

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

220

Dearest grandchild,

The late Chuck Colson was one of my favorite authors. Today's letter has been adapted from his book *Loving God*.

Millions have lived and died in Soviet Gulags without a trace. These nameless faceless victims were often herded into box cars and sent to Siberia never to be heard from again. One such prisoner, however, was fortunate enough to have his story leaked to the outside world. His name was Dr. Boris Nicholayevich Kornfield. He was both a Jew and a communist. We do not know his "crime". It could have been something as simple as saying something critical about Stalin. At any rate, he was imprisoned in the concentration camp at Ekibastuz. Communism looked differently to Dr. Kornfield from a concentration camp than it did from a classroom. When he saw first hand the barbed wire, the brutality, the corruption, and the mass executions, he not only renounced communism, he even became a Christian.

For obvious reasons doctors were treated better than other prisoners. These prison doctors not only treated other prisoners, but also the guards and prison officials. Obviously no guard or official wants to be treated by a doctor whom he has just tortured and mistreated. Kornfield's conversion, however, caused him to see his prestige as a doctor in a different light. Now he feared God more than the guards. Consequently, he dared to antagonize them rather than condemn innocent men to death. When a prisoner was marked for death, for example, it was routine to ask Dr. Kornfield to sign a certificate indicating that he was in good health and could stand the punishment. With a wink and a nod Kornfield had previously gone along with this sham. Now, however, he refused to sign and his usefulness to his communist slave masters had come to an end. His death was made even more certain by the fact that he dared to turn in one of the guards for stealing a loaf of bread. Such "in your face" insubordination could not go unpunished. Not long afterward, Kornfield was beaten to death while he slept.

Fortunately, however, Dr. Kornfield did share his testimony with at least one prisoner before he died. That prisoner had just been operated on for intestinal cancer. Not knowing whether the patient would live or die, Dr. Kornfield for some reason, dared to open up and share with him the story of his conversion. As the torrent of words came tumbling out of his mouth the good doctor revealed a strange paradox. He was a prisoner in a Soviet Gulag and yet, for the first time in his life he had found true freedom. Before his conversion he cringed in fear before his cruel masters, but now he only feared God. As Jesus said: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him" (Lk. 12:4,5). Truly, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (Jn. 8:36).

The next morning the young cancer patient awoke to the sound of running feet. The whispers of a fellow prisoner told the story. Dr. Kornfield, realizing that his life was in danger, slept in the hospital rather than returning to his dormitory. As he slept, however, someone slipped to his side and bashed in his head with a plasterer's mallet. Fortunately, the cancer patient did not die. This is the way we know what happened to Dr. Kornfield. That patient not only survived, but also pondered the impassioned words of his Christian doctor, and also gave his life to Christ. When that patient was released from prison, he dared to tell the world the truth about communism. In 1970 he was awarded the Nobel Prize

in Literature. Unfortunately, only one of his books was published in the Soviet Union. It was called *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962). Two of his other books were *Cancer Ward* (1971), and *Gulag Archipelago* (1973). His name, of course, was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn passed away Aug. 3, 2008.

This story illustrates the power of personal testimony. According to Rev. 12:11 it is one weapon we can use to overcome the “accuser of our brothers”. We are, of course, the world’s greatest authority on what Christ has done in our own life. It is exciting to consider that by simply sharing our own personal testimony we might influence someone else to follow Jesus. At least Dr. Kornfield did!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce