

What a Persecuted Pastor's Wife Learned Through the Trial

For 25 years of my Christian faith, I believed the lies that my deceitful flesh told me. I let it lead me to broken relationships and broken lives. It ultimately left me broken.

These lies I believed were slowly leading me to death. I was bombarded with thoughts like:

- Poor me.
- Why me?
- I'm tired.
- I'm worn.
- I shouldn't be treated like this.
- They need to do more.
- I deserve better.
- If only I had a man, money and looks, I would be happy.

All About Me

The lies led me to walk away from relationships and situations that were not making *me* happy. Instead, in following the lies of my flesh, I sought whatever it took to make me happy. My flesh always pointed everything back to me. **It was all about me.**

You see, the flesh was very deceptive and had good arguments that led me to believe everything it was telling me. And I never fought back because I did not recognize it for what it was. I wasn't able to experience the power and work of the Spirit of God in my life because I was selfish.

The Turning Point

It was only when, in 2012, Iranian authorities arrested my husband, Pastor Saeed Abedini, and put him in the worst Iranian prisons, where he was tortured for his faith, that I was awakened to the ways of my flesh.

For 25 years, my flesh had been throwing a tantrum cloaked in seasons of deep despair and anxious thoughts that made me always pity myself. It was during the tantrum that my eyes were finally opened to the sin that I lived in every single day of my life. The writings of the apostle Paul revealed the importance of dying to my flesh daily and the ongoing battle between the flesh and the Spirit within each of us:

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:21–24)

The words of Jesus in Luke 9:23 came to life:

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Jesus said that death to self and carrying the cross (a sign of submission) is our calling as Christians. It's the only way to follow Him and be His disciple. How had I missed such a basic and important lesson?

Carrying Our Cross

Suddenly, I could hear God speak to me through His Word: *“My people come to the cross for salvation, but they leave the cross behind and walk away . . . they have forgotten that they are to carry the cross in order to be able to follow Me and be My disciples.”*

I finally learned how to fight my deceptive selfish flesh on a daily basis—every nag, tantrum, despairing thought, and fear. Before Saeed was thrown into one of the world’s worst prisons, I struggled with fear and anxiety. More than anything, I was afraid of flying and speaking in front of people. It was when one of my worst fears happened, and I found myself a single mom with a husband in prison being tortured for his Christian faith, that I reached the ultimate low. It was in that moment that I realized how very weak I was. I could lose everything in an instant, and no one in the world could help me.

My mother was kneeling in front of me, crying and begging me to tell her what she could do to help. I realized that there was nothing she or anyone could do. Only the One who made me could reach down into the depths of my soul and fix me. I cried out to Jesus, “Help me! I can’t fall now! My kids need me. My husband needs me. Please heal me! I will let go of my life and let You lead me.” The peace of God that surpasses all understanding covered my whole being, and I was freed of all fear. I no longer feared death of loved ones. I no longer feared the loss of finances or health. I no longer feared the future. I was truly free in Jesus.

Free, Indeed

By God’s grace, I have overcome my fears in the last two years. This once timid and shy public speaker who was afraid to fly has traveled all over the world proclaiming Jesus in front of the United Nations, European parliaments, the U.S.

Congress, and ambassadors and leaders of countries. I have gone to places that I never dreamt of going and done things I never dreamt of doing. God has given me a *huge* platform for His Gospel.

The secret to my new-found strength has been in recognizing my flesh every morning, battling the lies I'm tempted to believe, and stepping out in obedience to the Word of God. It's not in your background, your finances, or the people you know. It is entirely related to how much you are willing to die to yourself and allow the Spirit to take control of your life.

The Bible tells us that we live in a fallen nature that is not to be trusted. That we are to keep our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5) and to keep our heart, which is deceitful beyond all things, in check (Jer. 17:9). We live in a fallen world that is always tempting our fallen nature to act out.

Walk in the Spirit

Single, married or widowed, you wake up to your flesh every day. If your flesh is anything like mine, your thoughts will echo lies that sound true. So, I want to give you practical steps to help you overcome your flesh, live in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18), and see the Lord use your life for His Kingdom and glory in a more powerful way than you ever imagined:

1. **Recognize the flesh** (Gal. 5:19-21).

Take a good look at anything in your life that it is all about you.

2. **Battle your flesh.**

Replace what it is telling you with the Word of God.

3. **Take action in obedience and submission to God.**

Love when it hurts to love. Love summarizes the law of God.

4. **Watch the Spirit work.**

Once you step out in genuine obedience, you will see the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life (Gal. 5:22-23).

5. The world will be drawn to your fruit.

People will want to taste of your salt. They will be drawn to your light in the midst of absolute darkness. Souls will get saved.

I say this to you and as a reminder to myself: There is no condemnation in Christ. Paul, a hero of the faith, struggled with his flesh. The key is to recognize it when it comes up and beat it down through confession, repentance and faith. Don't let it lead you to a life of destruction and despair—it only leads to death. Choose the narrow path that few choose because it's hard. It requires painful death to self everyday and carrying of the cross, but it ultimately leads to life—forever (Matt. 7: 13–14).

Taken from Naghmeh Abedini's blog post "What I Learned From My Husband's Persecution." . Used with permission.