

This dream was really outrageous since I had little hope of escaping Afghanistan and no reason to change religions. **But that dream never left me and it kept my interest in Jesus alive.**

When I was 17 years old, I rejected Islam and began searching for another religion. **But Afghanistan is not the place for religious experimentation.** I knew that if I wanted to learn more about Jesus, I would need to leave my country. To prepare me for the journey, my sister's husband suggested that I learn English.

As I studied, I met an American family of Christians in Afghanistan. They welcomed me like a son and soon **I could see that their lives were different.** I was attracted to their optimism and wondered how I could find the same joy. I felt as if there might be a door through which I

could walk to begin a new life. **I didn't know how to find that door, but I felt that these Christians were closer to it than anyone I'd ever met before.**

I loved that family and wanted to become like them. I thought that I could do this by going to America. I asked the mother how I might accomplish this. It isn't easy, she said. Go step by step. If God wants you to go to America, He'll lead you there.

Step by step, my journey began. From Afghanistan, I went to Pakistan, and then on to Iran. How could I find out more about this forbidden faith? I found my answer in an unlikely place: on the street. As I wandered in the markets, I saw a vendor selling Bibles. **I bought one and marveled that I hadn't been caught, since buying Bibles is illegal for Muslims in Iran.**

I began to devour that Bible. Much of what I read mystified me but I continued my search. I tried to attend a Christian church in Iran, but the Christians feared that I was a Muslim and wouldn't let me enter the building. I waited outside, tried to listen to the message, and then went on my way.

In Iran, I saw a movie that claimed Jesus was the Son of God, and that He died on the cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. When I arrived in Turkey, I went to Catholic and Orthodox churches and learned a bit more.

When I arrived in Athens, my search took on a new urgency. I slept in a park for two months where someone told me about *Helping Hands*. At *Helping Hands*, I ate soup and met other guys my age who were traveling west. I went to the English and Bible lessons,

and I liked the friendly Christians who ran the center.

I especially liked the Bible teacher. I learned many good things about Jesus and got a clearer understanding of the Bible by attending his classes. The teacher told us often that Jesus could give a person a new life. He read from the N.T.: When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a new person inside. He is not the same any more. while going to America might give me a better life, knowing Jesus would give me the best life.

That wasn't the answer I wanted to hear, so I took matters into my own hands. I joined a group of men who planned to go to Italy. As we waited for the ferry boat in Patra, a woman approached me and handed me a book about Jesus. **I was stunned. There are hundreds of people here in the crowd, I thought to myself. Why did she give this book to me?**

Meanwhile, passengers were boarding the ferry boat and my friends urged me to follow them. But I realized that I didn't

want to follow them, and felt an urge to return to Athens. I was sure that an important encounter awaited me there, and so I returned alone as my friends sailed west.

When I got back to *Helping Hands*, I told the Bible teacher about the woman in Patra and said that I wanted to become a Christian. The Bible teacher asked me why I wanted to change my religion. "Do you want to become a Christian to go to America, or to know Jesus?" he asked.

That was a hard question, and I didn't know the answer. I realized that my motives were mixed. "Oh God," I prayed, "Show me the way!" **Soon I had a third dream:** I dreamt of the cross of Christ, and I heard Jesus say, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but through me. (John 14:6).

Shortly after that, I was convinced that Jesus wasn't only a prophet, but the Son of God who came to earth to die for my sins and to give me a new life. **That moment of belief was the most important**

encounter of my life. Soon I was baptized in the sea, thus fulfilling my boyhood dream.

What have I gained from following Jesus? First, joy. I'm very happy because I know that Jesus has saved me from the sins that should have condemned me. I'm also happy because through Jesus, **I can know God, and can talk to Him like a son would. God also encourages me during the hard times** when the realities of the world bring me pain. Last year, for example, I had a bad accident in Athens and I was tempted to doubt

God. But I learned that suffering builds my faith. Trusting Jesus as my Savior has also helped **my attitude.** Before I was a Christian, I was a good, hard worker who minded the law. But I was also proud and judged other people harshly. Now I am humbled that Jesus took the punishment for my sins and that I am only saved by His grace. God has given me love for my enemies, patience, and the peace that my life is safe in His hands.

Then I had a second dream: I dreamt that I left Afghanistan, converted to Christianity, and was being baptized in the sea.