

# Jesus Freaks

Stories of those who stood for JESUS:  
the ultimate Jesus Freaks



dc Talk  
and The Voice of the Martyrs

REVISED and UPDATED EDITION

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**Stories of Those  
Who Stood for Jesus,  
the Ultimate Jesus Freaks**

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**and The Voice of the Martyrs**



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**Dedicated to . . .**

**all those who  
refused to  
deny Jesus Christ  
and counted the cost  
to share the gospel  
on some of the world's  
most dangerous  
mission fields.**

**Your witness  
was not in vain.**



## A Message from Michael Tait

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*“What will people think?” That’s the phrase that crept up on all of us when the album Jesus Freak was coming together. That phrase crystallizes our fear of being different. Everyone has this need to be a part of something, to be included. The very nature of Jesus Freaks is to thrust away from the mob mentality, away from the things that society tells us to care about. And that can be scary. “What will people think if I’m different? What will they think if my opinion is weird? Who will like me if I stand out?” But every time I stand back and look at the bigger picture, I see a little of what God sees. I see the potential to make a difference. And I get the courage to break away from the crowd.*

When you open up this book, you will learn about some of the biggest Jesus Freaks of all time: those who stood out from the crowd enough to be called *martyrs*. If Jesus was willing to give His life for me, and if these people, these martyrs, were willing to give up their lives for Him, how much does it take for me to truly dedicate my days on earth to Him?

Our mission may not involve hanging on a cross, being jailed, or being burned at the stake here in America, but we have other, more invisible obstacles. Ours is a society built by pride, materialism, and dedication to the status quo. In a world built on free will instead of God’s will, we must be the Freaks. While we may not be called to martyr our lives, we must martyr our way of





life. We must put our selfish ways to death and march to a different beat. Then the world will see Jesus.

That's why I know the answer to my question, "What will people think?" They may think I'm weird. They may think I'm fascinating. But I don't really care. My life is God's. I've crossed the line from innocent bystander to hard-core participant in what Jesus has called me to.

What will people think? I hope, whatever I do, it makes them think of Jesus.





## A Message from Toby McKeehan

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*Galileo. DaVinci. William Shakespeare. Martin Luther. John the Baptist. These are the strange ones who challenged society with a different way of thinking. They were the rebels and heretics of their day. But if history is told correctly, no man has caused the worldwide stir that Jesus Christ did two thousand years ago. So many people today portray Jesus as weak, the out-of-date artifact hanging on a church wall or in a stained-glass window hoping for a brighter day. But Jesus was the nonconformist of all time. He took the conventions of religion, tradition, and love and turned them upside down. He faced the political and religious leaders of His day and spoke truths they had never heard before. He walked in our world as the human voice of God.*

When I think of the boldest leaders and thinkers of our world, I believe Jesus stood above them all. He changed everything, and, by sacrificing His life, He changed the way I look at my fellowman. He is the one true reason I have a relationship with God. The more I learn about Him, the more I am drawn to Him and His ways. In a world that consists of fake lives and false promises, Jesus is authentic, and He died on the cross to prove it.

Real faith in Jesus seems to make people uncomfortable. Even in the open-minded artistic world, lyrics about faith in Jesus can be considered offensive. I guess that's what the world calls a "Freak"—someone who



commits to something wholeheartedly, without apology or compromise.

When our days on this planet are done, what will we be remembered for? That we had a nice car? That we made lots of money or became famous? Sometimes I have to struggle to keep my eyes set on the things of God rather than the things of man. But no matter how much I stumble, God's love is constant and it's His love that gives me the strength to stand up for Him.

For some, standing up for Jesus actually means dying for Him. In John 15:13 Jesus says, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*" (ESV). That's why we decided to title this book about martyrs *Jesus Freaks*. In its pages you will read story after story about those who would not compromise or apologize for their faith in Jesus Christ, even if it meant going to prison, being tortured, or facing death. These are the people who are changing our world by refusing to lay aside their relationship with Jesus for the mere sake of being accepted by the crowd. Such "Freaks" are the visionaries of our day.

My hope is that through their stories you will desire to know more about the man Jesus who has inspired such strength and courage for thousands of years.





## A Message from Kevin Max

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*The words Jesus Freak were first coined in the late sixties, when hippies became part of a new revival, the Jesus Movement. It was a time when music, poetry, and an open expression for Jesus Christ turned a new generation on to God. It merged rock and roll with the gospel message, a wave we're still riding today known as contemporary Christian Music. It infused the church with the arts. It shook up conventional worship. And, due to its "in your face" approach, it had a backlash. The rest of the world called these overzealous young people "Jesus Freaks" as a derogatory term. But decades later a new generation is embracing that same passion for expression.*

Being a Jesus Freak is having a passionate heart for Jesus, a willingness to extend that passion into all areas of life, be it poetry, music, art, or the hard choices made at life's crossroads. The lineage of Jesus Freaks actually extends much further back into history than the sixties. Many devoted followers through the centuries gave a new definition to the word *commitment* when they put their homes, their families, and even their lives on the line. Their love for Jesus was bigger than life itself. When I read their stories, I can't help but think of my own choices, my own commitments, and how much I owe to those courageous individuals.

Jesus Freaks are more than hippie kids and rock and roll. They are the dedicated followers of Jesus Christ who place His name above any other need or desire. And as



a Jesus Freak, I stand with thousands of martyrs around the world today who still face persecution because Jesus means more to them than their own lives or comfort.





## A Message from The Voice of the Martyrs

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*Jesus Freaks see things differently.*

When a million Communist troops descended on Romania to “liberate” the people in August 1944, most of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand’s fellow countrymen saw an invading enemy army. They despised the Russian soldiers who had occupied their homeland, robbing and raping as they advanced.

*But Richard and Sabina saw things differently.\**

Instead of an invading army, they saw an answer to their prayers. Richard had asked God to send him as a missionary to Russia, but with the soldiers arriving in his country, he could be a missionary to Russia without even having to travel. He and Sabina, along with bold members of their church, waited at train stations for the Russian soldiers to arrive. They were ready to greet the young men in their own language and offer them a welcome gift—the gospel of John in Russian!

Soon after the soldiers arrived, Richard, Sabina, and other religious leaders from all over Romania were invited to the so-called Congress of the Cults, a propaganda display to co-opt religious leaders into supporting the Communist party. Communist officials wanted to convince everyone that religion and the atheistic Communist party could and should work *together*.

Seeing an opportunity to appease their new rulers and maintain their positions of influence, bishops and pastors one by one offered words of praise for the Communist leaders. Some went so far as to say that Communism

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\* Read their full story on page 77.



and Christianity are fundamentally the same thing and can easily coexist.

*But Richard and Sabina saw things differently.*

Sabina told Richard to stand up and wipe the shame from the face of Christ.

“If I do that,” he told her quietly, “you won’t have a husband.”

“I do not wish to have a coward for a husband,” she shot back.

When Richard stood and began to speak, his words weren’t what the Communist leaders expected to hear. He challenged Christians to put Christ ahead of loyalty to any earthly government or party—to be *Jesus Freaks*. He told them to preach the true, eternal gospel of Jesus Christ, whether it was in or out of favor with the day’s authorities.

The Communists quickly cut power to his microphone, and Richard slipped out of the room. But from that day on, he was a marked man. His faithfulness and boldness later cost him a total of fourteen years in prison.

Even in prison, however, Richard proved that *Jesus Freaks see things differently*.

Richard prayed for the men who tortured him and willingly accepted beatings for preaching in prison. “We were happy preaching the gospel, and they were happy beating us,” he would later say. “So everyone was happy.” Richard even used the chains on his hands as musical instruments, making a joyful noise to the Lord while in solitary confinement and while suffering with tuberculosis, knowing each breath could be his last on this earth.



Although Sabina was repeatedly told that her husband had died in prison, she never believed it. She always held out hope that they would be reunited, which they eventually were. Finally, in 1965, a group of Christians in Norway paid the Romanian government a \$10,000 ransom to let the Wurmbrands leave the country for good. And two years later they founded what would become The Voice of the Martyrs.

*As you commit to being a Jesus Freak, you are committing to see things differently.* You are committing to see “enemies” as people Jesus died for and who need to hear about His love. You are committing to see obstacles as opportunities for God to shape you and for God to advance His kingdom through you.

There is good news for you as you begin this spiritual adventure: Others have walked this path ahead of you. From Peter, who was crucified upside down in Rome, to those laying down their lives to reach Muslims in modern-day Afghanistan, their stories are here. The pages of this book share hard-earned truths from bold fellow travelers among our spiritual family—truths that will enable you to boldly tread the path of your own Jesus Freak journey.

It won't be easy. But Jesus—the Author and Finisher of our faith—will *always* be with you. Pray often, as Eli-sha prayed for his servant, that God will *open your eyes* and give you courage to act boldly on what you see. (See 2 Kings 6:17.)

Pray that you'll see every situation in your life differently, *as a Jesus Freak sees.*





**mar•tyr** *noun* \mär-tər\

[from the Greek word for “witness”]

1. One who chooses to suffer death rather than to deny Jesus Christ or His work.
2. One who bears testimony to the truth of what he has seen or heard or knows, as in a witness in a court of justice.
3. One who sacrifices something very important to further the kingdom of God.
4. One who endures severe or constant suffering for their Christian witness.
5. A Jesus Freak.



# Is Following Jesus



## Is Jesus Worth It?

The question is a simple one: *Is following Jesus worth it?*

Jesus told us that it would always be costly to follow Him. He told His disciples, “*I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. . . . You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them*” (Matthew 10:16, 18 ESV). Our Christian heritage includes an unbroken chain of those who have paid the price to be Jesus Freaks from the book of Acts until today.

Following Jesus could cost you your popularity. It could cost you your job. It could cost you your standing in society and in your community. Your family and friends may turn their backs on you. You could be squeezed out of opportunities—sent continually to the back of the line, so to speak—because of your faith. Following Jesus could mean you’d have to give up everything including the clothes on your back.

And it has cost many their lives.

Jesus described the cost of following Him with these words:

*“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. . . . If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Jesus

(MARK 8:34–35, 38)



Is Jesus worth it? It's a question millions around the world face every day, and it's a question we all need to know how to answer.

To do that, we also need to know what it looks like to follow Jesus every . . . single . . . day.

## **Why Do You Follow Jesus?**

He knelt praying in the middle of the night in a garden where He and His friends often went. He had told His friends, "Pray that you don't fall into temptation." His prayer was, "Father, if You are willing, let this cup pass from Me. But if this must happen, I will obey Your will." And then He prayed more earnestly. His sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Soon soldiers came to take Him. He was betrayed by a close friend into their hands. The gospel of John tells us that the guards asked for "Jesus of Nazareth." When He answered, "I am He," they were knocked to the ground by the power of His confession. Peter, another friend, tried to rescue Him by attacking one of the high priest's servants and cutting off his ear. But Jesus rebuked Peter for his action, healed the servant's ear, and submitted Himself to the soldiers. He could have easily escaped, but He chose to be obedient to His Father's will instead.

He was taken before the high priest, where He was questioned and beaten. Then He was sent before the local governor to be tried. The priests demanded He be crucified because He had declared He was God. He was questioned again, but the governor could find no guilt in Him. Still, the others called for His crucifixion. The governor sent Him out to be whipped, hoping to appease the priests.



The rest of the morning He was whipped and beaten beyond recognition. A robe was placed over His bleeding back, left until the lacerations dried to the cloth, and then it was ripped from His shoulders, reopening the wounds. Then they draped it over Him to begin the process again. They mocked Him as king of the Jews and made a crown of one-inch thorns, forcing it onto His head until the blood covered His face.

Again, He was brought before the governor. This time he didn't ask the Pharisees and Sadducees, but he put it to the people, hoping they would show mercy on this innocent man. But the crowd called back, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" The governor washed his hands of the matter and turned Jesus of Nazareth over to the Roman guards for execution.

Jesus bore the weight of His own cross upon the torn flesh of His back and shoulders as He stumbled up the hill outside of the city. He was then nailed to that cross, raised up for all to see, and left there to die. The book of Matthew tells us He could have called twelve legions of angels to free Himself, but He didn't. He knew His sacrifice would pay the price for all mankind to be set free from sin and have the right to stand with God.

He was buried in a borrowed tomb, but didn't stay there long. On the third day He was resurrected from the dead, the keys of hell and death in His hands. He had paved the way for us to be born again, to become children of God, and to live forever with Him.

Immediately following His death, His friends and disciples were greatly afraid and hid. But after His resurrection, Jesus came and visited them, comforting and encouraging them. After He ascended to heaven, on the day of Pentecost, He gave them the Holy Spirit. A new boldness rose up within



them. Jerusalem saw 3,000 converted on the first day. Then they spread to the corners of the earth to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, no longer afraid. Every one of them except John was executed for proclaiming the name of Jesus.

They never denied His name again.

*Heroes. Brave men and women who lay down their lives for someone else.*

*The athlete who scores the winning goal after years of training, discipline, and teamwork.*

*The firefighter who runs into a burning building to save a life.*

*The soldier who goes to the front lines of battle to protect our freedoms.*

*They are heroes who should be appreciated and valued.*

*But there is another category of heroes we may have overlooked: What about those who are willing to risk their lives and livelihoods so that others might know Jesus?*

*Every day, believers around the world submit their lives to the lordship of Christ, being salt and light wherever God leads them. They are willing to sacrifice everything—even their lives—so that others may know Jesus. They are the witnesses, and many have paid the ultimate price for it.*

*Most of the martyrs in this book could have saved their own lives if they had been willing to deny Jesus Christ or simply been quiet about Him. We may wonder, “Why didn’t they just deny Him and ask for forgiveness later?” or “Couldn’t they have just kept their faith to themselves?” or “Why did they have to endure so much suffering?”*



*Jesus said, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).*

*In ways that aren’t always obvious, these martyrs—these Jesus Freaks—have heroically laid down their lives for us.*

## **Did They Have to Die?**

Standing before King Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proclaimed,

*“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”*

Daniel 3:16–18 ESV

Live or die, they would not deny their faith. They were obedient, faithful witnesses.

In the last chapter of John, Jesus told Peter that he would die a martyr’s death someday. When Peter saw John standing behind Jesus, he asked, “Master, what’s going to happen to him?”

Jesus said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me!” (John 21:22).

*The purpose of this book is not to try to explain away the deaths of the martyrs and those who have been persecuted for their witness, but to honor their conviction, commitment, and faith—and to build yours.*





*Each of us must choose to follow Jesus for ourselves. You may never have to face the decision of whether to die for your faith, but every day you face the decision of whether you will live it as a witness for Jesus.*

## **What About the Persecutors?**

When we read stories of persecution, anger and a desire for “justice” can creep into our hearts and minds. We so love our global brothers and sisters that we may even experience a feeling of hatred toward the persecutors. But this was never how Jesus saw things.

Jesus said, “Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!” (Matthew 5:44). On the cross He said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

*As you read the stories in this book, you will see a recurring theme: These men and women of God were more concerned with saving their torturers than their own lives. God has not called us to hate those who do evil, but to pray for them and bring them into His family as our brothers and sisters.*

## **Seeing It God's Way**

Some deaths seem senseless—but God sees things differently than we do. As Tertullian, a leader in the early church, said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

*Some have been tortured because they refused to betray those who worked with them.*

*Some have stood firm, knowing that if they gave in—even a little—it would undermine the faith of many.*



*Some refused to be quiet because they realized their responsibility to tell the godless men around them of God's love so they too could be saved.*

*Some have simply been willing to lay down their lives for the One who laid down His life for them.*

**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**

Jim Elliot  
Spearred by headhunters in Ecuador  
while serving there as a missionary,  
1956

**This is the end. For me, the beginning of life.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
Hanged in Germany, 1945

**For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.**

Paul the Apostle  
Beheaded in Rome, A.D. 65  
(Philippians 1:21)

*Heroic acts are often devastating, and there is a time for grief. But we must move on to discover the secret of the martyrs in this book. These believers were absolutely sure of eternal life. They were willing to obey Christ no matter the cost. They were convinced that they were not ending their lives but exchanging their lives on earth for a life with their Lord in heaven.*

*Throughout history, many have died so you could experience the faith and freedoms you enjoy today.*

*You too can choose to stand strong. God will honor you, and you will make a real difference in your world and for God's kingdom.*



# Here are their



# stories:

**Remember those in prison,  
as if you were there yourself.  
Remember also those being mistreated,  
as if you felt their pain in your  
own bodies.**

**Hebrews 13:3**



## I Am Ū

Abu Fadi  
Iraq  
2014

“Abu, ISIS is coming. Today is the day.”

For some time the Christians around Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, knew that ISIS forces—the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—had been amassing troops to the west, ravaging the small towns and settlements nearby, claiming them as part of their growing “caliphate.” Reports told of churches being burned to the ground and Christians driven out of the area or threatened at gunpoint to either convert to Islam or die. Word was they had their eyes set on taking Mosul next.

Today was that day.

In the middle of the call, a distant sound of an explosion came from the direction of Mosul, where Abu’s mother and sister lived. Both were disabled and got around only by wheelchair. There was no way they could escape on their own.

The phone line went dead. Abu’s friend had hung up. Hopefully he was okay.

Unsure of what to do next, Abu bowed his head and prayed.

The Iraqi troops and police in the area—believed to be as many as 30,000—fled for their lives in the face of the ISIS onslaught of a mere 1,500. The next six days, as ISIS set up its occupation, were nerve-racking. Gunfire could occasionally be heard from one direction or another. Armored vehicles rumbled through the streets. Jails were reportedly



being emptied as the prisoners were “liberated.” The roads were jammed with those fleeing—cars packed with as many possessions as families could fit. There was no way to go against the flow exiting Mosul. Friends told Abu that Iraqi forces were among those fleeing the city.

Abu couldn’t leave without his mother and sister. He wasn’t sure what to do, so he continued to wait and pray.

After days of waiting, Abu’s phone rang. It was his mother. “Please come get us,” she pled. “It’s not safe here. You must—”

A man’s voice cut in. “If you will not come today, we will throw them in the street. Either they will be Muslims, or we will leave them in the street. You must come and take them.”

Abu told the man he would be there as soon as he could.

ISIS soldiers had come to his mother and sister’s home, and when they found out they were Christians, they demanded money and told them to leave. They spray painted a ن—pronounced “noon”—on the outside wall of their house, the Arabic letter equivalent to our English n. Abu knew what that meant. It stood for *Nassarah*, indicating followers of Jesus of Nazareth had lived there. More importantly, however, it also meant: *This building and everything in it is now the property of the Islamic State. Stay clear or face the consequences.*

Try as he might, though, Abu could not get to Mosul because the roads were still clogged with those leaving the city. He finally returned home that night, frustrated. His mother and sister were allowed to stay with some Muslim neighbors, but he knew he needed to get them the next day or there would be trouble.

The next morning a Muslim friend agreed to drive his family members out of Mosul and to where Abu and his wife could



meet them. Now with no turning back, Abu packed their car with their most treasured possessions, and they drove toward safer territory.

When they reached a checkpoint, they weren't sure what to hope for.

"Who are you?" they were asked.

"We are Christians leaving Mosul because we are not permitted to stay in this Muslim land," Abu told them.

"We cannot release you," one of the armed soldiers told him. "You cannot go on your way. We have to call the authorities."

They were directed to pull over to the side of the road to wait and feared the worst.

About thirty minutes later, two well-dressed men carrying automatic rifles drove up in a brand-new Toyota Land Cruiser. They came over to where Abu and his family were waiting in their car and started questioning them. Abu told them where they were heading and why.

"No," the man finally said. "You have to convert to be Muslim. If you will not, we will kill you—all of you."

Abu looked into the man's eyes and saw his resolve. He wondered, if after all they had just gone through, his story would end here.

*No, he thought. I will not deny my Lord and we will not die here.*

"Brother, does not the Quran allow you options in such situations? Does it not also allow that we should pay the *jizya*? Let us pay that tax, and you need never see us again."



Another man came over and the scenario repeated itself. For more than an hour they went back and forth. Abu's heart raced, but he stood firm. He belonged to Jesus, come what may.

Then something changed. Even though Abu was certain he could be killed at any time, a sense of peace came over him. And while he believed he was weak, he knew the Holy Spirit was with him, strengthening him to confront them and to tell them, "I will not be Muslim."

After about ninety minutes, it was clear to the men gathered around Abu that he would not convert. It was time to decide what to do: carry through on their threat or allow them to pay the *jizya*.

At that moment another Land Cruiser pulled up and a young man with an AK-47 slung over his shoulder stepped out. All eyes turned immediately to this newcomer. He seemed to be a person of some authority.

The men around Abu left to consult with this new arrival. There seemed to be a disagreement. Then the man came to Abu and said, "Deliver this message to the priests and pastors of your church: We will follow you Nazarenes all over the world. We will reach the Vatican and the pope. We will convert the pope to Islam."

It took a moment for the meaning of this instruction to sink in. Before Abu completely understood, the man said, "Go. Now." Then he waved them through the checkpoint.

Abu didn't need to be told twice.





*Thousands of our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria would tell similar stories—some we will only hear when we meet them in heaven.*

*Even for Abu and his family it wasn't over. They went through almost the same thing at the next checkpoint up the road, and when the soldiers discovered some cash Abu's wife had been hiding, they demanded the rest of what they had.*

*When the Islamic extremists saw their death threats weren't working, they offered to return all the property and possessions they had taken if Abu and his family would only become Muslims. Again, Abu refused. Abu later said he was certain, had it not been for the protection of the same God who had fed the Hebrews in the desert, they would not have escaped.*

*It's easy to look at attacks like this and see enemies in those who oppress and threaten our brothers and sisters. It's natural to want vindication for such acts of terror. Indeed, when the Islamic State was defeated and chased from Mosul in 2017, there was cause for celebration.*

*At the same time, we are not called to think naturally, but supernaturally. Of the soldiers who terrorized our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria, Jesus says the same thing He said of the centurions who stood at the foot of His cross: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).*

*Pray for those who are persecuting Christians globally, asking the Lord that they will come to place their trust in Him.*

***"I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith. For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think***



*they are doing a holy service for God. This is because they have never known the Father or me. Yes, I'm telling you these things now, so that when they happen, you will remember my warning. I didn't tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer."*

Jesus

(JOHN 16:1-4)