The Impact of Testimonies on Partner Development Strategies: Mission Work in Europe

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to answer how first-world missionaries can utilize research findings on the effectiveness of testimonials and apply that knowledge to partner development strategies. Research trends demonstrate that most missionaries are being sent to countries with the largest practicing Christian populations, such as those in Africa or South America, and are more likely to receive financial partnerships. Europe has a high rate of non-practicing Christians and is a cultural intersection due to the refugee crisis, leading to a need for mission work. This research will culminate in the creation of a prayer guide, highlighting testimonies of individuals impacted by mission work in Birmingham, England which may be replicated as a partner development tool for European missionaries.

# The Impact of Testimonies on Partner Development Strategies: Mission Work in Europe The Intersection of Christian Testimonies and Marketing Theory

The power of testimonies has a strong historical record. Within a range of disciplines, such as religious texts, national judicial systems, and social media campaigns, testimonies have been used to provide a foundation for knowledge and beliefs. Within traditional and modern marketing, customer testimonials are frequently used as a reliable advertising tactic, as they have demonstrably established personal, emotional connections.

While the word "testimonial" is more frequently cited as a marketing tactic, the Christian "testimony" holds the meaning of a personal conversion story. Both words share in the meaning of expressing a personal reality, but there has been little overlap using the techniques of marketing when sharing a Christian testimony.

Global statistics show that the number of evangelical Christian missionaries is in decline, and today's Christians give only 0.09% of their income to support global missions (Sweeney, 2022). The increase in disconnect that the Christian church has with mission work can be attributed to several causes, which are typically subjective to the individual and/or congregation. In any case, this research will pose a solution for global workers serving in nations within Europe to rebuild connectedness with the local national church by utilizing theories applied within testimonial marketing.

Personal connection is a driving force of missionary sending. Currently, missionaries are more likely to be sent to places where churches have extended invitations for mission work because there is a sense of connection. Missionary "sponsorships are also more likely in places with large Christian populations" (Zurlo et al., 2020, p. 17). This means that missionaries are moving to places with already dense Christian populations, such as the African continent. With

what's already known through market research, testimonial theory can be leveraged to allow the church to personally relate with the work of global missionaries. Through the relay of personal testimonies, a personal connection can be established with places or people groups unseen or unfamiliar. Conversations about the need for global mission support, and specifically the expanding oversight of a need for mission work in Europe, must become more prevalent within the Christian church.

## The History and Usage of Testimonials Within Marketing

Testimonials have been used as an advertising tactic for over a century (Gleecontent, 2019). These testimonials have taken various forms, such as subjects wanting to keep up with monarchy fashion trends beginning in 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first athlete endorsement of sports equipment in 1905 (Denis, 2022). Recent trends in the rise of social media marketing have seen testimonials being presented in new ways, such as videos, blogs, or Instagram posts. By running a quick web search, one could find hundreds of resources as a guide on why and how to use personal testimonies to improve brand strategy.

The popular use of testimonials demanded that guidelines be formed to regulate brand sincerity. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) published an updated Endorsement and Testimonial Guidelines in 2023. These guidelines hold advertisers and endorsers accountable by law to follow regulations that adhere to principles of honesty for the protection of consumers. The FTC defined testimonials as "any advertising message... that consumers are likely to believe [that] reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings, or experiences of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser" (FTC, 2009, p.1). Social media brands have also established guidelines for testimonial endorsements on their sites. For example, Meta Platforms, Inc., the operator of Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp, has set up regulations that endorsement posts

must be made with the platform's "branded content tool" (Instagram, 2024, para. 2) to provide necessary disclosure to viewers that they are seeing an endorsed testimonial advertisement. The scope of testimonials is multifaceted however, and the multidisciplinarity of this technique provides fertile ground for much research.

One variable within testimonials is the type of endorsers. Although testimonial advertising began with "celebrity" endorsements (i.e. monarchs or athletes mentioned earlier), word of mouth endorsements has been around for centuries as well. Consumer and expert endorsements are utilized in testimonial marketing today and can be seen in many different forms, such as product reviews and commercial advertisements. In a study conducted by Rollins et al. (2021), researchers sought to understand if testimonials truly made an impact on perception and, if so, would endorser classification impact that perception. Findings revealed that when different endorsers are used for testimonial advertising, it does influence consumer response. Expert testimonials generated a higher level of source credibility and consumer testimonials were found to produce a higher level of source similarity: there were not stark difference between these two categories, however. On the other hand, this study found that celebrity endorsements were found to have the lowest believability and generated a high level of skepticism.

Testimonials have been understood to be so powerful because "we believe through the testimony of others" (Collins et al., 2021, p. 1). In Rollins' et al. study, celebrity testimonials were likely less believable because they represent an ideal self-image, rather than an accurate self-image. People desire to relate to the story they are being told and develop a personal connection to it. When testimonials represent an accurate picture, consumers are more likely to respond and allow it to shape a personal belief. This concept was explored and found to be psychologically accurate in a study conducted on conditional reasoning. The study conducted by

Collins et al. (2021) demonstrated that information received through testimonials, particularly in the form of conditionals (i.e. "If P, then Q" statements that shape beliefs), will change beliefs. Although this study approaches testimonial advertisements as a "partially reliable" (p.2) source, there is proven power within testimonies, as they have been shown to be a persuasive advertising technique within the psychological sciences.

With a definitive power attributed to endorsement advertising, a growing number of studies seek to improve knowledge to better utilize this marketing tool in expanding ways. Testimonial research is being broken down even further and the use of endorsements within the e-market is also being studied (Adwan, 2019). As a strong advertising method, testimonials have transitioned to a digital context as a reliable traditional marketing technique. Such studies on e-marketing have also discovered that "[i]ndividuals – especially young people – with high susceptibility to social norm influence (SNI) put much emphasis on testimonials" (Adwan, 2019, p. 89). With a proven influence, individuals have the responsibility to utilize testimonials wisely and with honesty, as regulated by the FTC and common social ethics.

# **Application of Testimonial Research to Missionary Partner Development Strategies**

Born from an understanding of testimonial advertising, improvements can be made to increase understanding of the mission of global workers. By utilizing testimonies that have been formatted in a way geared for audience reception, missionaries could better the perception of what they are asking potential partners to support. Formatting testimonies for this outcome would mean that personal stories would be written or recorded digitally in a way that could be shared with large audiences, which would expand the scope and likelihood of developing strategic partnerships. Allowing partners to understand the need for mission while also

developing a personal connection (through testimonials) with the work at hand, employs the influence available that has been tested and established in testimonial advertising.

Christian ethical principles provide reliability to the integrity of the testimonies used.

Christians uphold values of honesty, benevolence, and compassion which are sustained in the sharing of one's testimony, or story of how one became a follower of Jesus Christ. Although the sharing of testimonies will not be under the same federal scrutiny as testimonial marketing, Christian morality demands that testimonies are shared with accuracy, without any manipulative tactics.

From what has been concluded about the influence different endorsement personas have on consumer perception, those personas can be translated to fit various perspectives of testimonies. These perceptions should mimic the "expert" and "consumer" (Rollins, 2021, p.1) endorser personas that were received well in studies. Missionaries who are either currently serving or have served as foreign missionaries in or around the anticipated receiving location may be seen as "experts." In this instance, an "expert" is simply someone who has a strong understanding of the location and demographic that new missionaries will be reaching. "Consumer" personas may be filled by people living in or around the receiving location who have been impacted by mission work. Within this persona, various perspectives are desirable to provide a well-rounded understanding for potential missionary partners. These varying perspectives will allow a location (that potential partners may have little knowledge about) to form a stronger identity within the individual mind.

The methodology section will further discuss suggested dissemination of testimonies to reach various demographics through different platforms. Additionally, certain elements included

in the creative portion will later be highlighted that add depth to conclusions drawn from studies conducted about testimonial advertising.

# **Current Trends in Christian Mission Work and Demographics in Europe**

Even prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which restricted global travel and foreign residency, there was a negative trend in the number of long-term foreign missionaries (Zurlo et al., 2020). From 1970 to 2021, this number has decreased by 88 percent. These numbers are also likely to be influenced in the recovery period from the pandemic.

Another current trend is the "rise of the majority church in the South," (Gelder, 2013, p. 39) and the rise of missionaries being sent from the Global South (Zurlo et al., 2020). In an article published over a decade ago, it was reported that, "This past Sunday more Anglicans attended church in each of the separate countries of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda than did Anglicans in Britain and Canada and Episcopalians in the U.S. combined" (Van Gelder, 2013, p. 40). With the rise of Christians in the South, although they have a growing rate for missionary sending, they are also receiving the highest number of Christian missionaries (Zurlo et al., 2020).

The imbalance of missionaries being received in places with already large Christian populations is attributed to invitations and sponsorships. This makes logistical sense if one considers that more financial partnerships are made in either sending or receiving locations; thus, the larger the Christian population, the more Christian mission involvement. By 2050 it is predicted that the continent of Africa will have 1,324,601,000 Christians, while, in comparison, the European continent (including Russia) will have 501,724,000 Christians; this is a 2.81 percent increase in Africa compared to a 0.01 percent increase in Europe (Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2021).

Recognizing this trend, the American Society of Missiology gave a call to action to change cultural thinking from "I" to "We" (Van Gelder, 2013, p.43). Mimicking the societal thinking of the South, rather than the individualistic thinking in Western societies, should impact the ideas formed about missiology in the West and shape participation in the Christian mission for global evangelization. From 1900 to 2050, there is an expected 0.11 percent increase in foreign missionaries globally, which is a positive turn in the current trend (Gordon Conwell Theological, 2021). Out of this increase in global workers, -0.39 percent are being sent to Christian countries. This is a positive change; however, this largely accounts for missionaries being sent to countries within the 10/40 window (a rectangular area stretching from North Africa to Asia) which have high a high percentage of unreached people groups. While the estimation for this new direction in missionary sending shows great progress, the native European population, as well as the growing cultural intersection there, is often overlooked.

The Middle East's migrant population has more than doubled in the past decade (Connor, 2016). The emigration of many from this region is a result of conflict and the hope of greater economic opportunity elsewhere. "Europe received a record 1.3 million asylum seekers in 2015," (Connor, 2016, para. 4) and 2022 had the most asylum seekers documented since then, the majority being Middle Eastern (The UN Refugee, 2024). Particularly in the United Kingdom, asylum seeker populations have greatly risen in the past few years (Sturge, 2023). In 2021, reports indicate that asylum seekers immigrated into the United Kingdom from at least 15 various countries (Sturge, 2023). With this influx, people groups who are moving come with various religious backgrounds and a large majority are from Islamic States, such as Afghanistan and Iran.

Out of the 15 countries listed as asylum seeker home states (ordered from most to least: Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Vietnam, Pakistan, Turkey, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Libya, and Uganda), eight are considered "restricted access" or "creative access" countries (Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Libya). This means that the governments in those countries are distrustful of Western missionaries and often can be hostile towards Christianity. With an influx of these people groups in Europe, there is a unique intersection being formed that provides Christian missionaries with opportunities to evangelize to people who would otherwise have very limited and restricted access to hearing the gospel. At the same time, the European population is also in desperate need of another Christian revival.

Although current statistics would show that much of the European population is Christian, these statistics are based on nominal Christianity; and even these percentages are on the decline due to a rise in atheism and Islam (Zurlo, 2020). Therefore, future predictions on the rise of Christianity do not accurately account for the blanket covering of traditional Christians who do not actually adhere to Christian practices.

Non-practicing Christians, defined as those who identify as Christians but attend church only a few times per year, make up the largest portion of the population in Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2018). These non-practicing Christians reportedly do not believe in God as he is described in the Bible, but "believe in some higher power or spiritual force" (Pew Research Center, 2018, para. 6). For a more accurate understanding of Christianity in Europe, Greater Europe Mission, a Christian missions organization, reports that fewer than three percent of Europeans have a relationship with Jesus, which is a standard of Christianity (2024). The

statistically large percentage of "Christians" in Europe has more to do with tradition than religious practices.

Islam is quickly gaining popularity due to immigration and higher birth rates and, by percentage, is the second-largest religion in Europe (Operation World, 2023). Christians have the opportunity to see a rapidly growing need in Europe for mission work. There is already a foundation for Christianity within the general population and many immigrating Muslims are disenchanted by the violence of Islam and seeking for loving truth, which is available in the gospel (Operation World, 2023). Global workers in Europe are working to seize the openings available at this cultural intersection and share the universal truth available through the Bible.

# An Analysis of the United Kingdom and Birmingham, England

In the United Kingdom, the percentage of non-practicing Christians is 55, which nearly triples the number of church-attending Christians at 18 percent (Pew Research Center, 2018, para. 2). The UK was once an epicenter for Christian activity (Connor, 2016) and "[m]any Christians pray for another great spiritual awakening" ("Pray for: United Kingdom," 2023, para. 1). The religious climate in this region is very similar to the rest of Europe, with many nominal Christians and a growing Islamic population caused by an influx of asylum seekers and settling refugees.

Currently, within the UK resides 115 different people groups; 35 of these are classified as unreached people groups (UPGs) (Joshua Project, 2024). A UPG is a people group that technically is less than two percent evangelical Christian and there is no indigenous community to assist with church planting. While UPGs come from many religious backgrounds, the people groups represented in the UK are predominately Islamic with very low adherence rates. These

people are moving from broken countries, where the Islamic faith has been shown to be unreliable and cruel (Anonymous, personal communication, June 11, 2023).

A large portion of these asylum seekers are being moved to the city of Birmingham. Birmingham is known as England's industrial city and is the second largest city in the country (Ostberg, 2024). This city also reported the second most dispersed asylum seekers and is becoming increasingly more multicultural (Sturge, 2023). According to the World Christian Database, this city is 55 percent Christian, however that does not separate practicing from nominal (Johnson & Zurlo, 2024).

For the purpose of this study, Birmingham was selected as a focus city to apply research conducted on testimonial marketing and connect it to Christian mission work. This city was selected due to the influx of asylum seekers and the Christian revival many missionaries in the city are hopeful for. Birmingham has recently become a hub for evangelical Christian mission work with missionaries scattered through the city and the surrounding West Midlands region. The native "Brummie" population is being engaged alongside many Muslim-background asylum seekers and refugees.

## **Creative Methodology**

The design of this creative project aims to not only share testimonies but engage people with them. Based on testimonial advertising research, consumers are more likely to establish a personal connection when there is an increased level of engagement (Vongswasdi, 2022). When there is an exchange of testimonies, there is an increase in the integration of diverse perspectives.

Implementing the holistic scope of testimonial advertising research and current marketing practices, a seven-day prayer guide was determined to be the best application to allow this knowledge to evolve into a partner development strategy for Christian mission work. A prayer

guide allows readers to connect personally and engage positively with the testimonies shared. An opportunity for exchange is accounted for in this format, as readers will respond to new information and stories, learning more about real people who live in the same location. They will then have an opportunity to follow specific prayer points based off that day's testimony which provides a call to action for them to practice sharing and engaging on a personal level. A prayer guide highlighted testimonies will raise awareness about the need for mission work in that location and develop support for the work being done in an honest and transparent manner.

The first day of this prayer guide will introduce why the guide was created. On this day, the current realities of Christianity in Europe will be overviewed, as well as current information on the target city, which for this guide is Birmingham. This section will also present the need for spiritual and financial support. Prayer points will ask readers to prepare their hearts to continue in a week of prayer over the city of Birmingham, have hearts open to give generously, and ask God how they might play a part in his global mission to redeem people from every nation. Days two through six will introduce a new person daily. Each day will highlight testimonies of individuals currently living in Birmingham. Various perspectives were gathered to mimic endorser types in testimonial marketing, as previously discussed. Missionaries take the form of expert testimonials and people native to the location take the form of consumers. The prayer guide will feature testimonies from two asylum seekers who were Christians before they moved to Birmingham, one asylum seeker who became a Christian in Birmingham through hearing the gospel from missionaries, and two missionaries who are currently serving on the mission field long-term in Birmingham (husband and wife).

All testimonies will be shortened, and the latter half will be added to an appendix found at the back of the prayer guide. The decision to shorten each testimony will allow for stronger

reader engagement throughout the guide without compromising the power found within the entire conversion story. Readers will be directed to the appropriate appendix at the end of each day with insight as to what the rest of the testimony will share. An appendix is not necessary for reproductions of the prayer guide however, it is recommended if testimonies exceed two pages at the designated typeface and point size.

These testimonies were shared with consent to use for the creation of this prayer guide, however last names will be omitted for safety concerns. Each testimony was recorded by the author while living in Birmingham City Centre using the Voice Memos app between June 11, 2023, and July 6, 2023. All the testimonies shared are entirely true; they were rewritten (after transcriptions were gathered from the recorded interviews) for grammatical and timeline clarity only and no details were fabricated or exaggerated.

Day seven will be a final call to action. This day will outline a time of reflection for readers and offer a reminder of the need for mission work in Europe. Prayer points will transparently ask readers to give generously in accordance with their convictions and call them to ask God to do great things through what they are willing to sacrifice. This final day in the guide will use language outlined by Steve Shadrach in *The God Ask*, highlighting the privilege it is to partner with people who are taking the gospel globally to people who need to be engaged with truth.

The testimonies and information provided in the prayer guide will be supported by visuals. The inclusion of images creates a greater impact and can increase the opportunity for personal connection (Dahmen, 2021). For safety concerns, certain images in the example prayer guide will be blurred to maintain subject anonymity. All images within the prayer guide were taken by the author in Birmingham City Centre between June 17, 2023, and July 26, 2023, with a

digital camera and iPhone camera; in reproductions, any images used must be cited properly. No illustrations are used within the prayer guide template to increase future ability for reproduction.

The prayer guide will be created in the graphic design and publishing software Canva because it is easily accessible and reliable for all skill levels. It will be developed in a template format for reproduction to be made to represent various cities across Europe. Both print and digital format templates will be created. Print formats are recommended because of their reported ease of use, quality and functionality, satisfaction, and physical comfort (Deval & Singh, n.d.). Digital formats are recommended for their timeliness, accessibility, and availability. These formats may be replicated and distributed according to individual/organizational goals and target audiences. It is recommended by the author to have printed copies of the prayer guide to have as a resource when support raising through in person meetings or congregational visits, while digital formats are most appropriate as a secondary alternative. Digital formats should be exported into a flipbook software, which can be found online, for distribution.

# **Project Defense and Conclusion**

The seven-day prayer guide produced is informed by current research in the advertising field and applied to a demonstrated need within Christian missiology. The prayer guide is a replicable creative work with a template that is easy to mold independent of design skill level. Replications can and are recommended by the author to be made by global workers or missions organization for various locations to improve partner development strategies for Christian missionaries whether launching to be full-time global workers or already serving on the foreign mission field. Although the scope of this project is specific to the city of Birmingham, England, the research is demonstrably applicable for prayer guides to be created for any location.

# **Prayer Guide Images and Links**

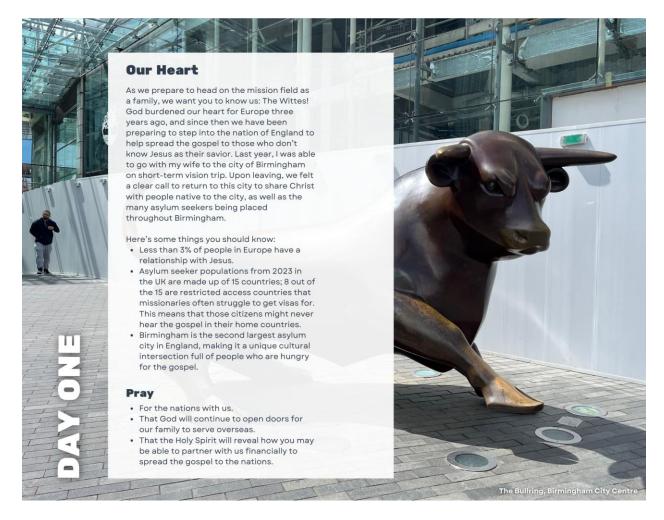
# **Print Visual Layout**



Prayer Guide Back and Front Cover: The front cover features a picture of the city and the city name. These should be changed depending on where the receiving location is for missionaries using the prayer guide to aid in partner development.



Pages 1-2: This dedication Bible verse is a reminder of the power that testimonies hold because of the story God gives each of his people.



Pages 3-4: This is the first day of the prayer guide. Copy for this day should introduce the missionaries and the city that they will be serving in. Prayer points allow the reader to understand that the goal of the prayer guide is to raise support through prayer for the city as well as financial partnerships with the missionaries. On days one through seven of the prayer guide, pictures should be placed in the background to allow readers to see people from and places around the receiving city. Captions describing the image should be replaced in the template to correspond with the new image.



Pages 5-6: Day two of the prayer guide introduces the first testimony. This testimony should be provided from a real person who lives in the city. Prayer points should correspond with points in the testimony and draw a larger connection to global issues and/or specific ways to be praying for the current mission field. The length of the testimony and prayer points should not exceed the space provided in the two-page spread. If the full testimony would exceed the space provided, the story should be stopped and continued in the appendix, as demonstrated. This break should be placed in a way that does not disrupt the effect of the overall story, allowing readers to decide if they would like to continue reading. Direction to the appendix should highlight key points from the rest of the testimony. The above text applies to pages 5-14.

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## THE IMPACT OF TESTIMONIES ON PARTNER DEVELOPMENT



Pages 7-8



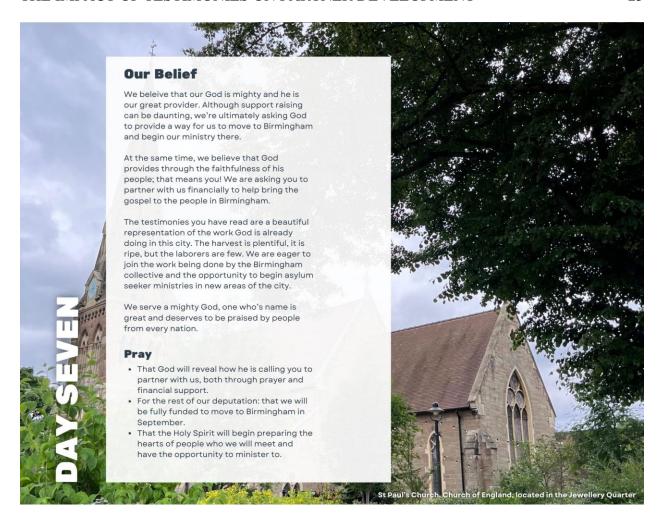
Pages 9-10



Pages 11-12



Pages 13-14



Pages 15-16: This is the last day of the prayer guide. Copy for this day should clearly state the need for financial partnerships through a call to action. A reminder should also be given to the reader about the testimonies they have read throughout the week and how they have been told about the work God is doing in the receiving city. Prayer points should direct the reader to pray specifically about how they are being asked to partner with the missionaries, pray for the success of missionary partner development, and pray for the receiving location once more.

## Appendix A (Meet Reza Continued)

When I arrived in Birmingham, my English wasn't good and I tried to find somewhere to improve my language because English is vital to me so I can get used to living in England. I met an Iranian man in my hotel, and he told me about an English class that meets at Quayside Tower. When I first came to class as a student, I didn't know it was a part of Second City Church. After class was finished, Coby, an American pastor at the church, invited everyone to stay for Bible study after the class. I didn't know much about Christianity and decided to go back to my hotel, but before I left, Ali, an Iranian Christian, told me that if I was interested in church, I could visit their baptism service at the Hope Center on Sunday.

It was rainy and cold that Sunday and I thought to myself, "It's rainy, is it wise to go out or not?" I didn't have any money to buy a train ticket, but I decided it could be good exercise because it was just about a 25-minute walk from my hotel. So I went to the service, and I was very impressed by it. Afterward, a group of missionary students who had come to evangelize in the UK came and asked me if I wanted to install the Bible application on my phone. I told them no, that I had just come to visit the service. They also tried to give me a Bible, but I was resistant to accept a Bible or install the application.

The next week I went to English class again and kept concentrating on learning English. I had this light in my mind to read the Bible, though. I don't know why, but I tried to learn more about English and Christianity at the same time. After a month, I asked Ali to give me a Bible. It was a small New Testament and after five or six months, I had finished reading the four Gospels, Romans, the epistles, and some parts of the Old Testament. I was impressed by Christianity but I still had a lot of questions. In my free time, I was able to think a lot about Christianity. I was shy to ask my questions, but I couldn't find a proper answer and I couldn't accept some parts of Christianity, like the Trinity, which was really hard for me to understand. My father was a wise man and it was his advice to me, "If you want to do something or accept something, do it by your conscious and not with blind

eyes." I had a meeting with Terry and Jez, elders at Second City, and asked them my questions. After six or seven months, I became a Christian in my heart.

After my conversion, I told my solicitor, "I accepted Christianity as my faith, but can I get baptized?" He told me I couldn't because it might affect my case. When Coby and Terry asked me to get baptized, I told them I couldn't because of my solicitor's advice and asked if they could do it after my asylum case was settled. They said, "Yes! It's fine."

Sometime later, a friend of mine came to visit me. He's an Iranian pilot who flew to the UK and didn't go back to Iran. He stayed here to seek asylum because he became a Christian, too. He has very good English and oversees translation for a church. When he was visiting me, he got a phone call and asked me, "Reza, do you want to be a witness of something amazing?" I went to watch his phone and saw a family of four in Afghanistan. After a while, I realized it was a baptism service in Afghanistan and he was in charge of translating for this family. The pastor was online and read the baptism prayer. I was so shocked; I couldn't say any words.

They got baptized and baptized each other in the most dangerous country for Christian people. They got baptized, and it was supposed to be a baptism service at our church in a few days. I wasn't in the baptism service, but at the next English class, I told Coby that I wanted to get baptized. He asked me what happened, and I told him that regardless of my case, I wanted to get baptized. That next Sunday, I got baptized and I haven't missed a church service since. Going to church gives me strength to overcome my difficulties and fears because it helps me be in communion with God. I can feel God around me. Sometimes I am shy about my beliefs, but because I have accepted Jesus in my heart, I am sure that God forgives me. You can't find anybody perfect; everyone needs a savior. I hope that as God helped me to find my way, he helps other people find the true way.

Pages 17-18: This is the beginning of the appendix. The appendix is not necessary if testimonies and prayer points do not exceed the space provided on the two-page spread given for each day in the template. If the appendix is used, each extended testimony should be given a separate letter, as demonstrated in each day of the template. Each letter should begin on its own page in the appendix, as demonstrated in the template. The above text applies to pages 19-29.

#### Appendix B (Meet Ali Continued)

My cousin shared that, before this dream, he had been feeling so depressed, hopeless, and afraid of life. He went to bed with such hopelessness that he said, "I kind of asked God in my heart, 'If you exist, I don't want to wake up. I don't have hope, I just want to die." Jesus met him in a dream that night and told him that he needed his love, the love of Jesus. My cousin responded and said that he didn't believe in Jesus, but Jesus told him that his love brings hope and faith. Jesus also gave him signs in this dream that he later saw fulfilled.

After my cousin woke up from this dream, he opened a Bible that an evangelist had given him and opened it right to 1 Corinthians 13. He told me that he shed tears that night. He still did not believe in Jesus, but he was very confused because he could not reject what he had just experienced. Once he saw the signs Jesus gave him come to fulfillment, he told me, "Ali, I just could not reject that anymore!"

As he shared his experience with me, I saw joy and peace in him. I saw a change in him! He could not stop talking about God and he was joyful in the name of Jesus. I looked at myself and said, "Ali, you have been looking for this joy that comes from God in his presence. You have always said you wanted God in your life."

But I still could not believe my cousin when he shared all of this at Christmas. I couldn't accept it, but I also couldn't reject it. Three more months passed, and he called me again. He talked more about Jesus with me and told me that his wife and some of his friends were now Christians. I said to him, "I thought you had lost it, but your wife can't lose her mind at the same time as you. And your friends can't lose their minds, too. So there really is something going on here... I need to know more. I need to think more seriously."

He told me to go read one of the gospels. I had one in my room, the gospel of Mark that an evangelist had given me on my first day of university in the UK. I didn't know that it was a Gospel, I just knew it was a Christian book and took it because it was free.

After I showed it to my cousin, he told me, "That's a gospel! Go for it. read it!"

I started reading it and the simplicity of it hit me at first. The Qur'an was not this simple, and I questioned if it was really God's Word, as Christians say. But my cousin told me that it truly was the gospel, it wasn't changed, it was the gospel of Jesus Christ. I kept reading and, eventually, I saw Jesus as a very different person compared to other saints. I saw him as someone who never killed anyone or waged wars. Instead, he actually died and rose from the dead!

I came up with 30 questions from reading the book of Mark and I asked my cousin all of them. One of the questions that I asked was, "Why did Jesus say 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' on the cross. If he's the son of God, why would he stay on the cross knowing that he would suffer and God would leave him?"

My cousin, despite being a relatively new believer, answered all of my questions and answered this question in a way that touched my heart. He said, "You know why Jesus said that on the cross? Because the Father literally forsook his son on the cross for me and you. He bore our punishments on the cross. And when he bore them, the Father took away his face from his Son because he was upholding the sins of the world on the cross. God cannot look at what is unholy, even though it's his Son. And Father rejected his son for us."

And I told myself, "That is beyond my understanding. Why should God love me so much? Forsake his son for me?" I saw this love differently from what I saw in Islam. I saw a type of love that's far greater than mercy or just liking or respecting someone. I saw a sacrificial love that goes beyond sacrifice; to the point of being trampled for someone else. I decided I could not reject this love. I wanted this change I had seen and on the evening of March 23, 2020, I read the sinner's prayer. This very week I believed in Jesus, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

I didn't know that church was a thing or that I should talk to other believers because of the lockdown. The only thing I wanted to do and I could do was read the Bible. Before I became a Christian, although I'm not proud to confess it, I was addicted to video games. But as I was reading the Bible, almost immediately after my conversion, all my desire to play video games left me! A new desire came to me and I just wanted to read God's Word. Any book I would finish, I would tell my cousin and he would encourage me to read the next one, and the next one.

When I read John 14:23 which says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him," I was stunned. My whole life, I have just wanted God; now, God was saying that he was going to come and dwell with me! Some things still bothered me, and the pains of 25 years did not leave me overnight, but I found excitement and joy in Christ and just reading his Word. A change was evident in me and other people began to notice this new joy I had within me.

After I finished reading Revelation, my cousin told me to go back to the Old Testament and start from Genesis. I was so confused as I read, but it felt so rewarding to me; my reward was just to know God more and know his plan more. I was able to see what I had been missing all of my life and the lies that I heard were uncovered with this truth.

Eventually, I came across a video sermon that said new believers should go out and find a church. I said, "Okay... Where though? All churches are closed." I searched the area around me and found an evangelical church. I contacted them and a pastor reached out to me. He told me that they didn't have services at the moment because of lockdown, but he wanted to meet up with me weekly.

I met Pastor John at the university park every week and for an hour we would walk around and just talk about Jesus. Another year passed and a lot of important things happened while we were still in lockdown. I told my parents about my conversion, and my mother couldn't sleep for three nights. My father tried to convince me to take back my decision and told me I wasn't making a wise choice. After three years of being a Christian, they have now accepted my decision and I know they still love me and care about me, but they still don't like my choice.

Once lockdown was over, my visa was about to expire but I could not go back to Iran. Lockdown made it difficult to apply for work and I could not find a job related to my studies, despite my efforts. Eventually, I had to apply for asylum because I had no other choice.

The British government transferred me to Birmingham a few months after I claimed asylum. My church back in Nottingham recommended Second City church to me when I moved. I got involved at Second City and in several months Coby and Bailey joined the church and began English classes, so I was able to get involved in that ministry as well.

Through that class, so many of our dear brothers started coming here, including Affshein, Reza, and Hamid. Many others attended as well, but are no longer at Second City because they were either transferred or switched congregations due to location. The Lord has truly blessed us here and this place has helped me to find a better grasp of what ministry looks like; it's more than just lighting candles.

It's been encouraging to me to see how people lay down their lives here to help talk to nonbelievers, encourage them, and share the truth of the gospel of Jesus. One of my friends told me once, "Ali! It's so interesting to me that these people have come from the US, they have left their country, and they come here to sit beside us and sometimes even kneel beside our tables and write on our papers. We're asylum seekers. We don't have anything to give them, we have nothing to offer in response to their kindness. This type of humility is extraordinary." "Yeah,

you're right," I said, "That's the humility of Jesus in our brothers and sisters." Eventually, he came to the Lord!

\*I've been waiting for my asylum claim to be concluded for almost 30 months now, but the Lord is faithful, he is good. I still don't know exactly what to do with my life or what type of ministry the Lord wants me to do; one of my dreams is to do ministry in Iran, but I don't know when or how yet. It hasn't been easy these last three years, especially in terms of witnessing the suffering of asylum seekers, but the Lord definitely had good plans for me and still has good plans to come!

\*Ali has since been granted his asylum claim and is now a refugee in England.

#### Appendix C (Meet Affshein Continued)

In Iran, basically all people went to school which talked about Jesus and taught us that he was just a prophet like all other prophets. Jesus was just another saint, another good guy, but he was not crucified. Qur'an classes were compulsory for us, and I believed in God, but I was never a devout Muslim. I had never prayed before, even though my Dad advised it, and whenever someone would play the Qur'an to listen to, I hated it and would get a headache.

When I read these verses on the leaflet, though, I was interested in what I read. I never believed the Bible was merely men's writings. I found these verses refreshing and I asked my cousin, "Do you have any idea who this 'Son of God' is that this verse mentions? Do you have any idea what this is about?" He told me that the people who gave me the leaflets were Christians, and they believe in Jesus. He was not much more knowledgeable than that, but he knew they were from a church nearby and that they came to the area we lived in occasionally to hand out leaflets and share the gospel. He suggested that I could go and meet them one day if I wanted to.

I went to visit the church and I even brought flowers for the pastor. So, I went and I talked to the pastor, but I was still struggling to speak Swedish so he gave me the Lord's prayer and suggested that I could start praying and told me it was great that I was interested in knowing more. I visited there a few times, but he realized it was hard for me to stay at that church because of the language barrier, so he suggested another church for me that had a Farsi translator.

When I went to that new church and started attending the Sunday services and Bible studies. We started reading the gospels together and I got to know who Jesus is and what the gospel truly was. Whenever I would go to a Bible study, the peace and joy that I experienced would wash away all the busyness and frustrations of the previous week. I would count down to go and attend the next Bible study because I loved it and how it made me feel. Reading God's Word touches your

heart and your soul and I knew it must be from God. During this time, I decided to believe in Jesus and then I got baptized.

During this time, I had so many things going on between work and the uncertainty of my asylum situation, and I could not focus much on reading the Bible. The only time that I was actually in the Word was in Bible studies. I was also very involved in politics still when I was living in Sweden which was taking a lot of energy from me. I received so many threats during this time that I would be killed if I returned to Iran. People were very angry and told me that I was against the government and religion. All of these things made life very hard for me.

In 2018, Sweden rejected my asylum case and I had to leave the country. It felt like a meaningless wait, all those years I spent seeking asylum, and I fell into a depression. I planned to move back to Germany or to France, but some things happened, and I found myself in Birmingham, England. I believe now that it was God's plan because it had nothing to do with how I ended up here.

I ended up meeting Ali at the Britannial Hotel, where we were both transferred. He invited me to come to English class as well as Second City Church. We became friends very quickly. I attended Second City church and have been attending this church every Sunday since early last year. After coming to this church, I became more enthusiastic about reading the Bible myself, not just in church services. Someone told me that even when I don't feel like reading, I should see that as an encouragement to go read the Bible anyway. I started reading God's Word and enjoyed it. I soon finished the New Testament, the Torah, and many other parts of the Old Testament. I found more joy and more rest here after leaving Sweden. I sometimes still feel depressed as I wait for my asylum claim to be approved, yet the Lord, through his Word, gives me rest.

#### Appendix D (Meet Bailey Continued)

One thing I've realized is that raising kids overseas is not as straightforward as I thought it was going to be. I had this idea that everyone does it the same way; you homeschool your kid and then you throw them on your hip, and they come along with you with you to do ministry things. With that being said, we've been able to have our daughter, Naomi, in nursery. She's little and doesn't talk much, so she's not sharing the gospel with her nursery workers, but it's a privilege for us to be able to disciple and teach her while she's in our home, so when she does have something to say, we hope and pray she puts her faith in the Lord and wants to share that with people. Although at times I may really want my mom to be down the street so I can drop off my kids with a babysitter who's always willing and ready, but because we don't, there are opportunities that Naomi has, or will have when she grows up.

Likewise, there are opportunities that she gives us. There are open doors that she provides as being a part of our family that I wouldn't have otherwise. If I always dropped Naomi off with my mom in order to do ministry, that would be fine, but there are unique opportunities when you don't have that around you. For example, we've had late night gatherings in our home or gatherings for Persian New Year and Easter and if we had an excess of babysitters, I would have dropped Naomi off because it makes my life a little bit easier. On the other side of things, as I sit and watch her play with people, as I experience open conversations because I have a child and the woman I'm talking to has a child, it's a really beautiful things that she does come along with us to events like that.

How this looks for us might be different than some people and it might be similar to others. Naomi is a gift to us in many ways, but when it comes to ministry, it's so sweet to see how the Lord uses your child in ways that you wouldn't expect. Even when she doesn't necessarily say a lot, the Lord uses her even still. So there are very real opportunities that Naomi has that we didn't have that are amazing and the Lord uses it, but there are also very real missed opportunities that she doesn't realize right now.

My husband, Coby, said, "There's great joy in watching your daughter dance with old Persian men to weird music," in a not creepy way, it's actually very sweet, "and there's also the reality that her grandparents haven't been able to celebrate a birthday with her so far. So, there is this tension that's very real and there are times when you feel like you're making a mistake as parents. We feel this burden, this desire to see the lost reached, but we also want our daughter to enjoy and be ministered to by her family. It's a hard thing to balance these two." Naomi will have experiences that other's won't, which are really cool, and we pray that she looks back and see that this ministry was not something that was forced upon her, but was an opportunity and an interesting thing to experience.

### Appendix E (Meet Coby Continued)

Our ministry here, English class, isn't something we love. Bailey and I don't love English, we're not passionate about English; we're passionate about sharing the gospel. It serves as a way to offer a service and help people with a practical need while also having something to invite non-Christians into. It serves as a platform to build relationship and share the gospel. We never want to bait-and-switch people or force anything on anyone, but I've seen the Lord use it in my weakness and my inability to teach English well.

In our ministry in Nashville and South Africa, we really didn't experience any interest in the gospel. We put in a lot of work with what seemed like very little to celebrate. We're quite young and we've experienced a bit of failure in ministry, but we've also experienced the grace of the Lord amidst failure. There's something very sweet about being in a community that has a biblical view of ministry because failure isn't actually failure, it's just learning.

I came to Birmingham with the mindset that our time here was going to be grueling with very few wins, but after being here for two or three months, some men came to me in English class and asked, "When are you going to teach us the Bible? We're done with Islam, we want to know what makes Christians different, so can you teach us?" A few weeks after that, we started holding a Bible study after class. In the first one, I remember that there were about 20 of us in there, all men, and there might have been two Christians out of the group, including Ali. We opened the Bible together and I was able to turn on a TV behind me to cast a Farsi version on the screen so everyone could read along. It was in this moment where I had the realization that this is what I've been praying for years. This moment was what I had been working towards: I was surrounded by Muslim background people who showed up to study the Bible. But my next thought was, "Why don't I feel more excited about this?"

Then I realized, in ministry, the fruit of our ministry can never be our fuel. That can never be our motivation and it can't be what

gets us out of bed. If we do count it as our motivation: 1) We may never experience it and, 2) When we do, it'll never be enough and the glory of it will fade. I was very thankful that God revealed this to me because it helped me realize that my fuel has to be the Lord. Simply obedience to him and being excited about the end has to be what gets me up and have the desire to do ministry day in and out. When ministry is really hard or when it's nonexistent, I'm still filled up by celebrating what it is to know my savior.

Pages 29-30: This is the end of the prayer guide. It should be noted that print formatting requires the total number of spread pages be divisible by four. This ensures the book will be assembled correctly when configured for a cover. In this template, there are 16 spreads. If additional pages are needed at the end of the book to reach a number divisible by four, it is recommended that missionaries add more information about their testimony or pictures that correspond to the prayer guide.

# **Print Layout**

The following template utilizes the same content from the prayer guide above, however it is properly formatted to be sent to print. Use the content from the above template, *Print Visual Layout*, and align it with the pages in the *Print Layout* spread (the front cover will be placed on the right side of first page and then a zig-zag pattern will be followed to place the following pages down and back up until the back cover is placed on the left side of the first page) before sending the prayer guide to the printer. This *Print Layout* should be downloaded from Canva as a PDF Print in the CYMK color mode (RGB color mode is acceptable if the CYMK is unavailable). Once you have downloaded the PDF, it can be sent to a printing service (printing options may be found at places such as FedEx or Staples). If printing at home, it must be printed utilizing the "Print on both sides" setting with "Flip on short edge" or "Short edge binding" selected. This template may be printed in color on standard printers using 8.5" x 11" paper. After all pages have been printed, it is highly recommended that the pages be trimmed of any white border. The pages may then be folded and stapled to create a book.



Back and Front Cover



Pages 1 and 30

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"And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

Revelation 12:11

Pages 29 and 2



### Appendix E (Meet Coby Continued)

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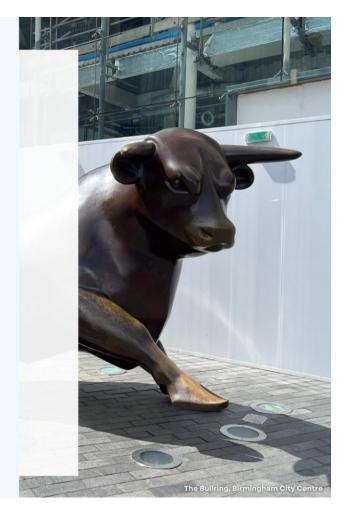
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Pages 3 and 28

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Pages 27 and 4

# DAYTWO

### **Meet Reza**

Back in my country, Iran, during the past four months, over 27,000 child marriages have happened. Girls under 15 are marrying older men, and most of those girls are being forced by family. You can probably imagine the emotions these girls feel as they are forced to get married to someone; utterly shattered physically, mentally, everything. That's why I started writing articles about divorce in the Iranian community. The government told me, "You are not an expert in Islam. It's not your business to write about this matter." In Iran, the government is Muslim because the people say they rule by the name of God. It's a very dangerous thing and people are suffering because of their beliefs.

I was a human rights activist in Iran, and I wrote a lot of articles about human rights, women's rights, child marriage, and freedom of religion. I was arrested three times for writing about my beliefs because they went against Islam and I believe that the government and religion should be separate. I fled my country about one year ago because of these political issues and I am now seeking asylum in the United Kingdom.

In Iran, I was a business advisor and a PhD student. It was a part of my job to know everything clearly and I always spent my time working or studying. For 30 years I followed Islam, but I was never a "real" Muslim. After 30 years, I quit Islam completely and my mother, a committed Muslim, accused me of being a pagan, but I was just agnostic. I believed in

### Appendix D (Meet Bailey Continued)

One thing I've realized is that raising kids overseas is not as straightforward as I thought it was going to be. I had this idea that everyone does it the same way; you homeschool your kid and then you throw them on your hip, and they come along with you with you to do ministry things. With that being said, we've been able to have our daughter, Naomi, in nursery. She's little and doesn't talk much, so she's not sharing the gospel with her nursery workers, but it's a privilege for us to be able to disciple and teach her while she's in our home, so when she does have something to say, we hope and pray she puts her faith in the Lord and wants to share that with people. Although at times I may really want my mom to be down the street so I can drop off my kids with a babysitter who's always willing and ready, but because we don't, there are opportunities that Naomi has, or will have when she grows up.

Likewise, there are opportunities that she gives us. There are open doors that she provides as being a part of our family that I wouldn't have otherwise. If I always dropped Naomi off with my mom in order to do ministry, that would be fine, but there are unique opportunities when you don't have that around you. For example, we've had late night gatherings in our home or gatherings for Persian New Year and Easter and if we had an excess of babysitters, I would have dropped Naomi off because it makes my life a little bit easier. On the other side of things, as I sit and watch her play with people, as I experience open conversations because I have a child and the woman I'm talking to has a child, it's a really beautiful things that she does come along with us to events like that.

How this looks for us might be different than some people and it might be similar to others. Naomi is a gift to us in many ways, but when it comes to ministry, it's so sweet to see how the Lord uses your child in ways that you wouldn't expect. Even when she doesn't necessarily say a lot, the Lord uses her even still. So there are very real opportunities that Naomi has that we didn't have that are amazing and the Lord uses it, but there are also very real missed opportunities that she doesn't realize right now.

Pages 5 and 26

heart and your soul and I knew it must be from God. During this time, I decided to believe in Jesus and then I got baptized.

During this time, I had so many things going on between work and the uncertainty of my asylum situation, and I could not focus much on reading the Bible. The only time that I was actually in the Word was in Bible studies. I was also very involved in politics still when I was living in Sweden which was taking a lot of energy from me. I received so many threats during this time that I would be killed if I returned to Iran. People were very angry and told me that I was against the government and religion. All of these things made life very hard for me.

In 2018, Sweden rejected my asylum case and I had to leave the country. It felt like a meaningless wait, all those years I spent seeking asylum, and I fell into a depression. I planned to move back to Germany or to France, but some things happened, and I found myself in Birmingham, England. I believe now that it was God's plan because it had nothing to do with how I ended up here.

I ended up meeting Ali at the Britannial Hotel, where we were both transferred. He invited me to come to English class as well as Second City Church. We became friends very quickly. I attended Second City church and have been attending this church every Sunday since early last year. After coming to this church, I became more enthusiastic about reading the Bible myself, not just in church services. Someone told me that even when I don't feel like reading, I should see that as an encouragement to go read the Bible anyway. I started reading God's Word and enjoyed it. I soon finished the New Testament, the Torah, and many other parts of the Old Testament. I found more joy and more rest here after leaving Sweden. I sometimes still feel depressed as I wait for my asylum claim to be approved, yet the Lord, through his Word, gives me rest.

God, but I never thought about faith. For people like me, or people with another faith background, they are struggling with two barriers to conversion. One of them is previous faith. If you were in a Christian family, it's much easier to follow faith yourself. For me, because I had some background in other beliefs, it was hard for me to convince myself all of my history of beliefs were wrong after 43 years and accept another belief that was completely different.

Another barrier, especially for Muslims, is community. Muslims are afraid of being rejected from their community which makes it hard for them to accept a new faith. In Islam, you are told to not think about faith in depth to avoid blasphemy. You are told to not ask questions and that if you can't find an answer to a question, to leave it. You are told that you don't have the right to convert to another faith because Islam is the best. If you go against these things, you risk rejection. In Iran, maybe ten percent of the population is actually committed Muslim. The rest of the population does not follow any faith, but they pretend they are Muslim because they don't have a choice. If you confess to being an atheist, you confess to be executed. In Iran, you have a right to beat people or if someone kills, you have a right to kill. But Jesus says in the Bible to forgive people, to not condemn people. I can't deny Jesus' character and his personality, it's amazing to me. To read more about how Reza came to know Christ through an English class and how his life was changed with a video call, see Appendix A.

### Pray

- For Muslims who are seeking truth but don't know where to find it.
- For Christians to be bold in their faith when sharing Jesus with Muslims.
- That the Holy Spirit will help Muslims who are considering Christianity understand difficult concepts like the trinity.

Short term missions team visiting Second City Church

Pages 25 and 6

## I was a Sunni Muslim who grew up in a relatively religious and devout family. I started following Islamic laws and regulations before I can remember. Even when I came to the United Kingdom, I was still practicing Islam for a little while, until I was about 25; that makes it almost two decades of my life that I was a Muslim with my family. The last few years before I came to the UK were not easy years for me. My whole life in Iran I had been studying, in high school and university. You expect many things when you're a student, and when you see your expectations failing, when you see no opportunities for a job before higher education, it just lets you down. I also had struggles with the government and with relatives in my family. All these things led me to be so confused about religion, about God, and about life in general. I left Iran with a broken heart and mind. When someone leaves Iran to study in another country, their family members and friends get excited for them because it's such a good thing. Leaving Iran is seen as a success because it means that someone has managed to escape the yoke of Islam. Many people don't plan to go back after school because they know there aren't many opportunities for them in Iran. I left Iran with some hope, but not very excited because I was leaving with questions for God. I knew that even if I went to the UK, God wouldn't change and I wouldn't change.

### Appendix C (Meet Affshein Continued)

In Iran, basically all people went to school which talked about Jesus and taught us that he was just a prophet like all other prophets. Jesus was just another saint, another good guy, but he was not crucified. Qur'an classes were compulsory for us, and I believed in God, but I was never a devout Muslim. I had never prayed before, even though my Dad advised it, and whenever someone would play the Qur'an to listen to, I hated it and would get a headache.

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Pages 7 and 24

you're right," I said, "That's the humility of Jesus in our brothers and sisters." Eventually, he came to the Lord!

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\*Ali has since been granted his asylum claim and is now a refugee in England.

Before I made it to the UK, something interesting happened, and, looking now, I can see that it was God orchestrating everything. I went to the United Arab Emirates to get my student visa but had two weeks before I was allowed to leave for the UK. As a student, it was too expensive for me to stay in the UAE and I did not trust the government in Iran to go back. Someone suggested to me that I go stay with my cousins in Turkey for two weeks while I was waiting.

My single cousin was very interested in religions without believing in any of them. He invited me to go to a Pentecostal church with him one day. He said, "Ali, come with me to church to see what they're doing." When we got there, I saw how joyfully they worshipped Jesus. At this time, my cousin also explained the true meaning of the Trinity to me. I thought that Christians believed in three gods, as do most Muslims, so I realized I was wrong about Christians all my life. The weeks passed and I finally went to Nottingham, England on a student visa.

Three months later, my married cousin called me on Christmas Eve, 2019, and said, "Ali, I'm a Christian!" I was so shocked because the last time I saw him, he was blaspheming God and filled with so much anger towards the God that he didn't even believe in. I asked him what changed, and he said he had a dream of Jesus. To read more about how Ali's cousin became a great witness for him, and how Ali surrendered his life to ministry in Appendix B.

### Pray

- That students in closed countries will have opportunities to study abroad and be exposed to Christianity.
- That God will bring people into Muslim's lives that cause them to question their faith.
- For atheists to encounter the presence, fullness, and joy of God.

translator helping a Persian student in English class

Pages 23 and 8



were still in lockdown. I told my parents about my conversion, and my mother couldn't sleep for three nights. My father tried to convince me to take back my decision and told me I wasn't making a wise choice. After three years of being a Christian, they have now accepted my decision and I know they still love me and care about me, but they still don't like my choice.

Once lockdown was over, my visa was about to expire but I could not go back to Iran. Lockdown made it difficult to apply for work and I could not find a job related to my studies, despite my efforts. Eventually, I had to apply for asylum because I had no other choice.

The British government transferred me to Birmingham a few months after I claimed asylum. My church back in Nottingham recommended Second City church to me when I moved. I got involved at Second City and in several months Coby and Bailey joined the church and began English classes, so I was able to get involved in that ministry as well.

Through that class, so many of our dear brothers started coming here, including Affshein, Reza, and Hamid. Many others attended as well, but are no longer at Second City because they were either transferred or switched congregations due to location. The Lord has truly blessed us here and this place has helped me to find a better grasp of what ministry looks like; it's more than just lighting candles.

It's been encouraging to me to see how people lay down their lives here to help talk to nonbelievers, encourage them, and share the truth of the gospel of Jesus. One of my friends told me once, "Ali! It's so interesting to me that these people have come from the US, they have left their country, and they come here to sit beside us and sometimes even kneel beside our tables and write on our papers. We're asylum seekers. We don't have anything to give them, we have nothing to offer in response to their kindness. This type of humility is extraordinary." "Yeah,

Pages 9 and 22

I didn't know that church was a thing or that I should talk to other believers because of the lockdown. The only thing I wanted to do and I could do was read the Bible. Before I became a Christian, although I'm not proud to confess it, I was addicted to video games. But as I was reading the Bible, almost immediately after my conversion, all my desire to play video games left me! A new desire came to me and I just wanted to read God's Word. Any book I would finish, I would tell my cousin and he would encourage me to read the next one, and the next one.

When I read John 14:23 which says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him," I was stunned. My whole life, I have just wanted God; now, God was saying that he was going to come and dwell with me! Some things still bothered me, and the pains of 25 years did not leave me overnight, but I found excitement and joy in Christ and just reading his Word. A change was evident in me and other people began to notice this new joy I had within me.

After I finished reading Revelation, my cousin told me to go back to the Old Testament and start from Genesis. I was so confused as I read, but it felt so rewarding to me; my reward was just to know God more and know his plan more. I was able to see what I had been missing all of my life and the lies that I heard were uncovered with this truth.

Eventually, I came across a video sermon that said new believers should go out and find a church. I said, "Okay... Where though? All churches are closed." I searched the area around me and found an evangelical church. I contacted them and a pastor reached out to me. He told me that they didn't have services at the moment because of lockdown, but he wanted to meet up with me weekly.

I met Pastor John at the university park every week and for an hour we would walk around and just talk about Jesus. Another year passed and a lot of important things happened while we then the next one. It seems like just a game of chances to finally reach a safe country.

Eventually, as I kept walking, I made it to Germany. When I arrived there, they screened me and got my fingerprints. They suggested that now that I was in the system, I could go to another country where I might have some relatives. Because my brother, three sisters, and cousins were all residents of Sweden, I went there towards the end of 2015. I spent about six months in Sweden learning the language. Once I had a better grasp on how to speak Swedish, I started working with my cousin in his restaurant. All I did there was wash dishes in the back and work on improving my language.

A few years passed as I kept working in the restaurant and eventually, I was able to interact with people- even though I was still learning and couldn't speak properly. One day, I was taking an order on the phone for two pastors. I had no idea they were pastors when they came in, but they were Christians, and they gave me some leaflets- some Christian stuff.

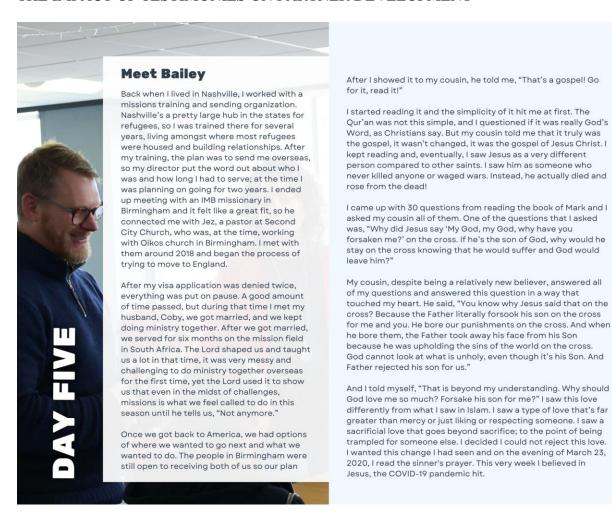
There were several verses written on the leaflet, and I can't remember all of them, but I remember John 3:16 was on it. When I got home, I started translating it on my phone. To read more about how these Bible verses changed Affshein's life and how he landed in Birmingham, see Appendix C.

### Pray

- For the safety of asylum seekers as they flee their countries to escape persecution.
- For native workers as they bring the good news of Jesus to the people around them.
- That the power of God's Word would be stonger than any language barrier or previous beliefs.

Victoria Law Courts, a historic court house in the ci

Pages 21 and 10



Pages 11 and 20

### Appendix B (Meet Ali Continued)

My cousin shared that, before this dream, he had been feeling so depressed, hopeless, and afraid of life. He went to bed with such hopelessness that he said, "I kind of asked God in my heart, 'If you exist, I don't want to wake up. I don't have hope, I just want to die.'" Jesus met him in a dream that night and told him that he needed his love, the love of Jesus. My cousin responded and said that he didn't believe in Jesus, but Jesus told him that his love brings hope and faith. Jesus also gave him signs in this dream that he later saw fulfilled.

After my cousin woke up from this dream, he opened a Bible that an evangelist had given him and opened it right to 1 Corinthians 13. He told me that he shed tears that night. He still did not believe in Jesus, but he was very confused because he could not reject what he had just experienced. Once he saw the signs Jesus gave him come to fulfillment, he told me, "Ali, I just could not reject that anymore!"

As he shared his experience with me, I saw joy and peace in him. I saw a change in him! He could not stop talking about God and he was joyful in the name of Jesus. I looked at myself and said, "Ali, you have been looking for this joy that comes from God in his presence. You have always said you wanted God in your life."

But I still could not believe my cousin when he shared all of this at Christmas. I couldn't accept it, but I also couldn't reject it. Three more months passed, and he called me again. He talked more about Jesus with me and told me that his wife and some of his friends were now Christians. I said to him, "I thought you had lost it, but your wife can't lose her mind at the same time as you. And your friends can't lose their minds, too. So there really is something going on here... I need to know more. I need to think more seriously."

He told me to go read one of the gospels. I had one in my room, the gospel of Mark that an evangelist had given me on my first day of university in the UK. I didn't know that it was a Gospel, I just knew it was a Christian book and took it because it was free.

was to come after being back in the States for a year. We kept talking to Jez, fundraising, and preparing to move over here long term; at least two years, but potentially longer. Jez mentioned English class before we moved over here as a ministry opportunity, but there wasn't necessarily much that was laid out or planned for us to step into. For the past several years there have been several people groups who were moving into the city as asylum seekers but there was no one else at Second City that was doing asylum seeker ministry. We knew we would be leading that out, so not long after we arrived here in Birmingham, we decided English classes would be a good avenue for ministry.

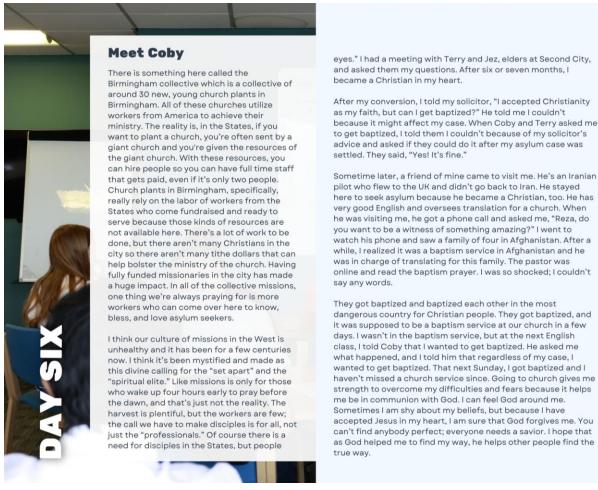
Coby and I have never felt significantly drawn to one people, place, or role, specifically, as of yet. What we have done thus far is trust the Lord and take steps of faith. As long as we feel like the Lord is allowing us to get a visa to move, as long as we feel like it's a healthy situation, and as long as there's ministry to do where the harvest is ripe but there are no workers, then we just take a step of obedience and go. It's been amazing to see how the Lord has used us in the midst of our failings and shortcomings in Birmingham and how much of a need there is to work with the Persian people here. To read more about Bailey's life as a mom overseas, see Appendix D.

### Pray

- · For laborers preparing to go to the mission field.
- That governments will accept visas for missionaries to be able to access countries.
- That the Holy Spirit will reveal ministry avenues and people hungry for the gospel to missionaries entering the field.

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Pages 19 and 12



Pages 13 and 18

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as my faith, but can I get baptized?" He told me I couldn't because it might affect my case. When Coby and Terry asked me to get baptized, I told them I couldn't because of my solicitor's advice and asked if they could do it after my asylum case was

pilot who flew to the UK and didn't go back to Iran. He stayed here to seek asylum because he became a Christian, too. He has very good English and oversees translation for a church. When he was visiting me, he got a phone call and asked me, "Reza, do you want to be a witness of something amazing?" I went to watch his phone and saw a family of four in Afghanistan. After a while, I realized it was a baptism service in Afghanistan and he was in charge of translating for this family. The pastor was online and read the baptism prayer. I was so shocked; I couldn't

dangerous country for Christian people. They got baptized, and it was supposed to be a baptism service at our church in a few days. I wasn't in the baptism service, but at the next English class, I told Coby that I wanted to get baptized. He asked me what happened, and I told him that regardless of my case, I wanted to get baptized. That next Sunday, I got baptized and I haven't missed a church service since. Going to church gives me strength to overcome my difficulties and fears because it helps me be in communion with God. I can feel God around me. Sometimes I am shy about my beliefs, but because I have accepted Jesus in my heart, I am sure that God forgives me. You can't find anybody perfect; everyone needs a savior. I hope that as God helped me to find my way, he helps other people find the

### Appendix A (Meet Reza Continued)

When I arrived in Birmingham, my English wasn't good and I tried to find somewhere to improve my language because English is vital to me so I can get used to living in England. I met an Iranian man in my hotel, and he told me about an English class that meets at Quayside Tower. When I first came to class as a student, I didn't know it was a part of Second City Church. After class was finished, Coby, an American pastor at the church, invited everyone to stay for Bible study after the class. I didn't know much about Christianity and decided to go back to my hotel, but before I left, Ali, an Iranian Christian, told me that if I was interested in church, I could visit their baptism service at the Hope Center on Sunday.

It was rainy and cold that Sunday and I thought to myself, "It's rainy, is it wise to go out or not?" I didn't have any money to buy a train ticket, but I decided it could be good exercise because it was just about a 25-minute walk from my hotel. So I went to the service, and I was very impressed by it. Afterward, a group of missionary students who had come to evangelize in the UK came and asked me if I wanted to install the Bible application on my phone. I told them no, that I had just come to visit the service. They also tried to give me a Bible, but I was resistant to accept a Bible or install the application.

The next week I went to English class again and kept concentrating on learning English. I had this light in my mind to read the Bible, though. I don't know why, but I tried to learn more about English and Christianity at the same time. After a month, I asked Ali to give me a Bible. It was a small New Testament and after five or six months, I had finished reading the four Gospels, Romans, the epistles, and some parts of the Old Testament. I was impressed by Christianity but I still had a lot of questions. In my free time, I was able to think a lot about Christianity. I was shy to ask my questions, but I couldn't find a proper answer and I couldn't accept some parts of Christianity, like the Trinity, which was really hard for me to understand. My father was a wise man and it was his advice to me, "If you want to do something or accept something, do it by your conscious and not with blind

always stay at home; if you see the command to go and you feel even an ounce of willingness to go, go. The Lord will use that for his good. You might not see a thousand people come to faith, but the Lord is working through your obedience and your faithfulness to him. This is how Bailey and I strive to go about ministry and will continue to moving forward. When I decided to pursue something like missions, that's really how it was. It wasn't like I saw it written in the sky or God gave me a vision. That certainly happens for some people, but we shouldn't wait for that to be our call.

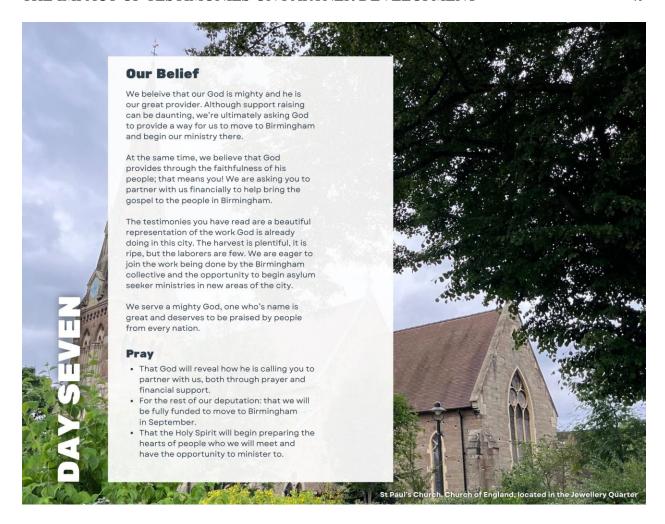
For me, I was reading the book of Romans for the first time. I read about the lostness of the world, our sin, and how we have been redeemed. Such excellent news. Then I got to Romans 10:14-17. Faith comes by hearing. For someone to believe, someone has to tell them. For someone to tell them, someone has to be sent. So there's this chain and if we want to see the nations reached, if we want to see Revelation 7:9 come to fruition where we worship for eternity alongside the global church, then we have to go. We can't just wait for other people to do it. To read more about Coby's view on ministry and how God revealed truth to him, see Appendix E.

### Pray

- For the Birmingham collective as they serve in churches across the city.
- That people would have a willing heart to go and serve in the nations.
- That the Holy Spirit would strengthen global workers as they serve across the world.

Teaching a lesson at English class in Quayside To

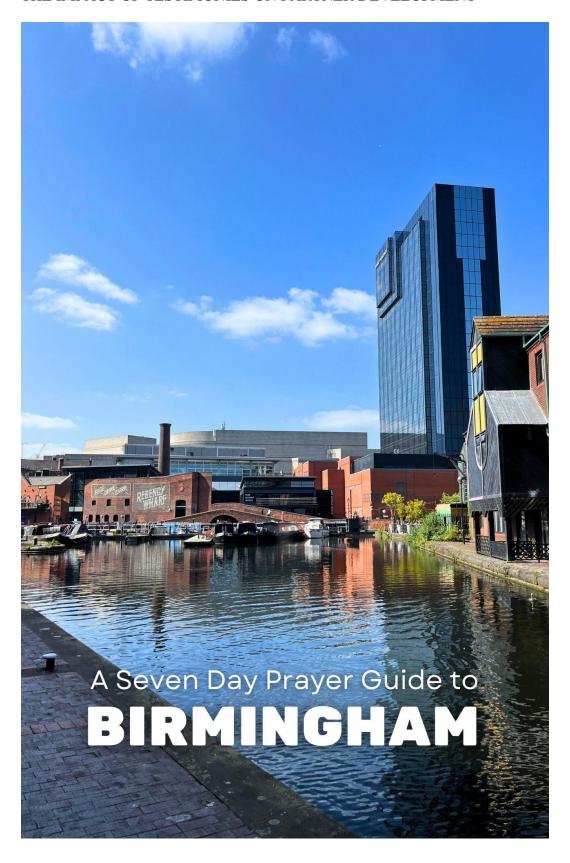
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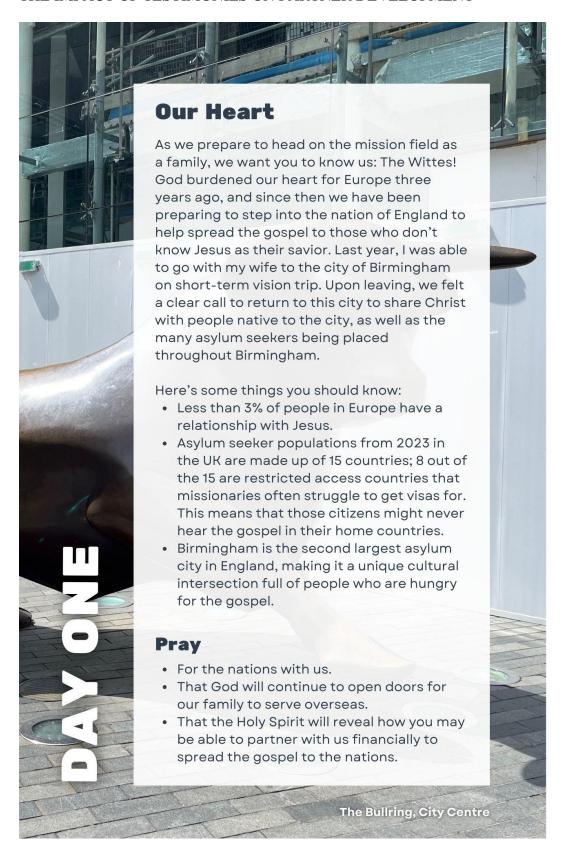
# **Digital Layout**

The following template utilizes the same content from the printed prayer guide above, however it formatted to better suit digital viewing. This layout can be viewed more easily on a mobile device and has been adopted to be viewed in single pages, rather than a spread. To adjust this template properly, it is important to adjust images accordingly (this may mean adding new images) as well as make adjustments to image captions. The copy should not be altered from the *Print Visual Layout* template. This *Digital Layout* template should be downloaded from Canva as a PDF Standard in the RGB color mode. Once you have downloaded the PDF, it can be shared from and to any electronic device. It should be noted that, unlike the printed prayer guide, page count does not impact the viewing experience for this format.



"And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

Revelation 12:11



# **Meet Reza**

Back in my country, Iran, during the past four months, over 27,000 child marriages have happened. Girls under 15 are marrying older men, and most of those girls are being forced by family. You can probably imagine the emotions these girls feel as they are forced to get married to someone; utterly shattered physically, mentally, everything. That's why I started writing articles about divorce in the Iranian community. The government told me, "You are not an expert in Islam. It's not your business to write about this matter." In Iran, the government is Muslim because the people say they rule by the name of God. It's a very dangerous thing and people are suffering because of their beliefs.

I was a human rights activist in Iran, and I wrote a lot of articles about human rights, women's rights, child marriage, and freedom of religion. I was arrested three times for writing about my beliefs because they went against Islam and I believe that the government and religion should be separate. I fled my country about one year ago because of these political issues and I am now seeking asylum in the United Kingdom.

In Iran, I was a business advisor and a PhD student. It was a part of my job to know everything clearly and I always spent my time working or studying. For 30 years I followed Islam, but I was never a "real" Muslim. After 30 years, I quit Islam completely and my mother, a committed Muslim, accused me of being a pagan, but I was just agnostic. I believed in

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Members of Second City Church

God, but I never thought about faith. For people like me, or people with another faith background, they are struggling with two barriers to conversion. One of them is previous faith. If you were in a Christian family, it's much easier to follow faith yourself. For me, because I had some background in other beliefs, it was hard for me to convince myself all of my history of beliefs were wrong after 43 years and accept another belief that was completely different.

Another barrier, especially for Muslims, is community. Muslims are afraid of being rejected from their community which makes it hard for them to accept a new faith. In Islam, you are told to not think about faith in depth to avoid blasphemy. You are told to not ask questions and that if you can't find an answer to a question, to leave it. You are told that you don't have the right to convert to another faith because Islam is the best. If you go against these things, you risk rejection. In Iran, maybe ten percent of the population is actually committed Muslim. The rest of the population does not follow any faith, but they pretend they are Muslim because they don't have a choice. If you confess to being an atheist, you confess to be executed. In Iran, you have a right to beat people or if someone kills, you have a right to kill. But Jesus says in the Bible to forgive people, to not condemn people. I can't deny Jesus' character and his personality, it's amazing to me. To read more about how Reza came to know Christ through an English class and how his life was changed with a video call, see Appendix A.

# Pray

- For Muslims who are seeking truth but don't know where to find it.
- For Christians to be bold in their faith when sharing Jesus with Muslims.
- That the Holy Spirit will help Muslims who are considering Christianity understand difficult concepts like the trinity.

Short term missions team visiting Second City Church

# Meet Ali

I was a Sunni Muslim who grew up in a relatively religious and devout family. I started following Islamic laws and regulations before I can remember. Even when I came to the United Kingdom, I was still practicing Islam for a little while, until I was about 25; that makes it almost two decades of my life that I was a Muslim with my family.

The last few years before I came to the UK were not easy years for me. My whole life in Iran I had been studying, in high school and university. You expect many things when you're a student, and when you see your expectations failing, when you see no opportunities for a job before higher education, it just lets you down. I also had struggles with the government and with relatives in my family. All these things led me to be so confused about religion, about God, and about life in general. I left Iran with a broken heart and mind.

When someone leaves Iran to study in another country, their family members and friends get excited for them because it's such a good thing. Leaving Iran is seen as a success because it means that someone has managed to escape the yoke of Islam. Many people don't plan to go back after school because they know there aren't many opportunities for them in Iran. I left Iran with some hope, but not very excited because I was leaving with questions for God. I knew that even if I went to the UK, God wouldn't change and I wouldn't change.

A translator helping a Persian student in English class

Before I made it to the UK, something interesting happened, and, looking now, I can see that it was God orchestrating everything. I went to the United Arab Emirates to get my student visa but had two weeks before I was allowed to leave for the UK. As a student, it was too expensive for me to stay in the UAE and I did not trust the government in Iran to go back. Someone suggested to me that I go stay with my cousins in Turkey for two weeks while I was waiting.

My single cousin was very interested in religions without believing in any of them. He invited me to go to a Pentecostal church with him one day. He said, "Ali, come with me to church to see what they're doing." When we got there, I saw how joyfully they worshipped Jesus. At this time, my cousin also explained the true meaning of the Trinity to me. I thought that Christians believed in three gods, as do most Muslims, so I realized I was wrong about Christians all my life. The weeks passed and I finally went to Nottingham, England on a student visa.

Three months later, my married cousin called me on Christmas Eve, 2019, and said, "Ali, I'm a Christian!" I was so shocked because the last time I saw him, he was blaspheming God and filled with so much anger towards the God that he didn't even believe in. I asked him what changed, and he said he had a dream of Jesus. To read more about how Ali's cousin became a great witness for him, and how Ali surrendered his life to ministry in Appendix B.

# Pray

- That students in closed countries will have opportunities to study abroad and be exposed to Christianity.
- That God will bring people into Muslim's lives that cause them to guestion their faith.
- For atheists to encounter the presence, fullness, and joy of God.

# **Meet Affshein**

I have been waiting for eight years to receive asylum. In 2015 I had to leave Iran because of some things that had happened to me and my family. I went to Turkey and from there, I literally began walking towards other European countries. This is not uncommon for asylum seekers; I know people who have walked for over two years, some through 14 different countries. It is very hard to be an asylum seeker in Turkey because the Turkish government can easily find you and deport you back. It's the same for many other countries, like Greece and Italy. So, from Turkey, I kept traveling and passed through Greece by foot, by bus, and by train, and I went through jungles and mountains. Once during this journey, I had to get in a boat at three in the morning, while it was still dark. We had to get from one coast to another and we were not allowed to have any kind of light, we just had to hope we would make it to the dim light on the other side of the water. Some people find the light, some people don't. As we set out, water kept coming into the boat and we had to keep emptying it; thank the Lord, we made it, but we knew of another boat that left after us and their boat had sunk.

The journey of an asylum seeker is very similar to Snakes and Ladders. You leave one country, go to the next, and then the government can take you, seize you, and deport you back to the first country. If the next government does not accept you, you get sent back to your first country and try to flee to the next one, and

Victoria Law Courts, a historic court house in the city

then the next one. It seems like just a game of chances to finally reach a safe country.

Eventually, as I kept walking, I made it to Germany. When I arrived there, they screened me and got my fingerprints. They suggested that now that I was in the system, I could go to another country where I might have some relatives. Because my brother, three sisters, and cousins were all residents of Sweden, I went there towards the end of 2015. I spent about six months in Sweden learning the language. Once I had a better grasp on how to speak Swedish, I started working with my cousin in his restaurant. All I did there was wash dishes in the back and work on improving my language.

A few years passed as I kept working in the restaurant and eventually, I was able to interact with people- even though I was still learning and couldn't speak properly. One day, I was taking an order on the phone for two pastors. I had no idea they were pastors when they came in, but they were Christians, and they gave me some leaflets- some Christian stuff.

There were several verses written on the leaflet, and I can't remember all of them, but I remember John 3:16 was on it. When I got home, I started translating it on my phone. To read more about how these Bible verses changed Affshein's life and how he landed in Birmingham, see Appendix C.

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- For the safety of asylum seekers as they flee their countries to escape persecution.
- For native workers as they bring the good news of Jesus to the people around them.
- That the power of God's Word would be stonger than any language barrier or previous beliefs.

Victoria Law Courts, a historic court house in the city



was to come after being back in the States for a year. We kept talking to Jez, fundraising, and preparing to move over here long term; at least two years, but potentially longer. Jez mentioned English class before we moved over here as a ministry opportunity, but there wasn't necessarily much that was laid out or planned for us to step into. For the past several years there have been several people groups who were moving into the city as asylum seekers but there was no one else at Second City that was doing asylum seeker ministry. We knew we would be leading that out, so not long after we arrived here in Birmingham, we decided English classes would be a good avenue for ministry.

Coby and I have never felt significantly drawn to one people, place, or role, specifically, as of yet. What we have done thus far is trust the Lord and take steps of faith. As long as we feel like the Lord is allowing us to get a visa to move, as long as we feel like it's a healthy situation, and as long as there's ministry to do where the harvest is ripe but there are no workers, then we just take a step of obedience and go. It's been amazing to see how the Lord has used us in the midst of our failings and shortcomings in Birmingham and how much of a need there is to work with the Persian people here. To read more about Bailey's life as a mom overseas, see Appendix D.

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- For laborers preparing to go to the mission field.
- That governments will accept visas for missionaries to be able to access countries.
- That the Holy Spirit will reveal ministry avenues and people hungry for the gospel to missionaries entering the field.

# **Meet Coby** Equative There is something here called the Birmingham collective which is a collective of around 30 new, young church plants in Birmingham. All of these churches utilize workers from America to achieve their ministry. The reality is, in the States, if you want to plant a church, you're often sent by a giant church and you're given the resources of the giant church. With these resources, you can hire people so you can have full time staff that gets paid, even if it's only two people. Church plants in Birmingham, specifically, really rely on the labor of workers from the States who come fundraised and ready to serve because those kinds of resources are not available here. There's a lot of work to be done, but there aren't many Christians in the city so there aren't many tithe dollars that can help bolster the ministry of the church. Having fully funded missionaries in the city has made a huge impact. In all of the collective missions, one thing we're always praying for is more workers who can come over here to know, bless, and love asylum seekers. I think our culture of missions in the West is unhealthy and it has been for a few centuries now. I think it's been mystified and made as this divine calling for the "set apart" and the "spiritual elite." Like missions is only for those who wake up four hours early to pray before the dawn, and that's just not the reality. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; the call we have to make disciples is for all, not just the "professionals." Of course there is a need for disciples in the States, but people

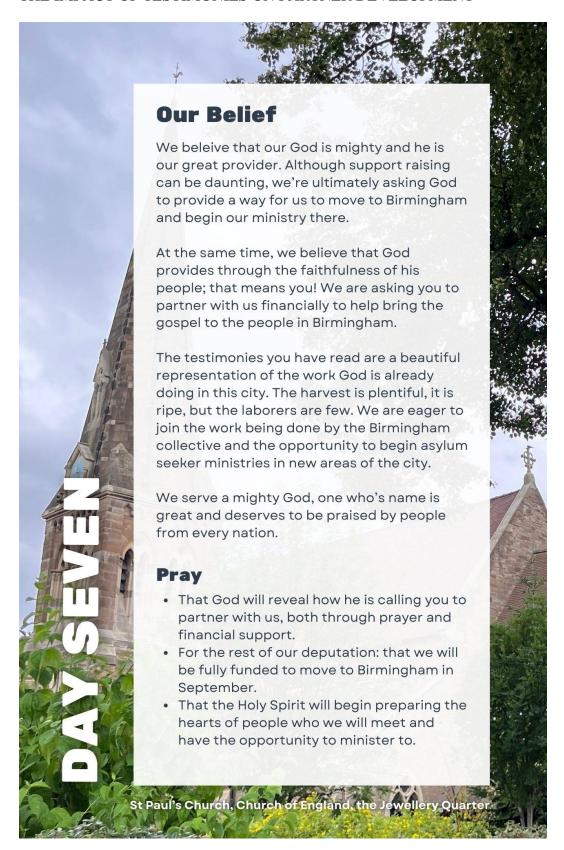
Missionaries helping with English class

always stay at home; if you see the command to go and you feel even an ounce of willingness to go, go. The Lord will use that for his good. You might not see a thousand people come to faith, but the Lord is working through your obedience and your faithfulness to him. This is how Bailey and I strive to go about ministry and will continue to moving forward. When I decided to pursue something like missions, that's really how it was. It wasn't like I saw it written in the sky or God gave me a vision. That certainly happens for some people, but we shouldn't wait for that to be our call.

For me, I was reading the book of Romans for the first time. I read about the lostness of the world, our sin, and how we have been redeemed. Such excellent news. Then I got to Romans 10:14-17. Faith comes by hearing. For someone to believe, someone has to tell them. For someone to tell them, someone has to be sent. So there's this chain and if we want to see the nations reached, if we want to see Revelation 7:9 come to fruition where we worship for eternity alongside the global church, then we have to go. We can't just wait for other people to do it. To read more about Coby's view on ministry and how God revealed truth to him, see Appendix E.

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- That people would have a willing heart to go and serve in the nations.
- That the Holy Spirit would strengthen global workers as they serve across the world.



# **Appendix A (Meet Reza Continued)**

When I arrived in Birmingham, my English wasn't good and I tried to find somewhere to improve my language because English is vital to me so I can get used to living in England. I met an Iranian man in my hotel, and he told me about an English class that meets at Quayside Tower. When I first came to class as a student, I didn't know it was a part of Second City Church. After class was finished, Coby, an American pastor at the church, invited everyone to stay for Bible study after the class. I didn't know much about Christianity and decided to go back to my hotel, but before I left, Ali, an Iranian Christian, told me that if I was interested in church, I could visit their baptism service at the Hope Center on Sunday.

It was rainy and cold that Sunday and I thought to myself, "It's rainy, is it wise to go out or not?" I didn't have any money to buy a train ticket, but I decided it could be good exercise because it was just about a 25-minute walk from my hotel. So I went to the service, and I was very impressed by it. Afterward, a group of missionary students who had come to evangelize in the UK came and asked me if I wanted to install the Bible application on my phone. I told them no, that I had just come to visit the service. They also tried to give me a Bible, but I was resistant to accept a Bible or install the application.

The next week I went to English class again and kept concentrating on learning English. I had this light in my mind to read the Bible, though. I don't know why, but I tried to learn more about English and Christianity at the same time. After a month, I asked Ali to give me a Bible. It was a small New Testament and after five or six months, I had finished reading the four Gospels, Romans, the epistles, and some parts of the Old Testament. I was impressed by Christianity but I still had a lot of questions. In my free time, I was able to think a lot about Christianity. I was shy to ask my questions, but I couldn't find a proper answer and I couldn't accept some parts of Christianity, like the Trinity, which was really hard for me to understand. My father was a wise man and it was his advice to me, "If you want to do something or accept something, do it by your conscious and not with blind

eyes." I had a meeting with Terry and Jez, elders at Second City, and asked them my questions. After six or seven months, I became a Christian in my heart.

After my conversion, I told my solicitor, "I accepted Christianity as my faith, but can I get baptized?" He told me I couldn't because it might affect my case. When Coby and Terry asked me to get baptized, I told them I couldn't because of my solicitor's advice and asked if they could do it after my asylum case was settled. They said, "Yes! It's fine."

Sometime later, a friend of mine came to visit me. He's an Iranian pilot who flew to the UK and didn't go back to Iran. He stayed here to seek asylum because he became a Christian, too. He has very good English and oversees translation for a church. When he was visiting me, he got a phone call and asked me, "Reza, do you want to be a witness of something amazing?" I went to watch his phone and saw a family of four in Afghanistan. After a while, I realized it was a baptism service in Afghanistan and he was in charge of translating for this family. The pastor was online and read the baptism prayer. I was so shocked; I couldn't say any words.

They got baptized and baptized each other in the most dangerous country for Christian people. They got baptized, and it was supposed to be a baptism service at our church in a few days. I wasn't in the baptism service, but at the next English class, I told Coby that I wanted to get baptized. He asked me what happened, and I told him that regardless of my case, I wanted to get baptized. That next Sunday, I got baptized and I haven't missed a church service since. Going to church gives me strength to overcome my difficulties and fears because it helps me be in communion with God. I can feel God around me. Sometimes I am shy about my beliefs, but because I have accepted Jesus in my heart, I am sure that God forgives me. You can't find anybody perfect; everyone needs a savior. I hope that as God helped me to find my way, he helps other people find the true way.

# **Appendix B (Meet Ali Continued)**

My cousin shared that, before this dream, he had been feeling so depressed, hopeless, and afraid of life. He went to bed with such hopelessness that he said, "I kind of asked God in my heart, 'If you exist, I don't want to wake up. I don't have hope, I just want to die." Jesus met him in a dream that night and told him that he needed his love, the love of Jesus. My cousin responded and said that he didn't believe in Jesus, but Jesus told him that his love brings hope and faith. Jesus also gave him signs in this dream that he later saw fulfilled.

After my cousin woke up from this dream, he opened a Bible that an evangelist had given him and opened it right to 1 Corinthians 13. He told me that he shed tears that night. He still did not believe in Jesus, but he was very confused because he could not reject what he had just experienced. Once he saw the signs Jesus gave him come to fulfillment, he told me, "Ali, I just could not reject that anymore!"

As he shared his experience with me, I saw joy and peace in him. I saw a change in him! He could not stop talking about God and he was joyful in the name of Jesus. I looked at myself and said, "Ali, you have been looking for this joy that comes from God in his presence. You have always said you wanted God in your life."

But I still could not believe my cousin when he shared all of this at Christmas. I couldn't accept it, but I also couldn't reject it. Three more months passed, and he called me again. He talked more about Jesus with me and told me that his wife and some of his friends were now Christians. I said to him, "I thought you had lost it, but your wife can't lose her mind at the same time as you. And your friends can't lose their minds, too. So there really is something going on here... I need to know more. I need to think more seriously."

He told me to go read one of the gospels. I had one in my room, the gospel of Mark that an evangelist had given me on my first day of university in the UK. I didn't know that it was a Gospel, I just knew it was a Christian book and took it because it was free.

After I showed it to my cousin, he told me, "That's a gospel! Go for it, read it!"

I started reading it and the simplicity of it hit me at first. The Qur'an was not this simple, and I questioned if it was really God's Word, as Christians say. But my cousin told me that it truly was the gospel, it wasn't changed, it was the gospel of Jesus Christ. I kept reading and, eventually, I saw Jesus as a very different person compared to other saints. I saw him as someone who never killed anyone or waged wars. Instead, he actually died and rose from the dead!

I came up with 30 questions from reading the book of Mark and I asked my cousin all of them. One of the questions that I asked was, "Why did Jesus say 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' on the cross. If he's the son of God, why would he stay on the cross knowing that he would suffer and God would leave him?"

My cousin, despite being a relatively new believer, answered all of my questions and answered this question in a way that touched my heart. He said, "You know why Jesus said that on the cross? Because the Father literally forsook his son on the cross for me and you. He bore our punishments on the cross. And when he bore them, the Father took away his face from his Son because he was upholding the sins of the world on the cross. God cannot look at what is unholy, even though it's his Son. And Father rejected his son for us."

And I told myself, "That is beyond my understanding. Why should God love me so much? Forsake his son for me?" I saw this love differently from what I saw in Islam. I saw a type of love that's far greater than mercy or just liking or respecting someone. I saw a sacrificial love that goes beyond sacrifice; to the point of being trampled for someone else. I decided I could not reject this love. I wanted this change I had seen and on the evening of March 23, 2020, I read the sinner's prayer. This very week I believed in Jesus, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

I didn't know that church was a thing or that I should talk to other believers because of the lockdown. The only thing I wanted to do and I could do was read the Bible. Before I became a Christian, although I'm not proud to confess it, I was addicted to video games. But as I was reading the Bible, almost immediately after my conversion, all my desire to play video games left me! A new desire came to me and I just wanted to read God's Word. Any book I would finish, I would tell my cousin and he would encourage me to read the next one, and the next one.

When I read John 14:23 which says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him," I was stunned. My whole life, I have just wanted God; now, God was saying that he was going to come and dwell with me! Some things still bothered me, and the pains of 25 years did not leave me overnight, but I found excitement and joy in Christ and just reading his Word. A change was evident in me and other people began to notice this new joy I had within me.

After I finished reading Revelation, my cousin told me to go back to the Old Testament and start from Genesis. I was so confused as I read, but it felt so rewarding to me; my reward was just to know God more and know his plan more. I was able to see what I had been missing all of my life and the lies that I heard were uncovered with this truth.

Eventually, I came across a video sermon that said new believers should go out and find a church. I said, "Okay... Where though? All churches are closed." I searched the area around me and found an evangelical church. I contacted them and a pastor reached out to me. He told me that they didn't have services at the moment because of lockdown, but he wanted to meet up with me weekly.

I met Pastor John at the university park every week and for an hour we would walk around and just talk about Jesus. Another year passed and a lot of important things happened while we were still in lockdown. I told my parents about my conversion, and my mother couldn't sleep for three nights. My father tried to convince me to take back my decision and told me I wasn't making a wise choice. After three years of being a Christian, they have now accepted my decision and I know they still love me and care about me, but they still don't like my choice.

Once lockdown was over, my visa was about to expire but I could not go back to Iran. Lockdown made it difficult to apply for work and I could not find a job related to my studies, despite my efforts. Eventually, I had to apply for asylum because I had no other choice.

The British government transferred me to Birmingham a few months after I claimed asylum. My church back in Nottingham recommended Second City church to me when I moved. I got involved at Second City and in several months Coby and Bailey joined the church and began English classes, so I was able to get involved in that ministry as well.

Through that class, so many of our dear brothers started coming here, including Affshein, Reza, and Hamid. Many others attended as well, but are no longer at Second City because they were either transferred or switched congregations due to location. The Lord has truly blessed us here and this place has helped me to find a better grasp of what ministry looks like; it's more than just lighting candles.

It's been encouraging to me to see how people lay down their lives here to help talk to nonbelievers, encourage them, and share the truth of the gospel of Jesus. One of my friends told me once, "Ali! It's so interesting to me that these people have come from the US, they have left their country, and they come here to sit beside us and sometimes even kneel beside our tables and write on our papers. We're asylum seekers. We don't have anything to give them, we have nothing to offer in response to their kindness. This type of humility is extraordinary." "Yeah,

you're right," I said, "That's the humility of Jesus in our brothers and sisters." Eventually, he came to the Lord!

\*I've been waiting for my asylum claim to be concluded for almost 30 months now, but the Lord is faithful, he is good. I still don't know exactly what to do with my life or what type of ministry the Lord wants me to do; one of my dreams is to do ministry in Iran, but I don't know when or how yet. It hasn't been easy these last three years, especially in terms of witnessing the suffering of asylum seekers, but the Lord definitely had good plans for me and still has good plans to come!

\*Ali has since been granted his asylum claim and is now a refugee in England.

# **Appendix C (Meet Affshein Continued)**

In Iran, basically all people went to school which talked about Jesus and taught us that he was just a prophet like all other prophets. Jesus was just another saint, another good guy, but he was not crucified. Qur'an classes were compulsory for us, and I believed in God, but I was never a devout Muslim. I had never prayed before, even though my Dad advised it, and whenever someone would play the Qur'an to listen to, I hated it and would get a headache.

When I read these verses on the leaflet, though, I was interested in what I read. I never believed the Bible was merely men's writings. I found these verses refreshing and I asked my cousin, "Do you have any idea who this 'Son of God' is that this verse mentions? Do you have any idea what this is about?" He told me that the people who gave me the leaflets were Christians, and they believe in Jesus. He was not much more knowledgeable than that, but he knew they were from a church nearby and that they came to the area we lived in occasionally to hand out leaflets and share the gospel. He suggested that I could go and meet them one day if I wanted to.

I went to visit the church and I even brought flowers for the pastor. So, I went and I talked to the pastor, but I was still struggling to speak Swedish so he gave me the Lord's prayer and suggested that I could start praying and told me it was great that I was interested in knowing more. I visited there a few times, but he realized it was hard for me to stay at that church because of the language barrier, so he suggested another church for me that had a Farsi translator.

When I went to that new church and started attending the Sunday services and Bible studies. We started reading the gospels together and I got to know who Jesus is and what the gospel truly was. Whenever I would go to a Bible study, the peace and joy that I experienced would wash away all the busyness and frustrations of the previous week. I would count down to go and attend the next Bible study because I loved it and how it made me feel. Reading God's Word touches your

heart and your soul and I knew it must be from God. During this time, I decided to believe in Jesus and then I got baptized.

During this time, I had so many things going on between work and the uncertainty of my asylum situation, and I could not focus much on reading the Bible. The only time that I was actually in the Word was in Bible studies. I was also very involved in politics still when I was living in Sweden which was taking a lot of energy from me. I received so many threats during this time that I would be killed if I returned to Iran. People were very angry and told me that I was against the government and religion. All of these things made life very hard for me.

In 2018, Sweden rejected my asylum case and I had to leave the country. It felt like a meaningless wait, all those years I spent seeking asylum, and I fell into a depression. I planned to move back to Germany or to France, but some things happened, and I found myself in Birmingham, England. I believe now that it was God's plan because it had nothing to do with how I ended up here.

I ended up meeting Ali at the Britannial Hotel, where we were both transferred. He invited me to come to English class as well as Second City Church. We became friends very quickly. I attended Second City church and have been attending this church every Sunday since early last year. After coming to this church, I became more enthusiastic about reading the Bible myself, not just in church services. Someone told me that even when I don't feel like reading, I should see that as an encouragement to go read the Bible anyway. I started reading God's Word and enjoyed it. I soon finished the New Testament, the Torah, and many other parts of the Old Testament. I found more joy and more rest here after leaving Sweden. I sometimes still feel depressed as I wait for my asylum claim to be approved, yet the Lord, through his Word, gives me rest.

# **Appendix D (Meet Bailey Continued)**

One thing I've realized is that raising kids overseas is not as straightforward as I thought it was going to be. I had this idea that everyone does it the same way; you homeschool your kid and then you throw them on your hip, and they come along with you with you to do ministry things. With that being said, we've been able to have our daughter, Naomi, in nursery. She's little and doesn't talk much, so she's not sharing the gospel with her nursery workers, but it's a privilege for us to be able to disciple and teach her while she's in our home, so when she does have something to say, we hope and pray she puts her faith in the Lord and wants to share that with people. Although at times I may really want my mom to be down the street so I can drop off my kids with a babysitter who's always willing and ready, but because we don't, there are opportunities that Naomi has, or will have when she grows up.

Likewise, there are opportunities that she gives us. There are open doors that she provides as being a part of our family that I wouldn't have otherwise. If I always dropped Naomi off with my mom in order to do ministry, that would be fine, but there are unique opportunities when you don't have that around you. For example, we've had late night gatherings in our home or gatherings for Persian New Year and Easter and if we had an excess of babysitters, I would have dropped Naomi off because it makes my life a little bit easier. On the other side of things, as I sit and watch her play with people, as I experience open conversations because I have a child and the woman I'm talking to has a child, it's a really beautiful things that she does come along with us to events like that.

How this looks for us might be different than some people and it might be similar to others. Naomi is a gift to us in many ways, but when it comes to ministry, it's so sweet to see how the Lord uses your child in ways that you wouldn't expect. Even when she doesn't necessarily say a lot, the Lord uses her even still. So there are very real opportunities that Naomi has that we didn't have that are amazing and the Lord uses it, but there are also very real missed opportunities that she doesn't realize right now.

My husband, Coby, said, "There's great joy in watching your daughter dance with old Persian men to weird music," in a not creepy way, it's actually very sweet, "and there's also the reality that her grandparents haven't been able to celebrate a birthday with her so far. So, there is this tension that's very real and there are times when you feel like you're making a mistake as parents. We feel this burden, this desire to see the lost reached, but we also want our daughter to enjoy and be ministered to by her family. It's a hard thing to balance these two." Naomi will have experiences that other's won't, which are really cool, and we pray that she looks back and see that this ministry was not something that was forced upon her, but was an opportunity and an interesting thing to experience.

# **Appendix E (Meet Coby Continued)**

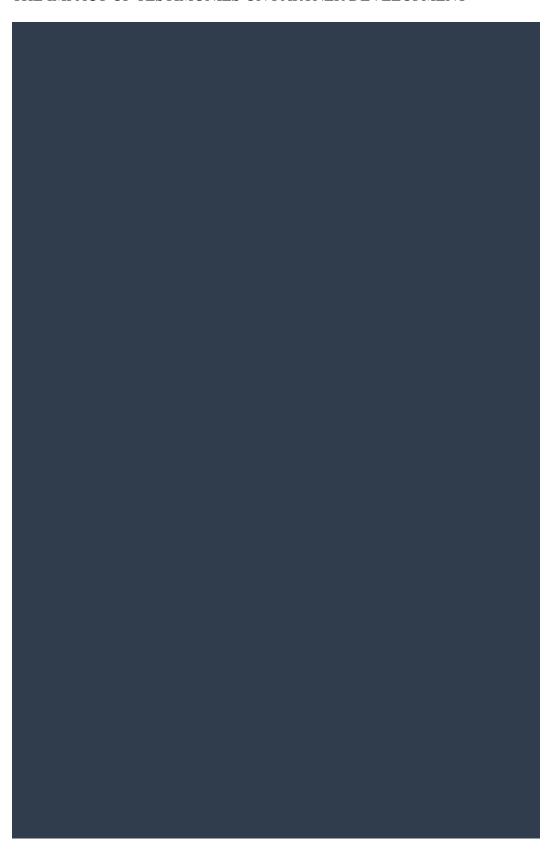
Our ministry here, English class, isn't something we love. Bailey and I don't love English, we're not passionate about English; we're passionate about sharing the gospel. It serves as a way to offer a service and help people with a practical need while also having something to invite non-Christians into. It serves as a platform to build relationship and share the gospel. We never want to bait-and-switch people or force anything on anyone, but I've seen the Lord use it in my weakness and my inability to teach English well.

In our ministry in Nashville and South Africa, we really didn't experience any interest in the gospel. We put in a lot of work with what seemed like very little to celebrate. We're quite young and we've experienced a bit of failure in ministry, but we've also experienced the grace of the Lord amidst failure. There's something very sweet about being in a community that has a biblical view of ministry because failure isn't actually failure, it's just learning.

I came to Birmingham with the mindset that our time here was going to be grueling with very few wins, but after being here for two or three months, some men came to me in English class and asked, "When are you going to teach us the Bible? We're done with Islam, we want to know what makes Christians different, so can you teach us?" A few weeks after that, we started holding a Bible study after class. In the first one, I remember that there were about 20 of us in there, all men, and there might have been two Christians out of the group, including Ali. We opened the Bible together and I was able to turn on a TV behind me to cast a Farsi version on the screen so everyone could read along. It was in this moment where I had the realization that this is what I've been praying for years. This moment was what I had been working towards: I was surrounded by Muslim background people who showed up to study the Bible. But my next thought was, "Why don't I feel more excited about this?"

Then I realized, in ministry, the fruit of our ministry can never be our fuel. That can never be our motivation and it can't be what

gets us out of bed. If we do count it as our motivation: 1) We may never experience it and, 2) When we do, it'll never be enough and the glory of it will fade. I was very thankful that God revealed this to me because it helped me realize that my fuel has to be the Lord. Simply obedience to him and being excited about the end has to be what gets me up and have the desire to do ministry day in and out. When ministry is really hard or when it's nonexistent, I'm still filled up by celebrating what it is to know my savior.



# **Template Links**

Below are the links to the Canva templates shown above. A copy must be made (go to "File," and then select "Make a Copy") in order to edit the template.

Print Visual Layout

Print Layout

Digital Layout

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