

11/24/14

Week 48: Fall Mission Feeding
Naghmeh Abedini

James: Boy, it is a joy to be here with you. I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are thrilled to have you. I'm holding a letter from a father in jail in Iran, in prison, to his daughter who misses him.

I wish you could hear us, dad. I wish you could know how much you, as a dad, as a father, as a minister, how much you exalt the Father. How much you inspire the witness. Your wife is here with us.

I know it is not like he could see this. I wish people in Iran would just say, "Let's let this man go see his daughter and son," like you'd want to see yours. You claim a devotion to Allah; surely you can understand devotion. I just ask for a miracle. Naghmeh is here; Abedini is her last name. I think I may be past the test to pronounce your name.

Would you welcome Naghmeh to *LIFE Today*?

We're so glad you're here. We love you. It's nice to meet someone whose last name is going to be more difficult than Robison, Robinson, or Rowbison or whatever they call me.

[Laughter]

You're beautiful. I may read a few sentences or so from the letter but he's written you some pretty powerful letters too. How are you doing? How are you?

Naghmeh: Tired, worn, at times frustrated but never lost hope. Trusting that God says in the letter the answer of why he has not released us; yet it relies in the who; and Jesus is in control, and every day he is in prison, God is using it for his glory and his

kingdom. People are being led, inside Iran, where he is at, to Christ and people -- God has given me a platform here and across the world for the gospel. So that's what makes it easier. But it's been hard; it's been a lot of traveling and trying to get support and advocating for his release. And as a mom, it is just hard watching my kids suffer.

James: Let me ask you this, you've spoken probably now to how many different nations, the witness for Christ as a result of the horrific thing that has happened? And you were already witnessing in Iran, which is your native country, and his. You found Christ here in America and you wanted to go back over there and just tell people how much you loved them and God loves them. And you met him and trouble started before you even met him because you kind of had what? Got arrested; right?

Naghmeh: Yes.

James: It wasn't like you were robbing banks or something. What were you doing?

Naghmeh: We were sharing Christ.

James: And that's what got you in trouble -- just sharing Christ?

Naghmeh: Well, I grew up here. I grew up in Idaho. I was born in Iran though and we moved here when there was a war with Iran and Iraq. Long story short, I felt called by God to go back to Iran in 2001 to share the gospel and show the Muslim people God's love. And I felt that's what will transform the Middle East is love of God, love of Christ.

But I was very fearful and so I went and I start sharing the gospel with my cousins. I wasn't really out in the streets. A year into it I met Saeed and he was born and raised in Iran. He was a pastor. The government knew of it. He was under a government-approved church. He was part of a Bible school; and part of their assignment was to start house churches and the government was allowing it and was aware of it. When I met him he was a pastor and then we just got married. We told the government we were Muslim converts.

Well, I was afraid; that was one of my times of arguing with Saeed. I always say it was my job as a wife is first to argue and make sure he is -- make sure he knows what he is doing.

James: Most wives have that divine assignment.

[Laughter]

Naghmeh: But I was a fiancé then. But he said, "Let's go tell the government we're converts and let's just have a Christian wedding."

I said, "No."

I was always -- I never denied Christ but I was hiding it because I just knew in Iran it is dangerous. But we went and told the government we were converts and that we wanted a Christian wedding. Saeed said I could never imagine having a Muslim wedding and making promises to the god of Allah. So we had a Christian wedding. It was central Teheran in front of one of the largest mosques near Teheran University.

I'm thinking, only my parents and my sister were coming from the U.S. I'm thinking, maybe four or five people from my side, maybe 20-30 people from Saeed's side. Most people didn't want to come because we were converts and they were Muslim. I see Saeed printing 600 wedding invitations and I'm thinking what is he doing? I didn't understand it until the day of our wedding, which we have the church is packed. It has a balcony of about 500-600 people. We made wedding favors of Jesus films and Bibles and they were beautifully wrapped. Saeed was passing them out and I was just -- I felt like it wasn't my wedding, I was just watching as Saeed is sharing the gospel.

[Laughter]

Of course, that night he got into --

James: You didn't know he was already married.

[Laughter]

Naghmeh: That's interesting because this year was 10 years we've been married. And on our 10 year anniversary it was hard, I was in D.C. and I hadn't gotten really promising news about his release. I was just feeling sorry for myself. But I was remembering our wedding where he got into so much trouble because I told him, our honeymoon, right after the wedding, I was fighting with him, "Why did you have to do this? Can we not do ministry for one day? Could we just have a normal private wedding?" I wanted small private and most of the people I didn't know. It was most like sharing.

Then I remember him smiling and saying, "I'm going to give you the best 10 year anniversary." And it kind of made me laugh too, go figure, he's in prison serving Christ on our 10 year anniversary. So it was just this beautiful start. I look at it now and I see God gave us beautiful wedding right in Teheran. Revolutionary guards were circling the church and we didn't get arrested but with Saeed we had a lot of arrests but we were always let go, either had Bibles and were giving Bibles, transferring Bibles to house churches or if we were sharing the gospel with someone.

But one of the instances that really touched me at that time and then I'd forgotten about it until recently, was a time where we were arrested and we had a house church leader who called and said, "I'm scared. I feel like I'm being followed. I feel like something bad is about to happen. Can you come to my house?"

So we went to his house at midnight to be more discreet. And as soon as we knock on his house, and he comes out with these revolutionary guards, which are the radical terrorist group. They attack us, they put us in these cars and they take us down these alleys and they take us to this interrogation place that was room after room in the middle of the courtyard -- and they moved us from room to room to room. And the final room there was this big guy with a beard. He was the boss of this place. Everyone respected him.

I'm sitting here, Saeed's next to me and this house church leader is next to Saeed and the revolutionary guard says, "This is your final chance. You say you're Muslim you go free. You say you're Christian, you will die."

And to even bring more fear he looked straight at me, and I have guns pointed to me, and he said, "You won't be with your husband. You will be in a separate cell. You will be tortured, raped, and then you will die; it's not going to be an easy death so make your decision."

In that instant I was really thinking, I've been a Christian, gone to church a lot. How much do I really believe Jesus is real? This gun and this interrogator is real to me. Long story short I felt the Lord say, "Don't deny me, I will protect you. I will deliver you."

So I opened my mouth and it wasn't even me because I didn't have the strength to say it. I felt it was the Lord just spoke, gave me faith for that moment and I said, "I'm a Christian."

And this interrogator got angry and he said, "Your testimony is the evidence against you."

So I gave my testimony.

He said, "You're westernized by America. You're..." He was getting angrier.

Then they heard Saeed's story. He was born in Iran, raised in Iran, very strong Muslim family. His mom was still teaching at the mosque. He had a powerful conversion where he saw Jesus; where he had a vision of Jesus and Jesus had told him, he had woken up in the middle of the night three times. The third time he heard... Every time he heard a voice say, "Saeed, I'm coming back soon. Go preach my gospel."

The third time he said, "Amen."

He saw the back of Jesus walking away. So he was describing his conversion story and this guard was beyond angry. I felt like Stephen, he was going to kill us right there. He wasn't even going to let us go to prison. Then he just closed our cases, take him away. You're done.

As we're walking away, he seems shaken or he seemed to be struggling with himself and he looks at Saeed and says, "I need to talk to you."

So he took Saeed to the courtyard. They're talking. About 30 minutes, 30-35 minutes later they come out and he's crying. He's trying to hold back tears. There's like -- he's sniffing and he says, "Can I have a Bible?" to us as we're leaving.

[Applause]

So this story was -- I'd forgotten about it because it happened in 2004, and Saeed was taken in 2012. During that process we'd come to the U.S. from the time we got married and then we left Iran in 2005 when Ahmadinejad became president. Churches have grown to a few thousand believers all over Iran, 30 cities and so on.

So we come, we'd had our two kids; my daughter who just turned eight, Rebecca, and Jacob who turned six. So we lived here, and once Saeed was taken, the Lord said, "Remember when you were about to be killed. You had a gun to your head. I delivered you. Saeed's time is not in the hands of the Iranian government, it is in my hands and I will deliver him the time he needs to be delivered."

The first week he was taken I was in the U.S. I got a call from his mom saying, "Saeed, they took him. We don't know where they've taken him."

The first week we didn't even know if he was alive. That's when the Lord spoke to me and said, "He's in my hands; don't worry. No government owns his life. The second I will protect him and the minute he has to go, I know the time he is supposed to be on this earth." So it was freeing to know God is control and that story really touched me. And remembering that story gave me a lot of strength.

James: Would you just like to say thanks?

[Applause]

I would just say to you, if you feel impressed in some particular way you want to help her, then you let us know. Tell us what you want to do. I will say this, and this is just something that I'm just sowing a thought, there are, even for the people in Iran to survive, there are certain things taking place in market interaction that even a compassionate businessman, you may say he is strictly market-driven, that's all that drives his mind, which is simply not true of much if not most the people who are in the free market enterprise who just know freedom gives us an opportunity to be overseers and stewards and produce and meet needs -- produce product, meet needs.

You may have a connection, something going on in Iran that you know if it stopped people would really suffer, and they know that. It's providing something. It would be a necessary service that you would want every child to have access to, every family to have access to. No matter how much you don't agree with what they believe, but you know that's important and you might be impressed. I just sow this thought to simply say to those individuals you're working with, "I care about you. I want you to do something for what I'm doing, to keep business with you. I want you to release this man."

I want you to do that. I'm just sowing a thought. I want believers to take it to God in prayer, because I'm telling you that there are ways even -- if you'll remember, when we're at war we're many times saving the family members of the very enemies who have been trying to kill us and trying to help their children go to school; that's not just the American way, that's compassion.

But the situation in the Middle East is very, very tenuous; it is very delicate. But this situation is serious here so I'm simply saying that to you. You want to help her some way, let us know. If you want to send her something to help her, don't hesitate to tell us, we'll be a channel because what's what we do. We release the river of God's life

and love all over the world because that's what he said would flow out of us, rivers of living water.

So don't hesitate to tell us here at *LIFE*. I want to just read a couple of paragraphs, this is to his daughter. This is Rebecca; right? "You prayed so many times for my return and I'm not home."

There is the big "why," you referred to it a while ago.

"Why Jesus isn't answering your prayers and the prayers of all the people around the world praying for my release and for me to be home with my family. The answer to the why is who -- who is in control? The Lord Jesus Christ is in control. He's here Rebecca. This Jesus isn't some religious ideology; this is a relationship I have with a living God, through Jesus. He is our friend and our savior. I desire for you to learn important lessons during this trying times; lessons that you carry now and for the rest of your life. The answer to the why is who. The confusion of why has all of this happened and why your prayers are not answered yet is resolve with understanding who is in control, the Lord Jesus Christ our God."

That's talking about trust; isn't it? How did she receive it?

Naghmeh: She looks for anything and everything from Daddy; what he says is really valuable to her. It is teaching her to trust Jesus, and to know God is in control. And he is using all of it for his glory and it is worth it. Jesus is worth the cost of following him. And it is teaching her a big lesson in her life that whatever you -- Jesus is worth us giving our life for him. That may be imprisonment, it may be dedicating our life to serving him or whatever it may be, he's worth it. He paid the price for our sin on the cross, and he is worth our life.

James: I said to many people after they had lost a loved one, don't ask why, you'll never get the why answered. Ask what do you want to do with it? He is saying who it is that's in control and love him. What does the one we love want to do with it? That's what we have had to say after we lost our daughter Robin. There was no reason for it.

Her precious, seemingly perfect girl to lose a battle to a disease that we know God heals.

And the thing that I've been able to draw from it, Naghmeh, is that I've been able to realize how many people hurt. People need to be set free but they also need their broken heart bound up. So many broken hearts. That's the first thing Jesus said in that great liberty phrase, "setting captives free, bind up broken hearts." He's bound your heart.

You talked to us in private about the liberty he has given you over fear and the peace is all over you. "So what do you want to do with it? What do you want to do with our lives?" I think that's what you asked.

And I'd like to encourage you to ask that right now. What do you want to do with me? What do you want to accomplish? And I pray God heals your broken heart. He's got a purpose for all of us. Would you just join and say praise God?

And bless you, Naghmeh, we love you.

Saeed, we're praying for you.

I want to ask you to do something really, really important right now. I want you to turn your gaze and I want you to look and see what I believe Jesus sees and will reveal through a precious woman, a gifted musician who lost her husband in a very brief marriage, a swimmer who drowned. But I want you to hear the heart of God being expressed. And please listen. God cares but who is it that expresses effectively what he wants to happen because he cares? Watch very closely and listen. Listen to God, not just Tammy.

On the mission field

Tammy: It's something you hear about but it's something you don't see every day. This precious little child fighting for her life with every breath she tries to take. I can

hear it. She is literally dying in front of our eyes. Not because of a disease, not because of a virus, but because she has no food.

Her body is frail; she is breaking down. She is fighting right now to live. Just one bowl of food, one bowl of food a day could have kept this little child from being in this bed in this moment. It amazes me and it blows me away to think that it's that simple. That there's something that we can do but if we don't, then we'll see hundreds of thousands of more children just like this because of malnutrition.

End of clip

In the studio

James: I know you could hear the child trying to get a breath. Just weak -- no disease there. Hungry -- I said "hungry." Starving -- that's real poverty. That's undeniable need. But this is a need that can be met effectively -- food, nourishment that we will put in a heat-resistant bowl, that you, the viewers years ago said, "Don't let those kids bring tin cans and plastic bags that the food just burns through. We want to give them a bowl."

The missionaries said, "No. We've got to feed them. These kids are starving; we don't care what they come --."

The viewer said, "No," to the missionaries. "No, we want to give them the bowls." That's called love.

And so what I'm asking you to do now is I'm asking you to respond to the love of God but I'm asking you to take advantage of the love of God expressed through some of our friends who know the need is so great in drought-stricken Angola and other places, and the children are dying because they didn't have a food line and the missionaries have found a place to feed them to stop this process but we need the food.

And some of our wonderful friends said, "Well, we'll give a matching gift of one and a half million dollars! That's how desperate it is and we'll do it. But we want to ask

everyone who is watching to give the largest gift they can. We'll match it." It's the largest challenge gift like that we've ever had for a feeding program. This is basically a cash gift to match what you give.

So here's what I want to ask you to do -- it is a miracle -- stop that cycle. See those mother's tears wiped away and children saved and have a future. I want you to reach out and touch someone, literally with the love of God. Go and get your checkbook or your bankcard and dial the number there that's a prayer line for people who have a broken heart or need prayer -- always there.

And at least 80% of the calls that come in, no matter how desperate the need, are always people calling, "Pray for me!" And you better believe we will because the call is paid for by love. We want to help you.

But I'm asking to you reach out today. If you could make a \$100 gift, we can feed ten children for the next months but now it will be 20. \$30, \$50, \$100 feeds three, five, or ten, but it will be doubled to 6 and to 10 and 20. If you would possibly give \$1,000, it will not just feed 100 but 200.

And we have some beautiful gifts we want to send you. But the greatest gift is what you're going to be doing for these families and these children. And you're going to be expressing the love of God because I'm going to tell you something, these missionaries are going to let these people know the source of that love, it's God, it's Jesus. And they're going to show it in deed, not just word -- in action.

Thank you for making that call. Thank you for making gift God put on your heart. Thank you so much! If you want to go online, LifeToday.org you can make your gift online and many people do that now and we thank you.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished areas of Africa, families are suffering, facing death by starvation, and those hit the children are their children. Life's mission feeding program is there, able to feed and care for over 400,000 children in crisis areas of

Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. With all of our previous reserves gone, and Angola facing its worst drought and food shortage in 20 years, we need to immediately replenish our funding and supplies for our feeding programs.

As an answer to prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends have set a \$1.5 million matching gift challenge for Mission Feeding. This means your gift today can have a double impact! \$30 to help feed three children will be doubled to impact six children. \$50 to help feed five children will be doubled to help save 10 children. \$100 for 10 children will be doubled to help feed 20 children. And \$300 for 30 children will be doubled to help feed and minister to 60 children!

With your gift of any amount we'll send you *All Things New*, a daily devotional with an inspirational music CD. With your double impact gift of \$100 or more, please request the N.I.V. larger print reference Bible.

Finally, please consider a double impact gift of \$1,000 and request our commemorative glass sculpture, "The Blessing."

Please call, write, or go online today and make your gift of life to help feed and care for hungry children.

End of clip

In the studio

James: We're expressing the truth in this word. We actually are to bind up his Word in our heart and it's to be a testimony in our lives. But boy, this is a beautiful gift to you for giving life.

We want to send you this beautiful Bible. Of course, the devotional book from many of our guests, are great inspirational testimonies and stories. We want to say thanks to God for Naghmeh, for Saeed. We're praying for a miracle. Somebody watching may be that source. Somebody that is doing a lot for the people that is so necessary -- more than a market, it is meeting needs. You might just say, "I'm doing something for you in business. I want you to do something for me, release this man" -- and others.

Are you glad that you were here? Do you appreciate Naghmeh?

Thank you! We love you. You're a blessing. You are a witness. You are a light.

Thank all of you for watching. And we thank you so much for reaching out and touching someone with God's love. You be a witness -- a faithful witness.

Thank you, sweetheart.