

# The Incubator is "born"

October 20, 2012

Remember when I wrote you this summer about the vision we had for starting a housing/discipleship ministry called "The Incubator" (incubator: *an apparatus for maintaining optimal conditions for growth and development in the early care of...infants...*)?

Well, we did not raise ANY money for that ministry project! Never mind. God has caused the "birth" of the incubator in another way. Our landlord agreed that we could turn the basement of our apartment building into an independent living area and use it for this purpose of ***discipling young believers in the context of community***. Two generous donors made it financially possible. We bought a fridge and stove, and another bunk bed, had some work done in the bathroom, and bought all necessary kitchen supplies and utensils, as well as cleaning supplies and initial food staples.

The first 3 residents will be moving in Sunday, October 21st. Their testimonies are below. Please pray for them and us as we grow together in Jesus.

Thanks for standing with us!

Grateful,

Scott and Vicki

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"GF"--24 years old, an Afghani born and raised in Iran; following Jesus for about 2 years.

"When I lived in Iran I had everything. I am not really sure why I left Iran, and that uncertainty grew when I arrived in Greece and ended up sleeping in parks, on sidewalks, and in abandoned buildings because I found nothing here to improve my life. When I was sleeping outside I was angry at God and was cursing Him for bringing this kind of life upon me. After several days of not having anything to eat and being very hungry, someone told me about a "church" that gives food to refugees, so I went there and discovered "Helping Hands". I went there for the food but there were also Gospel presentations through programs after the meal. I never stayed to listen because in Iran they told us that if we even listened to one word from the Injil (Gospel) we would NEVER go to heaven.

One day, one of the Helping Hands staff members said to me, "You are always coming for the food but you never stay for the program. Why don't you stay just ONE time and listen?" After the program I decided to look at some of the literature they had there in my own language, and I discovered verses in the Bible that spoke about love. It made me think about the people here who claim to believe this book--they were very kind and loving people--their life seemed to be consistent with their belief. I became interested to listen to more preaching at the programs. So over time I met with various staff member of Helping Hands and they share the plan of salvation with me. I told them that I believed and was a follower of Jesus, even though I really wasn't.

After some time I had a dream where blood came from heaven and covered my hands, and I was scared but a voice said, "You can be forgiven!" Then I really believed, and I began to feed upon the Word and draw close to the Holy Spirit who helped me resist the temptations I had so easily given in to previously. My heart began to get softer and I started going to Helping Hands not so much for the food, but to help as a volunteer. I believe that God told me that if I go more often to Helping Hands He can use me more often to bless others. It is very exciting for me to be used by God in sharing the Gospel with Muslim refugees who come to Helping Hands! But not only people who come to HH. For example, the man who is letting me live in his place was in the beginning very angry when he saw me reading the Injil, but I calmly and

respectfully told him he should read it for himself before he judges it, and I prayed for him. Now he is reading it and asking questions.

Also, I have recently started helping teach in the children's ministry. Recently a 10-year-old girl with Multiple Sclerosis asked me after a Bible lesson how can she accept Christ into her life. We led her to Jesus, and the changes in her were so noticeable that now her parents are interested (even today they are visiting a church with another Helping Hands staff member)!

Life in Greece is very difficult for me but through prayer and listening to God I am learning how He can take stumbling blocks and turn them into stepping stones. I am experiencing how He can bring something good out of things that are very bad and use them for my good and His glory. I believe God has given me the gift of teaching and I want to develop this gift to help others come to Christ and learn more about the true way through Jesus. In some ways life was better for me in Iran and much worse here, but because I came to the Truth in Jesus here, and God is using me now to help others find Him, I think this place is better than Iran."

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"GM", about 32 years old (he does not know his birth date), an Afghani from Afghanistan; he has been following Jesus a little more than 2 years.

"I left Afghanistan about 10 years ago and spent time in Pakistan, Iran, India, and France. I have been in Greece for almost 2 years now. Because in Greece I had no food and no place to sleep I went to various organizations asking for work, or different kinds of help, but everyone was always saying, "Come back later" and when I went back there was nothing for me. For 7 1/2 months I slept in a park until one organization finally provided shelter, but I was still going to different places to get food in order to live. Helping Hands was one of those places. There I found Persian and American teachers and I listened to what they were saying, and I was interested. Even in India, many years before I had started some studying about Jesus. As I continued going to HH for food, I stayed and listened to the preaching, I read the literature, I had conversations with staff and went to Bible studies. What became very clear to me was that God is love. The Bible is about love. These people were about love. The humility of God's love to come down from heaven and teach the people, and serve the people, and sacrifice Himself for the people all in love, not forcing them--these things really impacted me. I thought, "I like this message. I can believe it and follow it."

One of the main reasons I came to Europe was to get an education so I could go back to Afghanistan to help my people there. I come from the Hazara tribe, which is a very persecuted tribe and discriminated against. As a result we do not have education rights and opportunities like others and most of our people are very uneducated. I wanted to help change that by going back to villages and up in the mountains in remote places and opening language schools. But now I am seeing that even though things in Greece are very difficult and it looks unlikely that I will be able to fulfill that goal, God has changed my life and I am praying for the opportunity to go back to my people and help them find the way to the True and Living God. I will be helping them get an education but a very different one than I originally imagined--a spiritual and eternal one, not just mental and temporal. Now I believe that peace and joy will only come through this teaching of love that comes through Jesus, and I hope some day to bring this message of peace back to Afghanistan.

Until then, I am letting God use me here in Athens by sharing with those who are open to learning more about the Gospel. Some of them are people coming to Helping Hands and other organizations we go to for help, some of them are people I meet in the parks where I sleep, others I meet in different places.

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"O" (who wants to be called Stephen now), 36 years old; an Iranian from Iran; he has been following Jesus for about 10 or 11 years, *half of that time has been spent in prison and being tortured because of his faith in Jesus.*

"I am an orphan who has never known my parents or a natural physical family. I grew up in orphanages in Iran. When I was 15 years old they told me I would have to leave and make a life for myself. I became very angry and bitter and that night after they told me I spent a lot of time lying in bed cursing God and cursing people, just hating everyone. In the midst of my anger and confusion, they told me that they would give me 6 months more but not a bit longer.

I went searching for work and soon found a man who would hire me. He was an Armenian Christian and when he found out I was an orphan and about my situation, he went to the orphanage and asked for my papers and took me to live in a small room of his house, and work for him! This man lived a life before me that showed me Jesus and God's love for me. But I also knew that in Iran if a Muslim converts to Christianity he needs to plan on being executed by hanging. So I was not quick to make this decision and I asked many questions over a long period of time (about 4 years while I lived there). But in that period of time is when I truly began to believe and trust in Jesus.

However, I later left when problems started and went to work for this man's brother in Tehran. There I began to fellowship with other Iranian believers in the underground church. They warned me that if I was to be a part of their church I must be ready to die. I assured them that I was. But then they started to talk about my need to forgive others, and that was something I really struggled with until the day of my baptism (on which day I was truly set free in my heart to forgive all my enemies and all who had hurt me). I was also taught at that church how God becomes a Father to the fatherless and the orphans. That was the beginning of a more intimate experience of God as my Father.

As I grew in the Lord and in His Word, I wanted to go back to the city here I had lived and worked for that Armenian Christian and first believed in Jesus, and serve the local church, and evangelize and witness to the lost. One time I was covertly distributing some evangelistic CD's and literature, and a "spy" in our midst reported me. On my way home, the police stopped me, handcuffed me and took me to jail and beat me. (By-the-way, several other believers I was supposed to be baptized with were hanged to death due to the betrayal of this spy). I spent the next 5-6 years in prison, being tortured. I eventually experienced kidney failure and while I was in the hospital, I escaped. Unfortunately, they quickly caught me and exiled me to a place in Iran like Death Valley (very very hot all year round).

One night I cried out to God, "What kind of a God are you? All my life has been pain and loss and suffering. At that moment, God gave me a vision. In the vision God showed me something. He said, "If you have been beaten and whipped, I have been beaten and whipped too. If you have gone through hell, I have gone through hell too. If they have beaten you on your side, I have set my seal on you. Do not be afraid."

One night when I was in Iran I was telling God that I wanted to serve Him and I was asking Him where should I go and what should I do. I saw a dream about Greece and I was there in Greece. I didn't know at the time that it was about Greece but there were two men in it. When I came to Greece and went to Helping Hands the first time, those two men who had been in my dream were staff members at Helping Hands (Brett and Nader), and then I immediately KNEW that I was where God wanted me to be.

From the time I have entered Greece, God has used me, He has met my needs, and His hand has been supporting me. He has used me to witness to people about Christ, to help meet needs, to share what little I have with those in need. I believe God has given me the gift of teaching and the gift of giving, and He is using these gifts to glorify Him. I am asking people in these days to call me Steven because Stephen was the first martyr and I want my life to be lived for me even at the cost of death. I don't know the detail of His plans for me but I am available for His use and He will let me know as He wants me to know the details of that plan each day. I just want to know His Word and teach His Word, do His work, and become more like Jesus in the process.