

Iranian Christian on Brother's Arrest: 'So Afraid I Almost Fainted'

It was just another day at the office for accountant Sepideh*. The phone rang and Sepideh reached over her desk to answer it, not knowing that this call would be the start of years of worries. "Sepideh, quick!" The voice of her mother sounded nervous. "They arrested your brother, and they might come for you next. Please leave your workplace and come home!"

Five years earlier, Sepideh's brother Saman had decided to follow Jesus.

"At first, I thought it was just another one of his strange interests," Sepideh shares. "But as time passed, I saw how Saman changed. This is how I became interested in Christianity as well."

Sepideh started reading the Bible, and the words really spoke to her. Like her brother, she gave her life to Jesus. Brother and sister started to attend a house church together.

All went well until that terrible phone call. "When I heard that my brother had been arrested, I was so afraid that I almost fainted."

Sepideh decided to leave her office, although she wasn't sure where to go.

"My mind was blurred. I remember walking in the streets in the hot summer sun, my body soaked by sweat. I approached the police office, doubting if I should go in and ask about my brother. But when I was almost there, I quickly passed by, too afraid that I would be arrested as well."

At home Sepideh found her mother. She told Sepideh that Saman

had called her. "I have been arrested," he said. After those words he quickly disconnected. "We had no information, so after careful consideration, we decided to go to the police station together." While Sepideh waited outside, her mother went inside, but came back shaking her head—no information about her son.

That night Sepideh had trouble sleeping.

"I was so concerned about my brother, about what they did to him, about where he was. And I was concerned about our friends arrested alongside him."

But Sepideh also anxiously kept her ears strained for a knock on the door. "I was afraid the police would come and take me as well, or that they would invade our home to find evidence for my brother's case."

After a restless night, Sepideh was still in her house. The police didn't come. In fact, the police didn't let Sepideh and her mother know anything. After yesterday's quick and nervous phone call, it seemed as though Saman had vanished from the earth. Meanwhile, Sepideh still had trouble getting her mind clear. "I called my pastor, and he told me that I couldn't call him with this number anymore. He also told me that he had closed the church for a while to avoid any new arrests. His words made me even more afraid than I already was."

Anxiously Sepideh started to collect all her Christian CDs and books to get them out of the house. If the police came, they wouldn't find evidence. "But even this didn't calm me. In fact, I felt like as long as I didn't know about my brother, I couldn't feel at ease. So I fell down on my knees. The only thing I still had, the only one who could give me peace was my Lord."

Sepideh poured out her heart. "I told the Lord how helpless I felt about the arrests, how afraid that they'd come for me too."

Then a Bible text came to Sepideh's mind, all of a sudden, like it was sent by God: Mark 4:35-41. Quickly she browsed the pages in her Bible. When she started reading, her tears fell on the pages. "It was the story in which Jesus calms the storm at sea. He asks His disciples why they are so afraid and encourages them to trust Him. Reading the story calmed the storm in me as well. I entrusted my brother's life, as well as my own, to my Savior."

It would take two weeks until Sepideh and her mother heard anything from Saman—and another two weeks for them to be able to visit him. "He told us he and his friends had been arrested while distributing Bibles and that they faced tough interrogations." It was tough for Sepideh to see her brother like this, but she trusted her Lord. "I believe that my brother is in the hands of God and that He has a plan for him there."

Sepideh herself wasn't arrested. However, estimates from evidence provided by the American Center for Law and Justice, Article 18 and Middle East Concern suggest that, in May 2015, there were 90 people detained in Iranian prisons on account of their Christian faith and practice. Middle East Concern has provided a list of names of Christian detainees updated to Nov. 2016. {eo}

*name changed for security reasons

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