

I was invited to attend a large youth gathering one Saturday in Ladingwa a village about 38 miles (61 km) from our mission base. Since my co-worker Hansie was away with the vehicle, I had only one means of travel, and that was by bicycle. Early in the morning, Bullen, one of my students, Ivans one of our chaplains, and myself started our long journey. The road was rough with lots of sand, rocks, grass and thorn bushes most of the way. The heat was intense, at least 110 F (43 C) in the sun. At about 22 miles into the journey, I thought I was finished. The heat had completely sapped my strength and the bike seat had given me blisters. I just had to put one foot in front of the other, and press on. Bullen kept asking me if I was all right, my response was always the same and that was *"fine"*. I told him *"if I stop moving then I'm not fine, but until then, I'm fine."* They could see I was battling, but I didn't want to discourage them so I restrained my complaints.



When we arrived in the village Garia, my bicycle got sick. In other words, the whole gear shifter broke and

Ladingwa was still another 8 miles and it would be getting dark soon. One of the boys of the village, who

That night, God showed them a portable VCD player, which they thoroughly enjoyed. I didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning, I shared with them from God's Word, which was well received. Later I attended their y

That night I slept on a bamboo bed in Garia. I wasn't feeling well at all. In fact, I doubted that I would survive the next day's journey back. Even when I walked, my muscles would sting, like they've been damaged. My head hurt and I felt sick to my stomach, probably from drinking unfiltered water. I knew that if I were to make the next day's journey, God would have to give me strength, because I had none left.

The Lord was gracious and the next day I felt strong so we continued. We only had two bikes now, so we left some of our gear behind so that Bullen could ride on the back of my bike. After about 8 miles or so, I hit a bump, which catapulted Bullen off the bike. He landed face down in the dirt, but was ok. I thought maybe he'd dislocated his shoulder, but he said it was all right.

At about 15 miles (25km) out of Garia, we came to our shortcut, which had very tall thick grass that continually flogged you as you went through. One piece of grass got wedged up my nose, which was sore. A short distance further, we spotted a cobra snake in the grass only a few meters from where we were. It started to chase us, so I peddled as fast as possible to get us out of there. My main concern was Bullen, who'd been bitten by a black mamba 2 months prior. He held on tight and I cycled as fast as I could. I damaged the bike as I hit a rock that gave us a punctured tire. I also managed to get stabbed in my eye by a blade of grass.

We had nothing to fix the bike with so we walked 3 miles (5 km) to a pastor's house whose grandson fixed the bike. We finally arrived in Mundri about 5:00pm completely exhausted with only a few cuts and bruises. God was gracious to bring us back without harm and my eye made a quick recovery.

I must admit that I'm only now finally learning to trust God in ways I did not before. I guess that's what happens when you lose everything. You find better ways to trust Him

### Arrest and Confiscation

By the time the food was ready for the student's going away feast it was quite late in the afternoon. Three friends then arrived from the church to visit me as I'd expected. When I began to prepare them coffee and food for us to eat I was informed that there were two soldiers outside that needed to speak with me right away. I was irritated, as I was still busy with my invited guests, and didn't feel like tending now to uninvited guests.

The soldiers said they were under orders from the regional commander to take our radio to the military base. I then politely explained to them that I couldn't release the radio to them. Our radio is the only communication we have and were we to have any emergency, which is highly probable in Sudan, then we would need it. I couldn't allow them to take our missionary property unjustly and without reason.

They began to get angry. I explained to them that I must wait for my teammate Hansie to return from his journey about a days drive away. Only then would we discuss the matter further. Hansie was expected back that evening or the following morning. The soldiers said they could not wait for him and must take the radio immediately. At that I said, *"I cannot give you the radio. You can take me to jail, but I cannot give you the radio."*

They said

*"Ok then we'll take you to jail."*

I replied,

*"Ok, let me get my Bible."*

And I went inside. One of our Chaplains, Charles, began to negotiate with them in Arabic while I got a few necessities and put them in a bag.

I needed to diffuse the situation, so I got some food together and gave them some. They began to eat. After thinking it over, I realized that if I continued to refuse them they'd put me in jail, beat me, and then demolish the house to find the radio. To avoid the damage to the mission house, I figured that I could accompany the radio with them to the military base where I could negotiate with the commander. My visitors as well as Charles and my students were begging me not to go with them, as they knew the potential that I could be severely mistreated – which normally goes along with being arrested in this part of the world.

By now it was five in the evening and I would have to walk 25 miles (42km) in the dark and they could beat me if they wanted to. I didn't have a choice, I couldn't allow them to just loot us like

this, so I took the radio and began my journey. I was now placed under guard and watched like a hawk. By God's grace, we crossed the river about a mile away and there was an NGO vehicle that arrived on the other side to drop off one of their workers. This was very unusual to find anyone driving around close to dark. They gave us a lift, which cut 15 miles off the trip. While en route, I spoke with my guard and made friends with him so I avoided any further mistreatment.

That night, some of our friends in the village where we were dropped off gave us accommodation. Since I was a prisoner, I had to share the grass hut with my guard. Early the next morning we began the nine-mile (14 km) journey to the military base. When I arrived, I looked for our chaplains and I found that they were currently at the battlefield. Since they weren't around, I waited to speak with the commander. The soldiers searched me and took the radio. When I spoke to the commander, he said he was under orders from his superior who was in a distant village and he must keep the radio. I was then released and so that afternoon I began my long journey back alone. Again, God's favor was with me and after a few miles I was given a lift.

### **No Turning Back**

Over the next couple of weeks, we were on high security alert, as we didn't know what to expect. We weren't sure if they were going to try to come and take more from us. We used a radio in a nearby village to contact some of the senior officers that could help us. This was until the radio operators Joseph and Dominic who allowed us use of this radio were then arrested and given over 75 lashes each!

During this time, I got sick again with malaria and was bed ridden for some time. Two days after my recovery, we managed to finish our preparations for our departure and began our long journey back home. When we arrived in the village of Kotobi, we stopped at the church compound to say good-bye to all our friends there. Within minutes of our arrival, 3 soldiers approached us. The leader of the group was the same who arrested me a few weeks prior. He had arrived on orders again from the regional commander to take the radio antenna, solar panels, and batteries for our base radio.

Hansie refused to give them anything until we were given the opportunity to travel again to speak with the commander's superior officers. The soldiers refused to allow us to leave and threatened that we could not leave anywhere without first giving them what they wanted. I then insisted that the County Commissioner, who lived up the road and was the senior civil authority

in the area, be present to mediate the discussion. The soldiers insisted that I stay and followed me as I left for the Commissioner's home. One of the soldiers grabbed me by the arm to prevent me from going. I quickly pulled myself away and warned the soldier not to touch me. The situation became very tense as one of the other soldiers began violently tapping his rifle as he urged to his officer to give him the order to shoot me. The officer then went to Hansie and threatened in a loud voice too shoot me if necessary in order to stop me from going to the Commissioner. He also said that he had shot people before and had no problem doing it now. By then, I was well on his way and out of range. Everyone present at the church compound, including many church leaders, were shocked and very quiet.

Later, I returned with the Commissioner who stood outside while we continued our discussion with the soldiers. After awhile, as the attempts to dissuade them had proven fruitless, I suggested that we give them the materials they wanted so they would in turn allow us to leave. After everyone agreed, I returned under escort of the soldiers to the mission base to give them what they wanted. For safety, I took one of the pastors from the church so that we'd have a witness in case the soldiers tried anything while en route. We then proceeded back to the base and under protest handed them the requested materials. Afterward, the soldiers departed. Realizing that it was no longer safe to stay there, I then immediately returned to the church compound and Hansie and I departed that very evening to exit the country.

We drove the next 26 hours without stopping to ensure that we were safe from any more trouble. All the while, my back was still in pain from its injury, and I was still weak from the malaria. Yet the Lord never failed to be gracious in protecting us. As of now, none of the 4 confiscated radios have been returned to the churches or us.

We have always tried to maintain a good relationship with the soldiers and leaders of the SPLA (Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army). We've done a lot to minister to them and we continue speaking up for them as they seek to liberate themselves from a tyrannical Islamic government. This made it all the more discouraging to see this disrespect for church and mission leaders and property among them. We are still trying to resolve this issue with the top leaders of the SPLA. Please pray for God's intervention in this matter and that He will use this unpleasant situation to better our ministry there.

### **The Battle Continues**

Since my return to South Africa, my trials haven't ceased. After a short while, I again came

down with malaria and became very sick. This is the sixth time I've had it in the past two years. By God's grace, I've recovered quickly and am becoming increasingly strong and healthy as each day passes. I now eagerly await my trip back. Please continue to pray for me as I return to Sudan. Please pray especially that this situation with the SPLA is resolved quickly and our safety ensured. Especially as we have heard that there are arrest warrants out for Bishop Bullen Dolli, an evangelical Church leader in Sudan and our mission Director Dr. Peter Hammond. All this is connected to the confiscation of the radios. I will be accompanying them to Yei to resolve this crisis.

Thank you.

Your Brother in Christ,  
Timothy Keller

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