

### Pastor Stef's Book Review – March 2016

Once I started *In the Presence of my Enemies* (2003) by Gracia Burnham I couldn't put it down. I finished it in a couple of days, read late into the night, and paid the price in lack of sleep. Unfortunately, the reason the story was so grippingly is because it is about the kidnapping of missionaries Martin and Gracia Bernham by the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf and their attempt to survive being dragged through the jungle for a year. The first chapter of the story begins with their capture and then we rewind for about a third of the book to get the backstory of Gracie's growing up years, how she eventually met Martin at Bible School, got married, had kids, and then headed off to be missionaries in the Philippines with *New Tribes Mission*. Gracia's husband Martin worked for *New Tribes* as a bush pilot. His job was to get supplies to their missionaries in hard to reach places, as well as to get people out of these hard to reach places when an emergency arose. The narrative eventually catches up to the point where the couple are kidnapped celebrating their 18<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary at a Filipino resort. The following two-thirds of the book then trace their horrendous year in captivity. I'll stop here and not give any more away and simply encourage you to read the book for yourself.

*In the Presence of my Enemies* moves at a good pace with writer Dean Merrill utilizing short crisp sentences and realistic dialogue, which gives it the feel of a popular novel. Gracia gives us a complex description of her captors, even showing some of the kind and considerate acts a few of their performed for them. We also see how a number of others react to their captivity as a total of about twenty were taken from the resort, and not all of them survive.

Most of what the Burnham's went through during their time in captivity was brutal and I often wonder how people actually make it through an ordeal like this. Besides the physical discomforts, like not bathing for weeks, and the emotional discomforts, like being separated and unable to communicate with their young children, Gracia is quite open about her spiritual discomforts. She discusses her doubts, her anger at God, her loss of hope and yet, what it looks like to still cling to God and *literally* learn to "love your enemies". It certainly puts much of what we face into perspective.