

Real Life Stories
Geoffrey T. Bull (1921-1999)



For a number of years, the Lord has frequently called to my attention one of the least evangelized nations in the world - Tibet. In the 1890s Annie R. Taylor was the first Protestant missionary to breach the walls of this country, which had for centuries isolated itself from the rest of the world. William Christie, a Christian Missionary Alliance missionary, not long after the time of Hudson Taylor also entered into the borderlands of Tibet. Now for a more contemporary missionary.

Geoffrey T. Bull was born in England in 1921 into a family of fundamentalist and evangelical beliefs. He came to know Christ as his own personal Savior at an early age. At 15 he was baptized by immersion and received into the fellowship of a group of Christians meeting in New Testament simplicity. This group was of the Brethren persuasion.

Bull had intended to take up banking as a career but found himself guided by the Holy Spirit to missionary work in Central Asia. As early as 1941 Geoffrey Bull recognized his call. Soon after the Second World War, the leaders of his church agreed to identify themselves with him in entering into the work of God in Central Asia.

In March of 1947, Bull and his fellow laborer, George M. Patterson of Scotland, sailed for China. They traveled to the far interior of China to the border area shared with Tibet, where they first studied the Chinese language. After three years of intensive linguistic study, they were able to get a working knowledge of that tongue and also the Tibetan language. Toward the end of that time, they began to move into the borderland of Tibet and make some good contacts with tribal leaders whose realm of influence reached well into Tibet. They were learning the culture and religion of these people to whom God had called them. They lived among them in their nomadic lifestyle, learned to ride their high-spirited ponies, and ate the food of these people. At that time, the Chinese Communist forces took control of Tibet. Bull witnessed the last days of Tibetan independence and was taken into captivity for more than three years. At first Bull was in solitary confinement. Later he was confined to a Chinese prison where he underwent all the subtle mental torture of "re-education and thought reform." His friend George had been given permission earlier by Tibet to travel to the border of India. For the first 12 months Geoffrey was kept in solitary confinement in a very small cell where he had hardly enough room to turn around. He likened it to the experience of the Lord Jesus, Who from His realms of glory as Master of the Universe was, through His incarnation, confined to the limitations of a human body.

The Chinese looked upon him as a spy for Britain and tried to make him confess his knowing about matters that were of military and political importance, but he had no knowledge of these things. They fed him a steady diet of Communist propaganda and told him that Britain was already falling to Communism. They told him that if he did not cooperate with them, his family back in England would suffer severe consequences. He was also threatened with execution almost daily. During this very difficult time his stay was in the Lord. He was then transferred to the somewhat greater freedom of Chinese prison camps, somewhere in the far northwest of China. At times he was approached in a friendly nature but then, with great contempt and humiliation, given the threat of death if he did not cooperate with Chinese authorities. Daily they tried to break the spirit of this young man through "brain washing." Through it all, he was encouraged in the Lord through Scripture verses he had memorized as a youth and through the singing of some great old hymns of the faith.

In all, he was in captivity of the Communist Chinese for three years and two months. He was finally released in Hong Kong to British authorities.

Throughout this long ordeal a great host of people around the world had been praying for Bull, and he recognized that it was only through the loving grace of the Lord Jesus and the prayers of countless people that he was sustained. After a number of months of recuperation from the rigors of the prison camp and the emotional strain, he was able to again step out by faith in missionary service. He recorded these prison experiences in the book "When Iron Gates Yield", a very graphic description of these years of imprisonment. A sequel, which I have found to be a beautiful book of devotional meditations, is "God Holds the Key".

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He married and subsequently served the Lord in the late 50's to early 60's in Borneo. Following this, he has had a wide ministry of conference and Bible teaching. He authored a number of very readable books and had a profound influence over many young lives that sought to know the mind of the Lord.

There were others that fell into the hands of the Chinese Communists. Some languished in prisons, while for others death came quickly, such as John and Betty Stam. They did not suffer the long years of imprisonment. By the flash of a Communist sword, which decapitated them, they were ushered into the presence of the Lord. It is the enduring grace of the Lord that sustained each one.

As we enter into the new century and new millennium, I believe the enemy of men's souls is going to intensify his warfare, and we can anticipate that we too will be called upon to suffer imprisonment and death for the cause of Christ. Are we spiritually ready for such experiences?

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Dr. John A. Dreisbach

. . . . Gleaned from GFA Missions

Geoffrey T. Bull shares his personal story of being captured:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u0E50FeQ9s>