

Iran's Spiritual Awakening

The Holy Spirit is active in Iran; there is no doubt about that. The supernatural is commonplace. People are having dreams and visions. Miraculous conversion stories are a daily occurrence. The sick are being healed. And God is speaking directly to His people, providing supernatural guidance in a physically hostile environment. Over the past 30-plus years, 222 Ministries, now known as Transform Iran, has joined God in His supernatural work, and we are watching Him bring revival to this Muslim land.

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Ali is stuck in an endless cycle of depression and addiction. He has been a devout Muslim his whole life. One night he has a dream. Jesus visits him and shows him a better way. He wakes up free from his chains and in search for more about this Jesus who saved him. He contacts us for help. We begin weekly discipleship classes with him, all run remotely from the West and in the privacy of his home. He shares his newfound faith with his family. They all accept Christ. A house church is born.

Maryam has been abused her whole life. First her father, then her brothers, then her husband. She has now been left destitute by a system that does not protect women. The only way she knows to make ends meet is through prostitution. She hears about our work (Pearl of Persia) with prostitutes in Iran and reaches out for help. She finds healing, love and acceptance in Christ. She discovers her true identity and steps out in a freedom she has never known before. Now she is training to help others like her.

Fariba has been curious about Jesus her whole life. But such talk at home could get her killed. One day someone meets her in a park (the Holy Spirit had directed them there) and hands her a New Testament. She reads it and discovers water in the desert. How has she never known about this before? She can't stop reading and feasting on these words of life. She cannot tell her family. She finds herself sneaking to the restroom to secretly read her Bible. She is discovered, and her life is threatened. She escapes to Turkey, where she now serves with our ministry team reaching millions of Iranian tourists there as well as using mass media to share the gospel directly into Iran.

Siroos decides to read the Bible to fake his own conversion so he can gain refugee status outside Iran for himself and his family. To his surprise, he cannot put it down. He experiences a powerful conversion that includes instantaneous freedom from alcoholism. His broken marriage is restored. His wife and children are saved. Having suffered 15 years of strife in marriage as well as the effects of alcohol, he and his wife become powerful tools for marriage counseling amongst new believers who also need marriages restored.

He is arrested and spends two weeks in solitary confinement, but God shows him visions of angels standing guard around him. His wife prays for light for him in his dark prison cell. She neglects to ask for darkness at night, and God so illuminates Siroos' cell that he needs to sleep with a towel on his head. His hunger for the Word of God grows to the point that he cannot stop reading it. He now leads our Bible translation efforts into the ethnic languages of Iran. (Read his story on page 32.)

The Light Shines in the Darkness

The list goes on.

But why? Why so much and why here?

It certainly is true that Iran today is an oppressive place for Christians to live. The law of the land protects and promotes Islam. It is illegal to convert from Islam or to aid someone else in their conversion. Both are punishable by death, and the government is not shy about enforcing the law.

When I was a young man, living in a secular Iran led by our West-loving monarchy, I would spend days in the streets handing out pamphlets and wanting to share the Good News of Christ with anyone who would listen. Not one person ever stood and engaged with me. Iran was free then, and the people were not interested.

In 1978, the people turned against the ruling regime. In an effort to weed out greed and corruption, they chose to bring in "pure religion," "pure morality" and opted for an authentic Shiite Islamic regime. The ruling body became the clergy. When the regime changed in 1979, freedom was denied in the name of a restoration of morality. Alcohol was banned. Bibles were banned. Relations outside of marriage were banned. The media was controlled. Those in the arts were exiled. But the sin and greed of man had not changed, and as the people choked under oppression and darkness, they began to search for light.

The Word of God tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Since the revolution in Iran, my prayers for an open harvest in Iran have been answered. The truth is that when we are comfortable, when we have options and multiple sources for life, for joy, for hope, it's easy to be complacent and distracted. We don't realize how much we need God. But when we are out in the desert, desperately reliant on the only true source of life, joy and hope, we run to and cling to the living water, just as David describes the deer panting for water in Psalm 42.

When all other options are taken away, we become reliant on

God, on His provision and on the supernatural.

This is what has happened to the church in Iran. There is no way but the way of the Holy Spirit. There is no hope but the hope of the gospel. There is no freedom but that found in Christ. The physical world around us is dark and full of persecution. But the light we carry is bright, and the Holy Spirit is kind and ever-present.

'The Time of God's Visitation'

God is using many ways to speak to the lost and encourage and strengthen His bride. One key way is through dreams and visions. People often ask us why Iranians have so many supernatural dreams. I would say dreams are a part of our culture, and God loves to use language we understand to communicate with us. Dreams give strength and encouragement, inform decision-making and alter the course of lives. These dreams saved lives—even the life of the infant Jesus.

Ask the members of any congregation in Iran if they have had a dream or vision of Christ, and over 90% will raise their hands. God is speaking to the people of Iran, and they are responding.

So why Iran, and why now?

The kingdom of God is all about times and seasons. In Chronicles 12, we read about the sons of Issachar. They were aware of the times; in fact, the Bible says they *understood* the times. This made them rulers. When the disciples asked Jesus about the timing for when the kingdom of God would be established, He answered by saying only the Father knows. But in Matthew 16:1-4 we find Jesus rebuking the Pharisees because they should know how to “discern the signs of the times” (v. 4b). So there are some things which are hidden from us, but there are seasons, times of the move of God, that He desires us to be aware of and act accordingly.

At the end of Luke 19, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and her people's inability to discern the move of God: "You did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (v. 44b, NIV). The King of kings, Jesus Christ, had visited their city. And they had missed it.

This is the time for Iran. Jesus is visiting. Why is the revival happening? Because His hand of grace is on Iran for this time. We must be aware and act accordingly. Let us not be those who "did not recognize the time of God's visitation" and miss His move.

God has chosen this particular moment of history to visit Iran, and the people are opening their hearts to Him. No sector of society is exempt. The poor, the destitute, the illiterate, yes. But also the learned, the businessmen, the politicians, the mullahs (Muslim clergy members). Men and women, young and old. All are opening their hearts to Christ.

Elham was a mullah, giving religion lessons to young girls. When she found out she had breast cancer, her world fell apart. Someone connected her to one of our pastors, who introduced her to Jesus. She says she felt a ray of hope from that day on. She began to undergo treatment, and the pastor began discipling her as she learned about her newfound faith. She experienced a miraculous touch from God and complete healing of her cancer. She left her position as a mullah and began to seek the Lord about His plans for her life. Today she is studying to teach the younger generation about Jesus.

She says, "Since following Jesus, I have felt His presence every day in my life. Even though I was a Muslim cleric, I never had this feeling of God's presence that I have now. My Lord Jesus Christ guides and teaches me and gave me a new life. I feel His presence every day and everywhere, and I'm so glad that He chose me to know the true God."

No one is beyond the reach of the love of God. Studies have

been done in the West on the size of the church in Iran and its rate of growth. Open Doors says Iran has the fastest-growing church in the world right now, with a rate of 20%. In fact, more Iranians have become Christians in the last 43 years than in the previous 13 centuries put together since Islam came to Iran. We are seeing the biggest revival in the history of Iran. In 1979, there were an estimated 500 Christians from a Muslim background in Iran and now, Dutch research firm Gamaan estimates there are 1.5 million followers of Christ in Iran (that's over % of its 84 million population). And all this in a country that Open Doors puts as the ninth most hostile to the gospel right now.

The light shines in the darkness.

'Filled With the Knowledge of the Glory of the Lord'

People often ask us, "How can we know the times?" I would say that our loving Father loves to reveal His secrets to us, to invite us to share the adventure of it all with Him. In Amos 3:7a, He says, "The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants." In Isaiah 42:9b, God tells us that He will tell us about the new things which are happening ("before they spring into being I announce them to you").

When you love someone, you want to be in relationship with them, which includes communication. God loves His bride, and He wants to be in relationship with her. He not only wants to equip her to serve and be effective for His kingdom, but He also wants to *inform* her to be prepared.

As an organization, we make it a priority to hear from Him, to see what He sees and to be prepared. We use every opportunity available to us to maximize this open heaven over Iran, whether it be sharing the gospel via satellite TV, internet, social media, radio or printed Bibles; or discipling the converts through WhatsApp, Telegram or Zoom. As an

organization, we do our best to ensure we don't miss a single opportunity to partner with what the Holy Spirit is *already doing* and ensure as many as possible have access to the lifesaving words of Jesus and come to know a meaningful, deep-rooted relationship with Him.

Seeing some of this in the Spirit years ahead, we were able to prepare. We were privileged to pioneer Farsi Christian television broadcasting over 20 years ago. Many others have now joined us in this mission to use mass media to reach millions in Iran. We pioneered the only Farsi Christian apologetics center.

The church is growing, and we want to help it become strong. It continues: a Freedom in Christ course, Bibles, theological resources, digital church for the scattered believers, 24/7 radio broadcast, social media evangelism, 1:1 remote discipleship for those unable to meet in person, a mobile app bursting with evangelistic and discipleship resources, training events, trauma counseling, translating the Bible into Iran's 40-plus ethnic languages so all have access to the Word in their own language. Why do we do it? Because in His kindness, God has shown us ahead of time what He is doing and given us the grace to partner with Him and see our beautiful nation come into the light. Iran will be transformed for Christ. Of that we have no doubt. What joy, what privilege, to have been a part of it.

I encourage you to also invite Him to open your eyes to what He is doing—not only in your own life and in your immediate surroundings but also around the world. Where is He visiting? Where can you join forces with the work of the Holy Spirit and see a great harvest for the kingdom of God? “That the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. 2:14a).

Lazarus Yeghnazar and his daughter **Lana Silk** work as founder, president and CEO of 222 Ministries, now known as

TransformIran. TransformIran has over 30 years experience church planting, discipling and developing leaders in Iran and amongst the Iranian diaspora in 17 countries. If you would like to support their work or find out more about what God is doing in Iran today, visit and .