

Iranian couple risk it all to follow Christ

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TEA TIME — A man stirs sugar into a glass of tea at a teahouse in Iran. It is common to hold the sugar cube in one's teeth while sipping the tea. (IMB PHOTO)

“**D**avoud” felt so disillusioned with life that he sank into a deep depression.

He wasn't destitute. Far from it. Davoud was successful in the entertainment industry in Iran. He brokered motion picture deals and created artwork that hung above fireplaces in the capital city of Tehran.

He had a good home life. He loved his wife. He knew he should be happy.

But he felt hollow inside, like nothing really mattered. He tried to push these feelings aside by burying himself in work, but they kept creeping back, weighing heavier each time.

My life “was meaningless because my heart was empty,” Davoud recalls.

Barriers to faith

He shrugged it off when a friend told him the reason for his depression was that Christ was missing from his life. Most Iranians know of Jesus Christ because He is believed to be one of many Islamic prophets. For Iranians to try to convince others in the Islamic Republic that He is more than that can be punishable by prison or death.

When other friends accepted Christ, Davoud and his wife, “Susan,” still weren't interested. Fear wasn't their primary reason for rejecting Christ, it was disdain for religion of any sort.

When Davoud and Susan got married, they agreed that religion was something to be tolerated at special occasions.

Both of their families followed religious practices out of obligation and necessity. It was clear to the couple that religion as they knew it had nothing to do with the heart.



Susan was caught off guard by the joyful outlook of a friend who had accepted Christ. Up to this point, religion and religious people — including her extended family of strict Muslims — seemed cold and removed.

Finally Susan's curiosity piqued. She wondered who God really is, and her friend seemed to know.

When her friend led her to Christ a short time later, "It was love, real love, pure love," says Susan about who God is.

Jesus loves me

Susan's face softens into a deep, lingering smile when recalling her discovery of God's love.

"When I pray to God and when I think, I can talk to God directly," she says, "at that time I can understand how God loves me and how much I love Him."

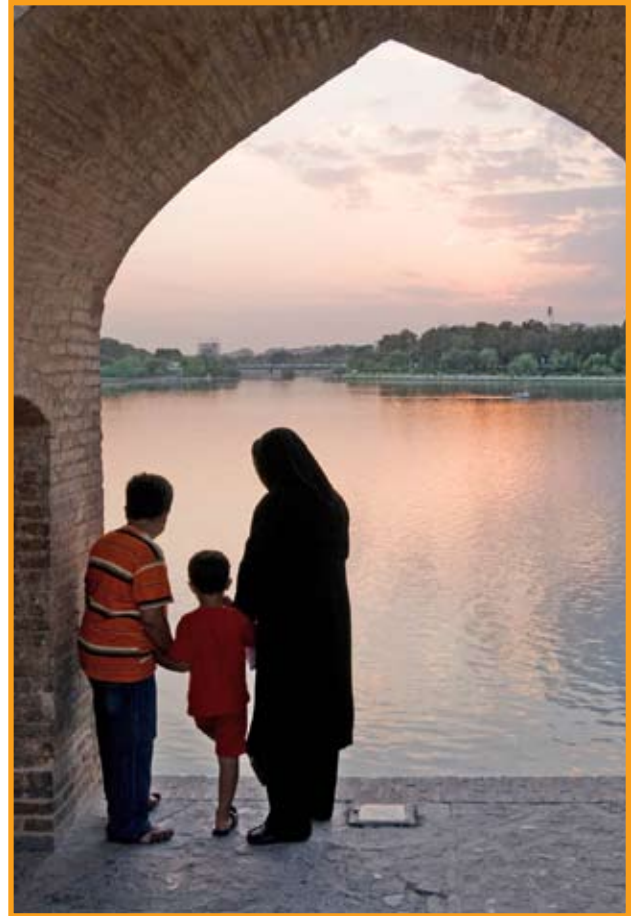
Growing up she felt "... always behind a barrier so you cannot touch a real God. But in Christianity, I can reach Him very easily. I'm always open to hear Him, to interact with Him."

Davoud's first thought when Susan told him about becoming a Christian was: "Don't react. After a while, she's going to forget [her impulsive decision] and everything [will] be the same."

But Davoud couldn't shake his feelings of restlessness and discontentment. He had recurring day-dreams in which he was drawn to a group of people sitting in a circle. When they realized someone was approaching, the group stood up and turned to him.

Going crazy?

He decided not to seek professional help. He was afraid people would think him crazy, which is how he felt. But his experience as a filmmaker helped him resolve the mysterious dream.



TIME WITH FAMILY — An Iranian woman wearing a traditional chador (black cloak) and two children look out onto the Zayandeh River from an archway on the Si-o-Seh (33 Arches) Bridge in Esfahan, Iran. (IMB PHOTO)

"I figured out that I can do something in that dream," Davoud recalls. "I can act. Until that day, I was the audience of a movie but as soon as I figured this out, I started shouting and yelling — 'What do you want from me? Who are you people?'"

The circle parted, and a man with an intent look asked him, "Have you suffered more than I have?"

Davoud says he realized "with all the cells of my body" that he was receiving a spiritual message.

But he wanted to be sure what it meant, so he consulted a Christian friend. The friend congratulated him for receiving a personal invitation from the One he had been trying to introduce Davoud to for a long time.

This time, Davoud accepted God's invitation. "After that, I did not feel depressed anymore," he says.

Following Christ

Davoud has learned that being asked, "Have you suffered more than I have?" didn't just pertain to his salvation but also to his Christian life, which wouldn't always be easy.

"God came to save me from my spiritual problems, but you can still encounter problems in life in Iran especially if you become a Christian," says Davoud.

There is a saying in Iran that being a Christian isn't a problem unless you're an active one.

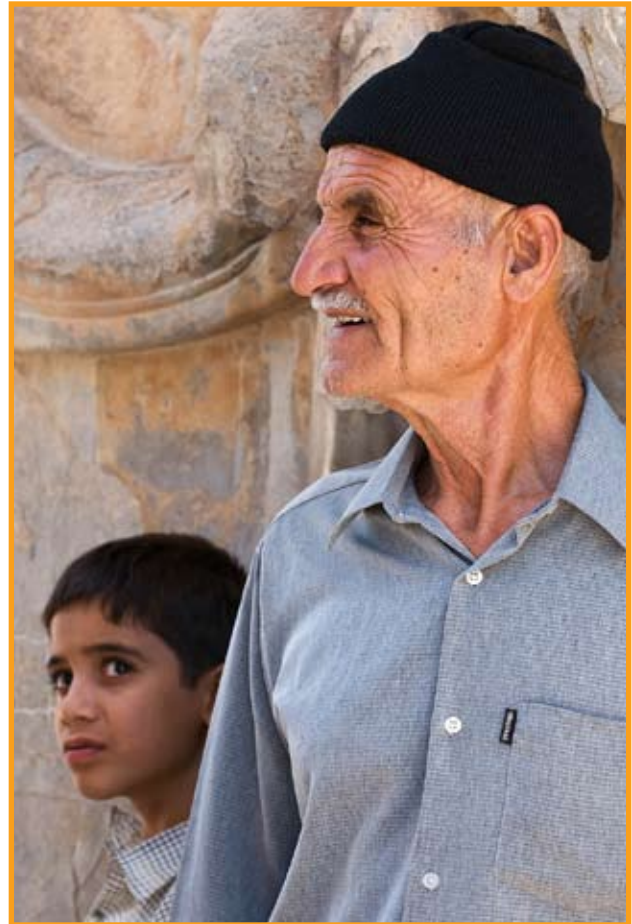
But for Christians, that's a problem.

"If you try to give people [the] Holy Bible, if you have a place, a room for Christian books, if you openly invite people to Christianity and do other things helping people to get to know Jesus Christ, you are considered an active Christian," Davoud explains. "If you have a house church, you are an active Christian. If you help people to get baptized, you are an active Christian."

A price to pay

Davoud and Susan had to leave Iran or risk imprisonment when some of those forbidden activities were discovered. Within less than a week they made arrangements and left behind almost everything they had.

They are now seeking refugee status in another country. They still face restrictions about what they can do and where they can go. Davoud longs to practice his art again. Susan sometimes wonders why rebuilding their lives is such a struggle, but they refuse to surrender to self-pity. They are active in a house church.



PALACE OF ESTHER — A man and boy view the archeological site of Persepolis. Persian kings, including Xerxes, used Persepolis as a ceremonial palace. Xerxes was the husband of Esther from the Old Testament. (IMB PHOTO)

"When you read Acts, you don't find yourself lonely," Davoud says. "So, we [Iranian Christians] are experiencing this truth — that our Lord was tortured, He was insulted and He was [put to death] in the most brutal way.

"We are His followers."

Names in quotation marks have been changed.