

Dear Praying Friends,

Believe it or not, I could be sending updates much more frequently but I put many of them "on hold" to allow some space between them so as not to overwhelm you. Here are a few from my backed-up folder...

(From Nader)...

Recently, we had a seekers retreat (helped by short-termers). We had some Afghani and 1 Iranian at the retreat. **On the first day of the retreat after the second session, one Afghani named "A" went outside the yard to talk privately about giving his heart to the Lord. "A" opened his heart and accepted the Lord, away from the eyes of his fellow Afghanis.** We had very nice conversation with the seekers. They are open-minded and have very much interest to know about what is written in the book of Christianity.

One of the Afghani seekers was the founder of a University in Iran (where he was a refugee for 24 years). He is a journalist, publisher of a magazine for women's rights, and wrote 5 books about Islam. His writings got him in trouble in Iran. He was held for 86 days in an intelligence ministry prison in the holy city of Qom for the crimes of "publicity against the government" and "publication of false information." He spent 81 of the 86 days in solitary confinement, and suffered kidney and chest pains that were not treated.

He also was accused of blasphemy in Afghanistan in October 2005, and sentenced to two years' jail. He had reprinted articles by an Iranian scholar criticising the stoning of Muslims who converted to another religion and the use of corporal punishment for people accused of adultery. His sentence was reduced on appeal to six months, despite some religious groups calling for the death penalty. **(His story has been in many news publications, including the Washington Post and the BBC).**

He also believes that any person has the right to choose their own religion. He wanted to know more about Christianity and he has a lot of interesting questions. He is an open-minded person and receptive.

Please pray for the Afghan "A" who received the Lord during the retreat and the others seekers with him in that retreat

Please Pray for the journalist from Afghanistan, that the purpose of the Lord in his life will help advance the Kingdom of God among Afghan people.

Pray also for us for our future ministry in Norway. Thank you for always standing with us in prayer. We appreciate you in partnering with us in serving the Lord.

Nader and Ella

Sam and Fran Holdsambeck are missionaries with Entrust, volunteering with our ministry in Athens for many years now. Among many other things, they have really been used by God in opening up their home to those in need.

They provided daily care and hospitality for about 3 years to "MJ" and her son "RA", refugees from Afghanistan who came to the Lord through the witness of another Afghani believer in

Athens. "MJ" and "RA" have been dear friends to all of us who work with refugees in Athens, and we have written about them before. (You can read their story in detail, from "RA's" perspective at <http://refminatzens.blogspot.com>)

(From Sam--edited version)...

Yesterday, Thursday September 25, at approximately 10:00 a.m., "MJ" got on an airplane. bound for Dubai. Her destination: Kabul, Afghanistan. After over 10 years on the refugee highway, she had had enough. She was going home to see her daughter and the three grandchildren she knew only from phone conversations. She was going back to see one more time her elderly parents, the only family members yet to be informed that "MJ" is no longer the person she was when she left. "MJ" is now a child of the living God, a blood-bought sister of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We first met "MJ" and "RA" when they were living in the Nest, a ministry of Helping Hands (International Teams). Fran and "MJ" cooked three days a week for the students at the Athens Intensive Ministry School (AIMS) during the fall and winter of 2004-2005. Despite "MJ's" limited English (and Fran's non-existent Farsi!), she and Fran became close friends. It was also during this time that we were able to help "MJ" get fit with a set of false teeth, something she desperately needed. The Lord was bonding us together like family.

They moved in with us over three years ago after the facility they were in closed. "RA" had started the year before at Glyfada Christian Academy, the school where Fran and I taught when we first came to Greece. We convinced them to come live with us so "RA" could finish school. It was a delight having them in our home. At times the American and Afghan cultures clashed, and we had our share of misunderstandings. Don't most families? But in spite of the cultural chasm we all got along quite well. "MJ" attended the Glyfada Christian Center and "RA" was active in the Persian Christian Fellowship. Both grew in their walk with the Lord.

Fran spent many hours with "MJ" on the laptop with the Rosetta Stone program, Fran learning Farsi and "MJ" working on her English. Fran (and I) also listened to "MJ" pour out her heart over her frustrations over her teenage son (some things are the same in all cultures) and the pain she always felt over the loss of her husband, her two oldest sons, and the separation from her home and her beloved Afghanistan. We listened many times to her as she told her story and her testimony, to us and visitors in our home, always learning some new twist or detail, always being amazed and awed at the grace of God in her life.

I can remember once standing in our kitchen, not that long ago, talking about their journey from Pakistan to Greece over a period of three years, and expressing frustration over the difficulties she was having getting her papers legally sorted out in Greece. But she said, in so many words, "You know, it's OK. Because God had a plan for us. By coming here we met Jesus Christ as our savior."

One morning "MJ" tearfully told Fran about a dream she had the night before. She saw herself sitting around in a circle with her family in Afghanistan. They were all praying. Suddenly "MJ" saw a cross in the middle of the circle. She got up and walked to it and embraced it, pulling it to herself. When she woke, she was puzzled and said, "Lord, what does this mean?" He spoke to her: "You are mine. You belong to Me." She was deeply moved and greatly encouraged.

"MJ" left Afghanistan after her two oldest sons were abducted by the Taliban and never heard from again. She had one son left, a nine-year-old named "RA". Something had to be done to protect him. She wanted him to have the chance for an education and a normal life. The only option was to flee, clinging to some remote hope that they could make it to a country where he

could get an education. "RA" has now not only learned English but Greek as well, and has his high school diploma in hand. His desire is to continue his education...In spite of the dangers she faces, Afghanistan beckons.

Whenever there has been talk in recent months of MJ going back to Afghanistan, she has been told not to do it, that it would be suicide. One close Afghan friend who is also a believer told her, "If you go back you will surely be killed. It's virtually guaranteed." Before they moved out (of our home) after "RA's" high school graduation, "MJ" got a call from her daughter in Kabul, warning her that everybody in the extended family now knows she is a Christian and that she should not return, she would be a marked lady. (Her elderly parents have not been told for fear of how it would affect them.) Apparently there is one uncle of hers who is a particularly fanatic Muslim (I demur to use the word "devout"), and he is reported to have said, "She must die."

Shortly before she left Athens, we went for a brief walk in the National Gardens on a beautiful fall afternoon, and a couple of times I said to her, "Isaye Masi ra rad nakon" (Don't deny the Lord). I could tell these words made her think, and I can only pray that God will give her courage and use her for His glory there in that dark and dangerous land. While most Americans these days are worried about whether their bank will fail and if the new president will be able to lead the country out of the mess it's in, and whether our precious "way of life" will be preserved, this dear lady is wondering if she is going to her death. Half-jokingly, she told me, "If my father finds out I'm a Christian, he may kill me himself!" She also said, "If I die, I die. My life is in the Lord's hands."

But mostly what I wanted to say to "MJ" yesterday was, "I love you. I'll miss you. I'll be praying for you. I will never forget you!" I really didn't cry that much until the next morning, after I took Fran to the bus stop to catch the airport shuttle. I was just as glad that I had the "excuse" of a prior commitment and couldn't go see her off at the airport.

By that time I was an emotional wreck. I called Fran after "MJ" had finished at the ticket counter, and I could hardly choke out my last goodbyes. She said, "Hi Sam-jan (Persian term of endearment). Are you OK?"

I am not forgot you! Goodbye! Goodbye! Khoda hafez! Khoda hafez!" This traditional Persian phrase, I found out not too long ago, literally means, "God Protector," so that essentially when someone says goodbye in Persian, they are saying, "May God protect you," or, "God is your protector." Yes my dear sister, who I may never see again this side of heaven when we will bow together before our great Savior, this is my prayer for you. May God protect you. We will never forget you!

Please pray for "MJ". We will let you know as soon as we hear from her. She promised several times to call, and we are currently waiting rather anxiously to find out if she made it safely. And please pray for us-she took part of our hearts with her! (Please also pray for "RA" to know God's will for him and to follow it).

(Some days later...)

"MJ" arrived safely in Afghanistan, and after a brief visit with her daughter and grandchildren in Kabul, she went to see her parents in the northern part of the country. She had a hassle in Iran and they "confiscated" many things from her bag (gifts she was taking to her family), but at least she made it safely. So far there have been no problems regarding her faith in Christ. (The man who has been so vocal about killing her, a nephew, lives in Kabul, and is no immediate threat, they tell me.) After Fran talked on the phone with her the other day, she said, "MJ" just told me something quite amazing!" "MJ" had told her, "I have talked to my father about the Gospel and Jesus. I can't talk to anybody else, but I can talk to him!" I broke down in tears when I heard this. Even "RA" was surprised about it when I told him later. So she had only been there a few days and already had talked to her elderly father about the Lord! Hallelujah!

Your prayers are a major part of what God is doing in and through this woman. I feel like we all have a part in our own little evangelist in Afghanistan. "MJ" may not be very sophisticated or knowledgeable, but given half a chance, she's going to talk to people about Christ. Please continue to pray for her and for her parents. She is there with no Bible, no church, no Christian fellowship-it's just she and the Lord. I believe with all my heart, as I know you do, that with God, ALL THINGS are possible! Of course, whenever we get any news, we will pass it along.

WITH CHRISTMAS AROUND THE CORNER, I HOPE YOU WILL CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING VIDEOS...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVqqj1v-ZBU>

http://www.gfa.org/gift-video?cm_mmc=GFA-_-Email-_-377991-_-081114-viral-video-friday

GRATEFUL FOR YOU,

Scott & Vicki McCracken
Panagiotou 3 Papagou
15669 Athens/GREECE

(30) 210-65-28-191

E-mail: scott.mccracken@iteams.org