

What kind of friend?

By [Stan Wilson](#)

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In the year after the tsunami destroyed the Sri Lankan coastline, lawmakers threatened to pass a law making Christian evangelism illegal. The proposed law was popular because of widespread anti-Christian sentiment. The majority of Sri Lankans are Buddhist, and they resented the privilege given to minority Christians under British rule in the past. Also, many were angry about widespread proselytizing on the part of some American missionaries.

At that time, Kingsley Perera was the leader of Baptists in Sri Lanka. Kingsley came to Mississippi to tell members of our church about the work of Baptists in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and ask for help.

Kingsley told us about Christians who tried to reach out to Buddhist neighbors after the disaster and about the impending law. Every time someone asked him what his people would do if the law against evangelism were passed, he would respond: "Our people are prepared to suffer for the gospel. We may lose a few members, but look throughout church history and you will see that the church always grows during persecution. We do not want this legislation, but it will not inhibit the gospel."

As I was driving Kingsley to the airport, I asked him if he remembered the old quote: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

"Tertullian," he replied instantly.

For the most part, people in my neck of the woods don't believe in suffering. We are ashamed and scandalized by suffering. We believe in eliminating suffering whatever the cost, and we think we can do it. We go to war to eliminate suffering. We experiment with incipient human life if it promises to eliminate suffering. We are not likely to think of suffering as a viable way of responding to injustice in the world.

We would also have a hard time inviting our friends to suffer, which is what Paul does in 2 Timothy. After reminding Timothy that ours is not a spirit of cowardice, and encouraging him not to be ashamed of the story of Jesus or of the story of Paul the jailbird, Paul invites Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. Some friend. I thought it was the job of friends to shield one another from suffering. What kinds of friends invite one other into a fellowship of suffering (Phil. 3:10)? Only those who have been schooled by the mind of Christ.

Clarence Jordan founded the Koinonia Community in South Georgia, an interracial farming cooperative. One day a truck driver who had been delivering butane to the community told Jordan he was quitting: he'd been receiving racist threats from some outside of the cooperative. The man knew that if he delivered to Koinonia, he would lose other customers.

Jordan did not waver. He confronted the man, and was not ashamed to ask him to suffer for the gospel. "It looks to me like you're in a spot. You're either going to lose some money or lose your soul," Jordan answered.

After a further exchange concerning the physical danger of anyone caught cooperating with Jordan, the man promised to find someone else who would deliver the butane.

Jordan did not move. "You mean you'd ask a friend to take a chance you're not willing to take yourself."

We all believe that Jesus came to save us from sin, but where did we get the idea that he came to save us from suffering?