

## *Real Life Stories*

### *I Plant Secret House Churches Because I Was Saved Into One*



I was raised in a Muslim family in Tehran, Iran. My mother was a teacher and the principal of an elementary school. She knew a lot about Islam and did her best to follow its teachings. She helped me learn to read the Qur'an, taught me to pray at least three times a day, and encouraged me to fast during Ramadan.

As a Muslim teenager, I remember being full of fear—specifically, the fear that my parents would die. This was because my Islamic beliefs gave me no sense of security on whether they, or any other practicing Muslim, would be saved. I had big questions about the afterlife experience that my faith couldn't answer. Thoughts of losing my parents would scare me to the point where I would go into their bedroom late at night just to ensure they were still breathing.

#### Medicine for my soul

One day, when I was 17, a relative of ours came to visit. She had recently become a Christian through her relationship with a missionary working in Iran. And so she decided to come to our house and attempt to share the gospel. "Jesus is Lord!" I recall her saying. "And he has come to save us from our sins!" She supported her claims with several Bible verses, including John 3:16 and John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

As a young Muslim, I had been taught that the Bible was corrupted, that the version we read today is a distortion of its original contents. But as I listened to this woman read from Scripture, I felt something of its power—and I felt sure that a book capable of grabbing my heart that intensely couldn't be corrupted after all.

Typically, my mother would get offended if someone disagreed with her Islamic values. On that day, however, something surprising happened. Instead of fighting back, she listened peacefully and asked questions. There wasn't a trace of defensiveness; it appeared that she simply wanted to know the truth. (Later on, our relative revealed that she had been praying for our family before coming to share the gospel, and I'm convinced those prayers worked to soften my mother's spirit.)

Something else in our relative's gospel presentation stood out: her claim that "Jesus can set you free from fear and save you from eternal death." These words were medicine for my soul and food for my hungry heart. I had never heard such words of peace and reassurance from any spiritual leader in the Islamic world. In some strange but powerful way, I thought I could sense God's presence and authority in what she said.

At the time, I had no understanding of anything like praying a salvation prayer. I didn't know how to repent of my sin or receive Christ as Savior. But as I went upstairs to my room, I couldn't stop reflecting on the idea that Jesus held the key to eternal life. Suddenly, I found myself on my knees. As I looked up, I said, "Jesus, I know you are Lord. Save me and set me free from my fears!"

Initially, I was reluctant to tell my mother I had become a Christian, because I feared her reaction. As it turns out, however, she was experiencing her own spiritual awakening at the very same moment. Soon enough, when she confessed having come to faith, I dared to tell her I had done the same. Remarkably, my father and younger brother converted to Christianity as well.

When we informed our family member of our decisions, she rejoiced with us and immediately connected us to a secret house church in Tehran. Sometimes it was scary to think that the Islamic government could arrest us and sentence us to long prison terms or even death. But the Holy Spirit gave us extraordinary courage and a growing desire to share the gospel with Muslims.

Over the next ten years, to deepen my walk with the Lord, I began traveling to Christian conferences outside of the country. I would study subjects like discipleship, church leadership, and church planting, and then I would

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bring those courses back to Iran and teach them to my cell groups. I was so passionate about God's mission that I would pray on my knees, every day, for God to use me as a full-time minister.

After years of prayer, I had a dream in which God told me I would go to another country. He didn't reveal the name of the country or even the region—only the year in which I would make my journey, the year 2013. As it happened, in that very year I became stuck in Turkey as a refugee. Two years earlier, the Iranian secret police had arrested one of the leaders in our church network, leaving me no choice but to flee the country.

I remember my last day in Iran, driving with tears in my eyes to say a final goodbye to all my family members, knowing I would never be able to return. I can still feel the pain of that separation. But God was faithful in fulfilling his promises, working through the United Nations to secure my passage to the United States, where I live today. He gave me a great church and a great Christian family who cared for me. He gave me wonderful, godly mentors who have poured blessings and wisdom into my life, coached me, and prayed with me in hard times.

For nearly 21 years, I have been involved in ministry for the persecuted church. I have planted several house churches and taught discipleship and leadership courses within them. After moving to the United States, I discerned a call to equip the Persian church through social media platforms. My goal is to use the power of online education and social media to train new leaders. I store all my teaching and videos on my social media platforms. And I mentor all my trainees online, meeting with them in person a few times a year in a safe country in Central Asia.

Meanwhile, my wife and I host a weekly Christian fellowship on Instagram for Persian-speaking people in secret house churches in places like Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. People tune in from all over the world, and we worship God together and pray for each other. We have the chance to share the gospel with Muslims who live in regions we could never hope to visit.

Set free from fear

One year after I gave my heart to Jesus, my father died of cancer. It was a great sadness for our family. But he had become a great believer, and in his last days, he was praising Jesus on his bed, even during the toughest moments of chemotherapy. I remember sitting by his bed and reading the Bible for him. Afterward, I would pray for God's healing touch. And my father would raise his hands to show that he was praying and worshipping alongside me.

When he went to be with the Lord, the Holy Spirit gave my family and me an incredible sense of peace. I realized that God had healed me and set me free from the fear of death, both my parents' and my own. And I rejoiced in the certainty that because of Christ, someday soon we would all be found in the presence of the living God forever.

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