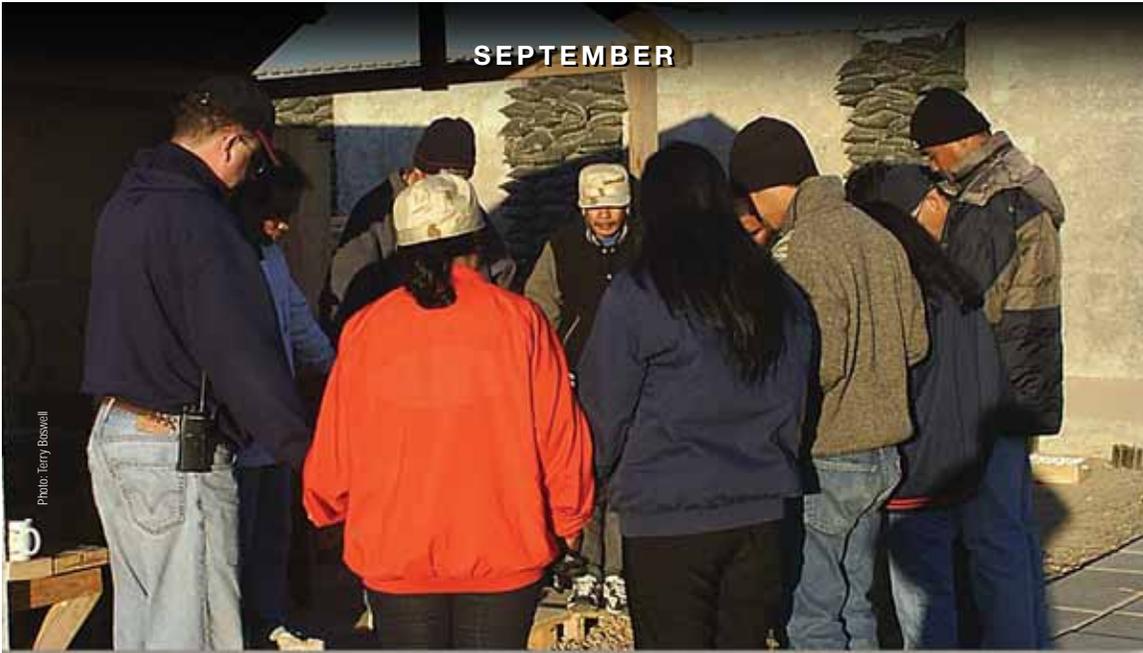


SEPTEMBER



Cool in the Furnace

by Margaret McCommon Dempsey

Seemingly every day, another car bomb in Iraq detonates, leaving carnage and destruction in its aftermath. Regular reports of kidnapped foreign civilians—many of them contracted by the U.S. government—break in through the headlines of the nightly news. All too often, the inevitable story of their murder comes a few days later.

Iraq is a bed of burning coals, the most violent place in the world today as the nation battles for democracy and freedom from tyranny and terrorism. In the middle of the explosions and chaos of this furnace of war, Baptist Man On Mission Jim Harger voluntarily served, consumed by the peace and call of God.

Harger is a civilian contractor working for the United States military, dealing in logistics and management. His job description doesn't begin to capture the bigger reason Harger signed up to serve in Iraq.

A Soldier's Trek

As a career military man, Harger has traveled across the United States, as well as to Korea, Germany, and the Middle East.

In 1996, Harger was 34 years old and, by his own admission, "far from being a Christian." On a business trip to Anchorage, Alaska, he attended a Christian service at a convention center. Although he had heard the gospel before, this was the first time he really listened. When the invitation was given, he committed his life to Christ.

"My life had an immediate and lasting change," he recalled.

By 2001, he had begun working with a group of men at his church, Cornerstone Baptist Church in Windsor, Colo. God had given Harger a desire to draw men to Jesus. He soon began working with churches throughout his association, connecting them with one another as

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their men connected with God. His associational work drew the attention of Sam Cotter, then the church resource director for the Colorado Baptist General Convention. Cotter invited Harger to serve as the men's ministry consultant for the state convention, where he networked Baptist Men to be on mission with God.

"I had sensed God was moving me in that direction. I just didn't expect it to happen so soon," Harger said. He invested his time training and encouraging men to reach other men with the gospel of Christ.

Within a year, "I realized God was calling me to a new responsibility, specifically, serving as a pastor," he said. Since then, Harger has been ordained, served as Cornerstone's associate pastor, completed his undergraduate degree, and enrolled in seminary.

With plans for a pastoral ministry in his sights, Harger was again surprised when God opened the door leading to Iraq. In late 2004, after much prayer—individually, with his wife and with other men—Harger began serving as a civilian contractor where his primary responsibility was to manage and maintain military housing.

Some of Harger's friends questioned how a man with a wife and three children could travel for a year to this notoriously dangerous area of the world. Harger said he and his wife, Beth, "knew we were in God's hands, and we knew why I was there—to be better prepared for the ministry."

Prayer sustained Harger through his months in Iraq. "My personal prayer strengthened my faith and gave me peace

about being there," he said. At the same time, the prayers of family, friends, and even strangers gave him hope, perspective, and encouragement. "I know God answers prayer, and knowing there were countless people praying for me gave me assurance," Harger said.

At the military base, Harger worked 12-hour days, seven days a week. Although there was little "down time," Harger said, "It was a great time to grow closer to God and spend time in His Word."

He also found opportunities to serve God in different ways.

Harger started a prayer ministry with the work crew he supervised. Having already experienced the impact of prayer in his own life, Harger believed others could be sustained through prayer as they connected with God. Each morning he gave his crew a safety briefing concerning the

day's tasks. He knew some of his crew were Christians, so he asked if he could pray for them one morning. That morning, he prayed for his crew's safety and protection and for their families left behind.

At the prayer's end, a worker named Brandon was crying. "That touched me in a mighty way," recalled Harger. The prayer that first morning started a tradition in which Harger prayed with his crew almost every morning.

Soon other members of his crew offered to voice the morning prayer. A worker named Franco was the first to pray aloud. "He prayed in broken English, but you could feel his heart," said Harger. Although his broken English embarrassed Franco, "I assured him that

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A High-Powered Prayer Ministry

Sometimes life's journey takes you to unexpected places offering unexpected ministry opportunities. "We never know how God is going to use us," said Jim Harger, Baptist Man On Mission and civilian contractor who served the military in Iraq. "We just need to stay in His Word and grow closer to Him. If we do that we will be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's urging. That's what led me to begin praying with my workers."

An effective, powerful prayer ministry doesn't have to start at or be offered only at church. Consider these tips to begin a prayer ministry at your workplace or in your neighborhood:

- Ask a friend to be your partner in the ministry.
- Select a convenient time and place for your prayer group to meet free from distractions.
- Read a Scripture about prayer as you begin each group prayer time.
- Share your personal prayer concerns with the group. As you share personally, others will do the same. "The greatest thing we can do as men is gather together and share our lives with each other. Only when we do that will we know how to pray for each other," said Harger.
- Keep a prayer journal of requests and answers to encourage the group. Keep prayer requests confidential within the group.
- If men are reluctant to pray aloud, be patient. As they become more comfortable with each other, they will become comfortable praying aloud.
- Don't be concerned if your prayer group starts small. Often the most meaningful groups are small in number.

Harger stepped out in faith to begin his prayer group in Iraq, and it soon became the most rewarding aspect of his time there. "The crew looked forward to our time together, and I cherished it," he said. A prayer group promises rewarding experiences with God and other men.

God understood his prayer and that his passion came through very clearly," Harger stated.

About a week later, Brandon voiced the morning prayer in his native Philippine language. "I didn't understand much of it, but his calling upon Jesus was very clear," Harger said.

Harger collected resources such as books and magazines from several Christian ministries. He shared the resources with men who expressed interest. In addition, he offered to serve in a pastoral role to anyone who asked.

"My background in Baptist Men prepared me to talk to men about the struggles they face daily. Even though we were far from home and family, there were still similar temptations all around us. I didn't go around and advertise that I am an ordained pastor, but I did avail myself to anyone who wanted to talk," he stated.

As Harger continues his journey with God one step at a time, he knows there may be more surprises and changes. He's ready for whatever God may have for him, and he encourages other men to be ready as well.

"I talk to men about having the courage to follow God's calling in their lives. I also tell them it isn't always a grand plan; sometimes it is simply being the husbands and/or fathers God wants them to be. Sometimes it is being there for someone in order to have a small impact that will change that person's life.

"We never know how God is going to use us," he said, "but however God chooses—wherever God chooses—that's the best, safest place to be." **B**

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