

week one



karen watson

NO REGRETS

Karen Watson entered a war zone because she loved Jesus. She knew the risks. News reports in early 2004 were riddled with American casualties in recently liberated Iraq. Car bombs blew up convoy trucks. Suicide bombers targeted civilians. Ambushes occurred weekly.

But a Scripture burned on Karen's heart—one that propelled her to Iraq: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’” Her answer echoed Isaiah's: “Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa. 6:8 NASB).

Karen had accepted Christ after experiencing severe grief as a teen. Her fiancé, her father, and her grandmother all died within a two-year period, and her pain had driven her into the arms of Jesus. Soon after, Karen took part in short-term mission trips, flying from Bakersfield, California, to El Salvador, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Greece. After those excursions, Karen knew she wanted to be a full-time missionary, despite the world climate.

Once accepted by the IMB (International Mission Board, a Southern Baptist missionary organization), she sold her home

and car and submitted her resignation to the Kern County Sheriff's Department, where she had worked for eight years as a detention officer.

The IMB immediately sent Karen to Jordan to coordinate refugee relief during the war in Iraq. When the expected influx of refugees did not arrive, she was reassigned to Iraq. Then the UN building was bombed there, killing several civilians. Karen called home to California to say she was okay. She frequented the UN building but had not been inside the day of the bombing. After that day, however, she made it a point to call her family and supporters after every act of violence, just to assure them she was all right.

On March 15, 2004, Karen, along with several other missionaries, headed to Mosul, Iraq's third largest city. They were involved in humanitarian aid, developing a water purification system for the area. Partway through the missionaries' journey, Iraqi militants in a passing car assaulted them with automatic weapons and rocket-powered grenades.

When friends at home heard about the violent car ambush, they expected another satellite phone call. But this time Karen didn't call. She had died instantly, a casualty of bullet and shell fragment wounds.

Before she left for Iraq, Karen had discussed the risks with Roger Spradlin, one of her pastors from Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, California. "She was very, very brave, and she knew the risk of being in that part of the world," he says. "But she weighed that risk against the people's need for the gospel."

One of her friends related, "Karen was a real soldier in God's army and she will be greatly missed, but we know that she is now celebrating and worshipping the God she served."

Another friend noted, "Karen was the type who would

stand up for the Lord anywhere in the world. She felt the Lord Jesus was worth it.”

After her death was confirmed, another pastor, Phil Neighbors, opened a letter she had written before she left for Iraq—to be opened if she were killed. It read:

March 7, 2003

Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger,

You should only be opening this letter in the event of [my] death. When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you, my heart for the Nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory was my reward, His glory is my reward.

One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work. I am writing this as if I am still working [in the mission field].

I thank you all so much for your prayers and support. Surely your reward in Heaven will be great. Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well being. Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine pastors.

In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simple. Just preach the gospel. If Jason Buss is available or his dad, have them sing a pretty song. Be bold and preach the life saving, life changing, forever eternal GOSPEL. Give glory and honor to our Father.

I once read in The Missionary Heart:

Care more than some think is wise.

Risk more than some think is safe.

Dream more than some think is practical.

Expect more than some think is possible.

*I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience.
There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving Him.
I love you two and my church family.*

*In His care,
Karen*

Karen Watson spent her life for the cause of Jesus Christ among the nations, particularly one that appeared to be an enemy. People from that country took her life, yet her life continues on—as an ongoing testimony that God will expand His kingdom through those who dare to step outside of their comfort zones for His renown.

No one knows what Karen thought when she felt the bullets tear through her and the life drain from her body. But she lived her life without regret. Perhaps, as she grew closer to seeing Jesus' face, she recounted one of her favorite Psalms:

*Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this, I shall be confident.
One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days
of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His
temple.*

(Psalm 27:3–4 NASB)