a week later, after Hannelie managed to acquire emergency travel documents and made sure that the arrangements for the repatriation of her family's bodies had been made, I met up with Hannelie in Istanbul to travel home with her. She was still wearing the same clothes as on the day of the attack. Words escaped me when I saw her – nothing that I had ever sacrificed could compare to the loss she had suffered!

A month before his death, Werner spoke at a conference on the subject of 'Counting the Cost for Christ'. He ended it by saying, "**We die only once. We might as well die for Jesus.**"

Hannelie later said: *"I don't think that we will ever know 100% what the impact is that we made in Afghanistan through the years. I think that we will know that one day, though, when we are in front of the Lord. But I believe that we made an impact on people's lives. I believe, also, that **my family's blood that was shed, is like the seed for the Afghan church and that there will be a thousand-fold harvest in the end, because I believe God has the last move.**"*

In Revelation 12 the Apostle John relates his vision of the war that broke out in heaven – Michael the archangel and his angels waging war with the dragon (Satan). In verse 9 we read that the great dragon was thrown down on earth and his angels with him. In verse 11 John explains what was required for this to happen: <sup>11</sup> **And they overcame and conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, for they did not love their life and renounce their faith even when faced with death".**

Today there are many more like the Groenewalds – Afghan Christians that are still trapped in Afghanistan as well hundreds who have managed to flee and are now stranded in neighboring countries. The World Watch list of Open Doors now rates Afghanistan as the most dangerous place on earth for Christians. For us to have any hope of overcoming Satan, **we need Christians who do not love their lives and renounce their faith even when faced with death.** We cannot claim that we did not know of them, neither may we be indifferent to their plight!

Our advocates in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan have made themselves available to assist with travel documents and the like. It is unfortunately always a costly business when visa fees and travel costs are involved. I appeal to you to please give towards defraying these costs. **We owe it to those who don't waver in their faith when faced with death!**

Warmly in Christ



Teresa Conradie  
President and CEO, Advocates International

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