
Chapter 20

Another Challenge

The next morning, Tuesday, May 24th, Jamsheed left the house in a cab at about 8:00 am to meet with the police officers to discuss the details of how I would turn myself in and to whom. He would be back to get me and Ali as soon as he could.

While I was waiting at the house, Ghader started to cause problems by asking for the balance of the money. He told us that he had done all the work and he should be the one to get the money, not Majid who stayed behind. Ali tried to convince him that we had made an agreement with Majid and could not give him the money unless we talked to him and he gave us permission.

Ghader claimed that Majid did not have a phone at his house and his cellular phone had been cut off because he had not paid his bill. Ghader was making excuses to get his hands on the balance of the money we agreed upon. He said that he wanted to purchase things while he was in Turkey and that was the reason he needed some money right then. He then told me that if he didn't get it, he would not allow me to continue my trip to the next level.

Ali and Ghader went head-to-head for almost two hours about how to disburse this money and finally they came to an understanding. If they were able to speak with Majid, Ali would tell him the situation; that because there was not a U.S. Consulate or Embassy in Van as he had promised, it was causing him to have to spend more money on taking care of me and getting me where I needed to go.

I somehow believe that they had intentions all along to try to get more money from us. Majid had told us that he would take me right to the door of the U.S. Embassy in Van, but there was no Embassy or Consulate there. He had told us that Ghader and he were brothers, but they were not. There was so much inconsistency and untruth that it was hard to believe anything they said. But they had gotten me this far and for that I was grateful. I had to trust them to a certain degree, but God was my true guide!

Also, Jamsheed later told Ali that he saw Ghader going through my suitcase the night before while I was asleep trying to steel my passport. I always kept my passport on me because of that very reason, so praise God he didn't get it! He took some other papers that didn't matter instead. His intention of course, was to try to keep me from leaving until I paid him the money.

Finally, Majid called the house at about 10:00 am. Ali talked to him about the money, and he was okay with us giving the money to Ghader. This \$1,500 was the second part of the money we agreed to pay them once they delivered me to the U.S. Embassy. So Ali called my sister back in Iran and authorized her to give the money to one of Ghader's relatives to hold for him until he returned. He was happy with that.

I was dressed and ready, anxiously waiting on Jamsheed to return. I went outside to wait, pacing back and forth and praying that all would go well as I turned myself in to the Turkish police. Finally, he came back in the same yellow cab and the three of us left for the police department. We went straight to the front of the building where the detective was waiting for us. We all got out and the cab left. The officer helped me with one of the two bags I was carrying and we went inside the station. Jamsheed and Ali stayed behind on the street and said they would wait to hear from me, hopefully in a few hours.

The detective took me to one of the offices on the second floor where they started a file on me. There were two other detectives in the office when we arrived. The officer, who took me in explained to them my situation. While one of the officers was making some phone calls, the other officer tried to start a conversation with me in his broken English. They seemed to be very nice, offering me a soft drink or hot tea, but I declined since I was planning to be there for a short time. In order to “break the ice” and be friendly, I attempted to continue an exchange by teaching them a few English words as we shared things of common interest.

I finally asked, “What are we waiting for?”

He answered, “We are waiting for the Captain. He has gone to another town and should be here within a couple of hours.” Then I told the officer I would accept their hospitable offer concerning the soft drink since it was going to take much longer. They gladly brought one.

Then they looked through my bags and documented all my possessions, and at noon took me to lunch at the officers' mess hall. The dining room area was small. It only fit about ten small wooden tables with two chairs around each one. There was a small window where you would order and pick up your food. Next to the pickup window was a person at a desk that would collect the lunch money or record names based on the prearranged status.

After lunch, we went to another building close by where many officers and staff were gathered for fellowship. All the officers I had seen so far wore civilian clothes and no uniform. I thought that a bit strange, but it put me more at ease. They all were gathered there drinking hot tea, smoking their cigarettes, and some were playing card games, etc. The room was full of smoke from the cigarettes, but I stayed close to the entrance of the door to get fresh air.

It was there where I met the Assistant Captain. The officers who had brought me in briefed him on my situation. After he heard my story and studied my appearance, he motioned to the officers to do whatever was necessary to help get me home. Then the ball started rolling! The officers took me back over to the office where I was before and started the process. They took a mug shot, (just a front facing picture with a smile!) fingerprinted me and sent me to a local medical clinic for a check-up. I believe they did the check-up so there would be proof I had not been abused in their care.

While all this was taking place and we were going from one building to another, I saw Ali and Jamsheed pacing back and forth on the street, but was not able to talk to them. There was no one to let them know what was going on and I

couldn't say anything to them for fear they would get in trouble for their part in helping me escape from Iran. There was nothing I could do and I felt so bad for them! But it was comforting to know they were there for me, especially Ali. And I even believe that Jamsheed, even though he was being paid to be there, cared a little about what happened to me. I prayed that soon I would be able to somehow let them know that everything was ok.

The U.S. Embassy was aware of the whole situation and gave my wife the phone number to the police station in case she needed to speak with me. As a result, we talked several times when she wanted to check on me.

When I found out the airline would not accept my old ticket and while trying to find the solution to that, my wife called me, (she was one step ahead of what my needs were) and gave me the confirmation number of a newly reserved airline ticket. WOW!

I was delighted and overjoyed, for I saw my Father in heaven in action by putting my need in my wife's heart! She had called the airline to check on my old ticket, but they told her that the old ticket was no longer in their computer and we had to purchase a new one, therefore in order not to delay any longer she took it upon herself to buy a new ticket. Praise God!!

While going through the necessary paper work, a phone call came in to let me know that two detectives who spoke English were coming to question me. Then they explained to

me that they must take me before a judge to authorize my deportation. The two detectives came and questioned me about my background, my wife and children, my work and the length of time I had been with the company, as well as where my wife worked. They also wanted to know how long I had been married and the purpose of my visit to Iran.

Then they asked, “How did you manage such a trip through the mountains?”

I answered, “I had help.”

“Did you know them?” They asked.

I answered, “I did not know any of them.”

They responded in amazement by asking: “Did you ever think about the danger of going through such mountains that were unfamiliar to you and traveling with people whom you did not know? Do you realize that what you did could have cost you your life?”

Frankly, they were right about the danger, but during those uncertain times I clung to such comforting words from the scripture such as Psalm 23:4 which reads: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

I told them that I knew my actions were not the best and that I considered myself fortunate to have made it safely, but I was desperate and had to make a choice if I was ever going to leave Iran, as I was not sure how much longer they were planning to keep me there against my will.

I would not advise anyone to do what I did because I truly could have disappeared and never been seen or heard from again. But my love for my family drove me and my trust in God sustained me as I crossed those mountains. It was the only thing that made sense to me at the time!

The detectives took notes of our conversation and before they left told me not to ever come back to Turkey illegally. I thanked them and told them that not to worry; my next trip to Turkey would be with my wife and family. They smiled and left.

Later, they brought in a lady who was an English teacher and who would be my interpreter when I went to court. She helped me with the rest of the paperwork, explaining it to me and telling me where I needed to sign. When I finally went before the judge, very few words were spoken between us. The judge looked at my identification, such as my driver license and passport, and asked a few questions. He then gave his stamp of approval and I received the court order for my deportation! Haleluia!

Next, I needed to be handed over to the Foreign Affairs Department in Hakkari. About 4:00 pm, I left with two detectives who would be transporting me. The two detectives sat in the front seat while I sat in the back. As we were leaving the town, I spotted Ali and Jamsheed who were still pacing the street, waiting for someone to let them know what was going on. At that moment, the car slowed down because one of the detectives saw someone he knew and wanted to speak to them. God had provided an opportunity at last! They saw me and Ali came a little closer, hoping to get a chance to find out what was going on, so I rolled my window down. With excitement and a smile on my face, I said,

“Freedom at last! I am going to America!” When Ali heard the news, he backed up, and with a big smile on his face waved goodbye. Jamsheed had kept his distance, but motioned me goodbye with a bow and a smile!

We traveled by car for two hours, going through at least two police checkpoints before we reached the city of Hakkari. The officers turned me over to the foreign affairs officer and then returned back to their own town. There in Hakkari, I met two other officers in civilian clothes. Later, another officer who spoke English joined us. They were required to establish their own file on me, so again I had to be “booked” like before. Another photo opportunity! Seriously though, it was not an unpleasant experience under the circumstances. They were treating me with kindness; just following procedure. The officers worked late and diligently to expedite my paper work.

I patiently sat in one of the offices while I waited for them to finish the paperwork. The phone rang and low and behold it was my wife! She was calling to see how things were going and how I was. My daughter, Elizabeth was there with her as well. They were calling to be my encouragers! I had not talked to any of my children during this ordeal, so Ursa asked me if I wanted to talk to Elizabeth. I told her I wasn’t sure if I could maintain my composure, but Elizabeth wanted to talk to me so I agreed. As soon as I heard her voice she began to cry, and of course, that’s all it took for me! When the detectives saw my emotions, they left the room to give me some privacy. We were not able to speak long, but it was wonderful to have the opportunity to hear from the ones I loved and for them to know I was fine.

Eric Ager, (one of my angels from God!) whom I mentioned earlier was from my hometown and was stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, also called to check on me. He wanted to know if there was anything he could do for me. I thanked him for the phone call and his offer, and told him that they were being very kind to me and doing a very good job. He gave me his phone number and told me to call if I needed anything at all.

At about 9:00 pm, we sought the commander in charge to review and sign off the paperwork. He was at a private dinner with some important people, but took the time to come outside for a moment. I was standing at a visible distance, dressed in black pants, a white shirt and black shoes. The officer began to tell his commander about my situation. After a short conversation, the commander wanted to know who the person was who made such a trip through the rugged mountains. In order to be polite, the officer did not point his finger at me, but rather made motions with his head. The commander looked toward me, then to the left and right, but he only saw me! So he asked the officer,

“Is that him?”

The officer nodded “Yes”.

The commander laughed, because he could not believe his own eyes that someone like me would cross those mountains! (Perhaps he was looking for someone who looked a bit rougher than I did. Believe me, I had a hard time believing in what I did too, and to this day, everything that happened appears to be like a dream to me. It was definitely the adventure of my lifetime!) Then, with much relief, the commander signed the deportation papers!

It was getting late, so the officers took me to a nice restaurant and fed me whatever I wanted. Later they took me back to the police station in order for me to rest. They would not allow me to be by myself since they were responsible for my safety, so that night I slept in their jail cell, but with the door open so I could be free to move around. Before I went to sleep, we sat in the front office and watched a soccer game on TV with the rest of the policemen while drinking hot tea. None of them spoke English, so we didn't talk much! I soon became tired and decided it was time to get some sleep, so I retired to my cell.

In the jail cell there was a narrow platform on all three sides covered by a thin mat. I needed to try to get some rest because of the long day ahead of me, so I washed up, shaved and brushed my teeth, then laid down to try to sleep. There was no pillow so I used my hand bag to lay my head on and no blanket so I used my jacket to cover up with. Thus needless to say I didn't get much sleep. I will tell you, that was the closest to being put in jail I ever wanted to be!

The next morning the officers came for me. We went straight to a travel agency in order to make reservations for a bus to Van and a flight from there to Istanbul. Getting our bus tickets was no problem, but there were only two flights daily out of Van to Istanbul, and they were both booked for that day!

By bus, the travel time to Istanbul was 30 hours. It was Wednesday and my flight was scheduled out of Istanbul to America for Friday at 4:00 am. If we took the bus, we would not make it on time. So I immediately called my wife and asked her to call the airline and see if she could change

the day and time. She was able to get it changed to 4:00 am on Saturday, one day later. At that time, I was asked to purchase the two detectives tickets also! I was not prepared financially and surprised to know that the responsibility of purchasing airline tickets for the officers was mine, but at the same time I was so grateful to God that I was willing to do even more if I could. I had \$360 in cash as well as my credit card. Ali had kept most of my money for security purposes while we were traveling, but after going to the police station, we never made contact anymore. The cash I had was not enough to purchase all of our tickets.

I offered to use my credit card, but their computer rejected it! There was a bank next door to the travel agency, but they would not honor my credit card either. I called my wife again using one of the policeman's cellular phones. It was about three in the morning there and I woke her up. I asked her to call my credit card company to see why I could not use it there. She called me back after speaking to the 24-hour bank representative. Their computers were down and she would have to call back later. At first, I wasn't sure what to do next.

Then I remembered Eric and his offer to help. My wife called Eric and told him the situation, and asked if there was any way he could lend me the money I needed to buy the tickets. Eric immediately called me to get the details. He was more than willing to lend me the money, so he tried using his credit card but it was rejected too. Then he went to a bank near where he was and within 30 minutes, the \$700 I needed was transferred to the bank next to the travel agency! Wow!

*Is God awesome or what?
He is so faithful and true!
What is the possibility that someone who lived in the
same town as I did was half-way around the world at
the same time I was! I know in my heart that God
made that possible, knowing my need before I did.
He is truly amazing!*

With that money I was able to purchase the airline and bus tickets we needed. We would be taking a bus to Van, and then a flight from there to Istanbul. The bus was scheduled to leave at 3:00 pm, and we barely made it. We were the last ones to board the bus and headed to Van.

It happened that Eric's mom, Annie, was already in Turkey visiting her son, and John, her husband was going to be flying to Turkey within the next few days, so Ursa took the money to him so he could take it to Eric and pay him back.

We were all so excited that Saiid was finally in Turkey and seemingly on his way home, but I would not rest until he crossed into American airspace! I kept thinking that there was some possibility the Iranian officials would realize what he had done and would try to come after him. He could not get to the Istanbul airport fast enough for me!

But it was comforting that I was allowed to keep in touch with him by calling the cell phone of one of the officers who was with him, as well as being in touch with the embassy, who were also keeping up with his progress. It was a true miracle all that was taking place. The fact that the Turkish officials were treating him with kindness and respect was not something you would expect, but I knew in my heart that

God was the One paving his path and protecting him from harm

Ursa



We arrived in the city of Van around 7:00 pm. The officer who spoke English had lived there some years ago and was very familiar with it. It was a small city, but people were as active and busy as you would see in most big cities. We stopped at the first hotel that we came to. The hotel looked good from the outside, but turned out to be poorly maintained.

The officer said: “Since we are not going to stay here more than a night, I don’t see any reason to spend more for an expensive one.”

I didn’t object. They had what was left of my money, as well as my passport, so I had to trust them to make a decision. I was just looking forward to a place to rest. So, we checked in and put our luggage in the room.

The room had three single, narrow beds with a 13” remote TV as well as a broken and non-functional telephone. The space between the beds and the wall was so small that after I put my luggage on the floor there was hardly room to walk. The room had a musty, old smell, so I chose the bed next to the window so that I could open it for fresh air.

After a short while we decided to leave the hotel for dinner. Before we left, the English speaking officer called one of his friends whom he had not seen for a while to come meet us. When she got there, we all went to a restaurant.

We enjoyed each other’s company as we ate dinner, even joking around a little. After dinner, we walked down the streets of Van and did some window shopping. I wasn’t sure what to expect to see while I was in Van, but there were some things that surprised me and got my attention.

One was that most households were equipped with a Satellite dish, regardless of the condition of their house.

Secondly, most people had a cellular phone on their sides. Sim-cards (for prepay cellular phones) were very popular and sold on every street corner.

Thirdly, I saw “Internet cafés” and “Phone Booth Stores” almost at every street corner, packed with customers who wanted to talk or chat to people around the world. I decided to take advantage of one of the phone booth stores and called home to talk to my wife. A desk timer kept track of how long you talked and you paid the attendant the amount after you finished your conversation.

Before we went back to the hotel, we stopped at a grocery store and purchased a few things. I picked up some

fruit; nuts, soda and some shampoo, but the officers wanted beer for themselves.

When we got back to our hotel, I jumped at the opportunity to take a good hot shower. I had not had a shower for a few days and was feeling very uncomfortable. I had to let the water run for a long time before it got hot enough. The shower curtain was broken, but I was able to manage with a little creative ingenuity! The sheets on the bed were not clean to my satisfaction, so I slept on top of the covers and used the extra blanket to cover up with. This certainly wasn't the best hotel I'd ever stayed in, but it sure beat my accommodations the night before! It was the first good night's sleep I'd had in days and I slept like a baby.

Friday May 27th

The hotel offered a continental breakfast, so we made our way down to the lobby. As we ate, one of the officers checked the expiration date on the jam that was placed on our plates and noticed that it was already expired. We all agreed that this is what you get in cheap hotels!

Our flight out of Van would be leaving later on that day, so we had some time to kill. We decided to walk and window shop again and that took most of the morning. We found a place to eat lunch and, then went back to the hotel to get our luggage. Finally we left the hotel by cab and headed to the airport.

As we were traveling, I was getting calls often on one of the officer's cell phone. The gentleman from the U.S. embassy called to check on me several times. My wife

called me, as well as my brother, Hamid. When I talked to Hamid, he asked me three times if I was okay! He had been forced to leave me behind in Iran and that was not easy for him at all, and he needed to know I was okay. I assured him that I was and told him I would be home soon! So many people from all over were praying for me, showing their love and concern in so many ways. That was very comforting for me and I know was a very big part of how I made it home!

Soon, we arrived at the airport and checked in. When security realized the officers had guns with them, they made them turn them in and were told they would get them back at the airport in Istanbul. They willingly turned them over and we boarded the plane.

We arrived in the beautiful city of Istanbul at about 6:00 in the evening. Istanbul is indeed a beautiful city! The city is lively twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with so many tourists from all over the world. There is a beautiful bridge connecting Asia and Europe together. The famous Blue Mosque is located in the center of the city adding even more beauty. Opposite the Blue Mosque is a large church bringing two major religions, Islam and Christianity, closer together and in peace with each other. One of the officers commented on how proud he was of that fact; that Muslims and Christians can live side-by-side with respect for one another in that country.

We traveled to town by metro from the airport. Then we took a cab to a place where we met a friend of one of the officers who owned a rug shop. He also spoke good English. I had been looking at some small handmade carpets as we window shopped in Van, so I took this opportunity to purchase one from this gentleman. After making the

purchase and visiting a little while, we all went out to dinner.

Given that we were going to need to leave for the airport at 2:30 am the next morning, we really did not want to spend the money for another hotel room for such a short time. So the gentleman whom I purchased the rug from was kind enough to put us in touch with a good friend of his who owned a hotel. With no charge, his friend allowed us to spend the rest of our time on the balcony of the 4th floor where there were tables and chairs for us to sit and enjoy the beauty of Istanbul at night. So until we had to leave for the airport, we sat on the balcony, enjoying some snacks and drinks we had purchased, and talked. We talked about our families, children, and Christianity. They were very open-minded and eager to listen. They asked many questions and they received the answers well concerning things that I had to share with them.

One of the police officers asked me if I would share with the American people that the people of Turkey despise terrorists and those who use Islam to advance their own cause, killing innocent people as you see on television and in newspapers. He told me that he had once visited the USA and had a great love and respect for the people there. He said he wished for the day when all the terrorist activity would end.



Bosphorus bridge, Istanbul-Turkey

At 2:30 in the morning, we called for a cab to take us back to the airport. The airport was very large and was divided in two sections. One section was Domestic and the other International. At the airport, we had to check on a couple of things. One was to find the place where the officers could pick up their guns, and second was to go to an exclusive custom and security department to stamp my exit on my passport. Since the Turkish officers were escorting me out of the country, we were able to use police privileges to bypass the normal interviews, gates, etc. It was interesting to see all the things that were going on behind the scene at an airport to ensure a safe flight for everyone.

From time to time as I traveled on this unexpected journey, I would find myself thinking back on the events that had happened the past two months, and I would be overwhelmed with so many different

emotions. On one hand I would feel excitement and joy, and on the other I would feel afraid and alone, uncertain of the unknown.

The unknown was the fact I had come this far in my journey and had been faced with many unpredictable circumstances, and I wondered if there were more ahead. My heart would be filled with anxiety, but then I would open my wallet and look at the pictures of my wife, children, and my grandson, Roman. My heart would ache and my eyes would fill with tears, longing to see and hold them in my arms!
