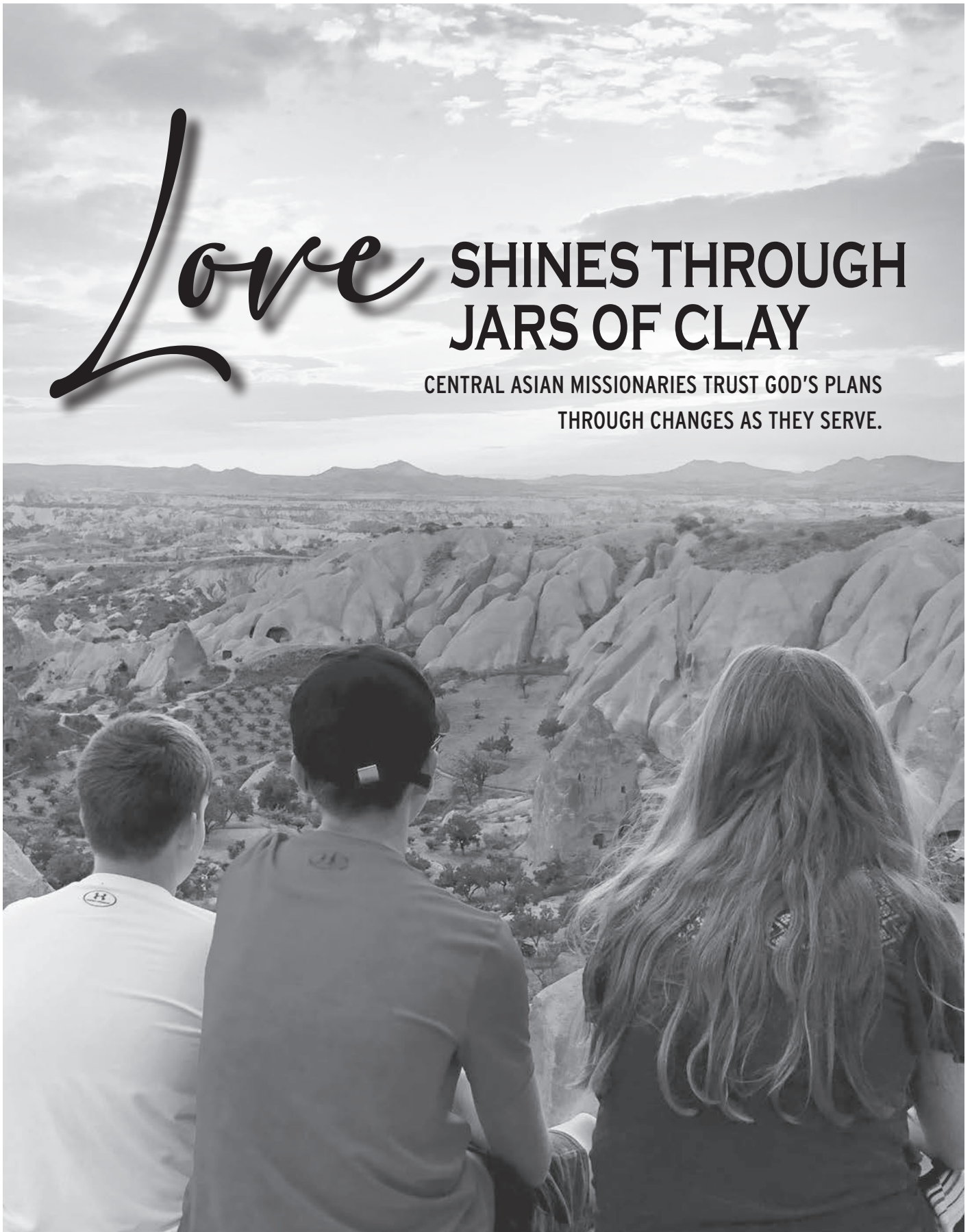




# *Love* SHINES THROUGH JARS OF CLAY

CENTRAL ASIAN MISSIONARIES TRUST GOD'S PLANS  
THROUGH CHANGES AS THEY SERVE.



Sam\* and Olivia Martyn\* faced a harsh reality in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic when they were forced to move out of the Central Asian country where they had lived for nine years. As they looked to the future, would God make a way for them to continue to serve those they'd grown to love? Absolutely. They just needed to be willing vessels in His capable hands.

## **THE ROAD TO SERVICE**

Olivia's story is typical of many children raised in Southern Baptist churches, but the name of her church—Wallace Memorial Baptist Church—was not. Named for martyred missionary Dr. Bill Wallace of China, her church family was infused with a heart for the nations. Through the ministry of her church, Olivia grew up learning about missions and heard from International Mission Board missionaries. In contrast, her husband, Sam, was raised in a nominal Catholic home. He came to faith at age 16 through the influence of friends who invited him to a youth Bible study.

During their college years, both Sam and Olivia answered the call to ministry, but they were not sure what that meant long term. After seminary, they moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where Sam served on staff at a local church, and Olivia served at a refugee center. In 2010, The Lord burdened their hearts as a family for the Muslim community and they surrendered to His call. The next year, Sam, Olivia, and their three children were appointed to serve in a country in Central Asia.

## **LOVE REFLECTED IN SERVICE**

Once on the field, the Martyns connected with a local church that served as a lighthouse to the nations to the refugees and immigrants that began pouring into their city. Over the years, they watched the church multiply and the number of believers grow.

Discipleship is key to the Martyns' ministry. For almost eight years, Olivia hosted a weekly women's Bible study in their home. As many as 17 women attended, speaking at least three different languages. They worked systematically through books of the Bible, ending each session with tea and snacks. Tea is the centerpiece of any conversation or meal in that region.

Sam also led a monthly men's discipleship group. Together, the Martyns taught baptism classes for new believers. They also taught national interns about how to disciple others and handle situations in culturally appropriate ways. Such partnerships in ministry are crucial to preparing a new generation of local leaders while enabling missionaries to be effective in service.

## **LOVING THROUGH PAIN BRINGS GAIN**

Pouring into the lives of fellow believers is crucial but not always easy. Sometimes it can even be terribly painful.

For instance, what do you do when a believer turns against you? In the course of their ministry, the Martyns have learned to pray specifically for those who oppose them and remain willing to endure trials for the sake of the gospel. This lesson came into sharp focus through their experience with a man named George\*.

George was one of the first in their city to believe, but several years after his conversion, he and another man who was a refugee began sowing division in the church. The ensuing conflict threatened to break the congregation apart. After a meeting of church leadership, George and the other man were asked to leave the church. Though they also made personal threats to Sam, the situation still broke his heart.

Afterward, George and the other man brought legal action against the church and its pastor. They leaked false stories to local newspapers that landed the Martyns on the front page more than once. Sam shared, "No one in my 26 years of walking with Christ has tested my understanding of Christian fellowship and the possibilities and limits of forgiveness like George has. He made me take a hard look at myself. We've celebrated together, grieved together, prayed together, but ultimately, he went his own way."

Then George got COVID-19. As George was clinging to life, his son, who was not a believer, reached out to the pastor George had once slandered, asking him to perform the funeral and prepare a place for burial in the non-Muslim cemetery. After all the pain, accusations, and fighting, the pastor let love prevail and agreed. A Christian funeral in their city is a rare sight, and it was an opportunity for George's Muslim relatives and friends to see the power of the gospel in action. Though nonbelievers, the family members were grateful for the pastor's help in giving their loved one a burial that reflected his faith in Christ.

Following the service, one of men in attendance shared with the pastor that he had written the church to ask for a Bible. He had been communicating with one of the church members but had never met him. He said it was the first time in his life he had been to a funeral and heard a message of hope. He asked the pastor if he knew the man with whom he'd been communicating. The pastor did and said, "He's right over there!" George's funeral brought the seeker and believer together.

George had not been a part of the church fellowship for at least three years when he became ill. The pastor could have easily turned down the request because of all the hurt and division he had caused. However, showing love to George's family in this way meant 60 people heard the gospel. As a result, at least four people have asked to talk to someone about Jesus. Because of this and other experiences, the Martyns have recognized any pain they and their church endure means nothing in light of the opportunity to see lives changed for Christ.

## OUR PLANS BREAK, BUT GOD'S PLANS PREVAIL

It's an understatement to say Sam and Olivia were not prepared to hear they had ten days to leave their country and never return. God was moving among the people they'd grown to love, and besides, there was a pandemic on the rise! By God's grace, they were able to remain eight more months until their children finished school. During this time, Sam poured all his efforts into raising up the next leaders of their local church. He quickly put together a training curriculum and asked four young men to take part. As part of the training, the men kept ministry journals and held each other accountable with early-morning texts about their daily Bible reading. Sam found it a joy to see how excited they were to learn and grow.

The extra months allowed the Martyns to feel at peace about their next destination of service—Europe. They would be relocating to a city that contained the second largest concentration of the Central Asian people group they'd been living among. This meant that, despite being banned from their home, they would be able to continue serving the people God had called them to. Though it had seemed the ill-workings of man would ruin everything, these were nothing compared to God's power.

Pandemic-fueled restrictions and other struggles they experienced moving to a new country in the middle of a worldwide health crisis were also overcome by the grace of God. While most of their ministry still dealt with the Central Asian language they used for years, they now needed to know the local language so they could communicate with their national hosts as well as their target group. But even these language barriers did not cause much of an issue because Sam already spoke the local language and Olivia had begun to immerse herself in full-time language learning.

## LOVING JUST ONE

As they prayed to find a new location, one of the most important things to the Martyns was to find a good church. When the doors opened to their European city, they began to reach out to local churches. After contacting the pastor at an international church, it became apparent the Lord was drawing them together for the sake of ministry. In one of their first conversations, the pastor mentioned Belle\*, a young Central Asian woman who had come to faith earlier that year. Within weeks of arriving, she and the Martyns formed a connection.

The Martyns longed for someone who understood the culture and people they had invested in, and Belle longed for family. Belle began spending one day a week with the Martyns. Moving in the midst of a worldwide

pandemic was very difficult. For almost ten months after they arrived, they had to live under strict regulations. They couldn't have more than one person visit in their home or meet in groups outside. Belle became their one person, and the Martyns said she was one of the brightest spots of those first months. She understood all their stories and helped them feel connected to a part of life that felt forgotten. She and the Martyns became family in an unfamiliar place, where they could each find understanding and feel the comforts of home.

After just a few weeks, Belle asked Olivia if she would disciple her. New in her faith, Belle wanted to study the Bible but felt lonely, as there were no other believers in the city where she lived. In their region, it's not uncommon for believers to be isolated in a place without a church or other believers. The Martyns must be creative in finding ways to connect them to the fellowship of the church and to disciple them in the Word. Olivia used the YouVersion app to study books of the Bible with Belle. Each day, they would read the same passage and share their thoughts or questions together through the app. Once a week, they would either meet in person or talk on the phone about what the Lord was teaching them through the passage. In just a matter of months, they worked through most of the New Testament.

## GOD'S LOVE SHINES THROUGH

Through good times and bad, the Martyns cling to the words of Paul: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Pray they would continue to allow the genuine love of Christ to shine through their hurts, weaknesses, and trials, and that He would gain all the glory.

## SHOW YOUR LOVE THROUGH PRAYER

Pray the Martyns and their children would quickly learn their new local language so they build relationships with those around them.

Pray the Martyn children would make new friends and be a light for Jesus at their school.

Pray many would respond to a new Internet site the Martyns have created that offers free Bibles to anyone who requests one. Pray Sam and Olivia would be able to have personal meetings with those who respond.

Pray the bans on them and around 50 other workers from their Central Asian country would eventually be lifted.

Pray for a new church plant that will focus primarily on reaching internationals in the city. Pray a Bible study group of Central Asian believers would form as a result.

*\*Names changed.*

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**CAROL GHATTAS** has served for 22 years in the Middle East and knows how God can use a closed door to open new opportunities for service. She writes about this in her new book, *When Doors Close: Changing Course in Missions Without Losing Your Way*. Learn more at [lifeinexile.net](http://lifeinexile.net).



# Central Asia: Love Shines through Jars of Clay



## FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

**BEFORE THE SESSION:** Prepare tea and snacks to serve the group, since “tea is the centerpiece of any conversation or meal” in Central Asia.

1. Ask everyone to close their eyes and imagine moving to a country where few have knowledge of Jesus. Say: *Picture the people and daily life, then imagine ministering for years and being ordered to leave, permanently banned.*
2. Use the sections, “The Road to Service” and “Love Reflected in Service” to introduce Sam and Olivia Martyn\* to the group.
3. Describe George’s story in the section, “Loving through Pain Brings Gain.” Ask the group to discuss how they would feel if someone who had partnered with them in ministry suddenly turned on them and the church.
4. Explain the Martyns’ forced exit from their area of service and

their move to a new country as detailed in the sections, “Our Plans Break, but God’s Plans Prevail,” and “Loving Just One.”

5. Break into small groups to discuss the questions: *How would you feel if you were forced to move to an unfamiliar place? How would you serve others while living under tight restrictions due to local health regulations?*
6. Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 4:7. Break into small groups to discuss how this verse applies to the Martyns’ story. End by praying together for the Martyns’ prayer requests and for all who serve in difficult places.



## FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Search online for facts about Central Asia—countries, culture, religions.
2. Prepare tea and Central Asian snacks to share.
3. Present an overview of the Mission Study. Direct everyone to take notes and compare.
4. Discuss the difficulties and rewards of mission work.
5. Write the Martyns’ prayer requests on strips of paper and cut them out. Fold and place them in a small basket. Ask a child to pass the basket for everyone to draw a name, read the request, and pray for the need.
6. Pray for family members to faithfully follow God’s leadership and Jesus’ example in both good and bad times.

*\*Names changed.*



## FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Prepare a snack and a cup of tea.
2. Choose a country that needs God’s message of salvation. Write characteristics of the country—culture, religion, and why you feel drawn to it. Then, read about the Martyns’ call to their area of service in the sections, “The Road to Service” and “Love Reflected in Service.”
3. Read the section, “Loving through Pain Brings Gain.” Consider how you would deal with someone in your church who suddenly turned

against you and caused turmoil in the church.

4. Read about the Martyns’ forced exit from their area of service in the sections, “Our Plans Break, but God’s Plans Prevail” and “Loving Just One.” Contemplate your feelings in those circumstances.
5. Memorize 2 Corinthians 4:7, the Martyns’ verse for good and bad times.
6. Pray for the Martyns’ prayer requests.

**DIANA DERRINGER** serves with her husband as a friendship family to international university students. She offers Life Lessons from English Expressions at [dianaderringer.com](http://dianaderringer.com).