



PASTOR DAVID BUTLER holds a rocket that was launched into the town of Sderot.

PASTOR

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Affairs Committee bringing a bus full of United States leaders to its border and fired off five rockets into Israel. The Iron Dome did its job, Pastor Butler said.

The group was always accompanied by heavy security. Pastor Butler and his group had one of the same security agents as vice president Joe Biden had received the previous week at Ariel Sharon's funeral. Threat against the group was real, Pastor Butler said.

Of the many experiences, Pastor Butler said that the most spiritual and surprising moment was when he went to The Western Wall, known as the "Wailing Wall." This is the holiest shrine of the Jewish world, and the last accessible relic of the last holy temple that was destroyed. His wife, Jackie Butler, whose grandfather is Jewish, asked him to put a prayer there for their family. Pastor Butler said that this was the single, most powerful moment on his trip, and he was taken aback by the emotions that filled him.

One of the trips that really showed him how affected this region is took him to Sderot. This town of about 24,000 has been subject to relentless rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip for years. He said that there are an enormous amount of children aged five to

fifteen in counseling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder because of the constant explosions, air raid sirens, and fear for their and their family member's lives. While there has been some semblance of peace for the past six months, the violence has started to escalate again.

Walking down the street, every 30-40 yards there are bus stops. But unlike bus stops most are familiar with in America, these bus stops are also bunkers. The only playground in the town is indoor and rocket safe. The population has been deeply affected and devastated by the ongoing rocket attacks.

Pastor Butler spoke to Khaled Abu Toameh, an Arab Israeli journalist. Abu Toameh has had the opportunity to see both sides of the conflict, and is critical of the Palestinian Authority. The conversation was insightful, and helped him develop a better idea of how Israelis and Palestinians in the area feel, he said.

Abu Toameh has been labeled by his own as an Israeli sympathizer, thus putting his own life at risk. He expressed how, as a journalist, Israel was the only place in the region where there was true freedom of the press, democracy, and peace.

After speaking to Pastor Butler's group for some 45 minutes, Pastor Butler asked

Abu Toameh, in light of his own words for the past 45 minutes and with hindsight being 20/20, if he could go back and pick from the two, which would he rather have: Being born a Palestinian or being born an Israeli Jew. His answer to Pastor Butler was "What do you think?"

After the eight-day trip, Pastor Butler said he was affected in many ways. He has already written Congressman Huelskamp, sharing his experience, and putting a spotlight on the issue. He said he would like to partner with Israel, and will hopefully be in Washington, D.C., in March to lobby Congress on the Israel policies. He is also hoping to take a step in the political ring himself. He said he has always had an interest in politics, and he would like to make a difference. He is considering running for office locally, when the opportunity avails itself.

Pastor Butler said next time he travels to Israel, he hopes to take a bit more of a spiritual journey. However, he was thankful and grateful for the opportunity to see what Israel is facing.

He will be sharing his experiences at the St. Francis Community Church at the 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday. He encourages anyone who would like to hear more to attend.

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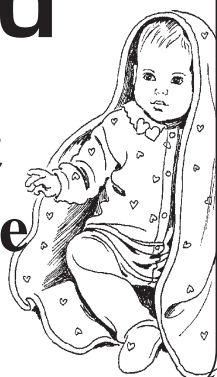
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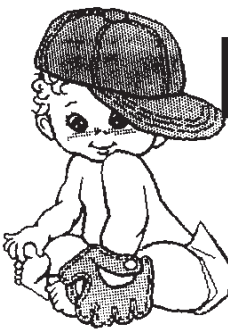
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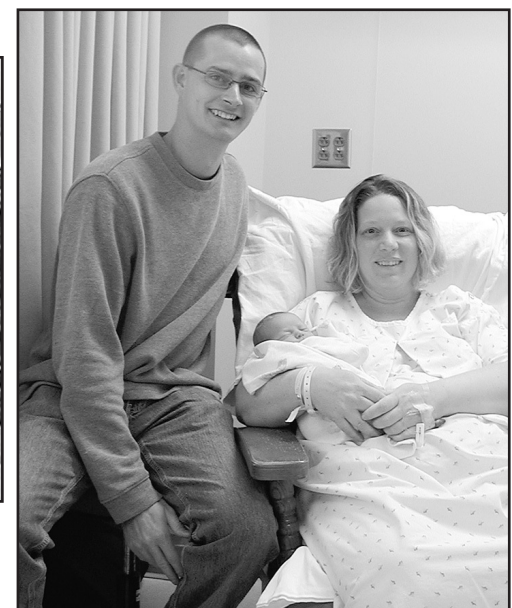
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