

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, partially obscured by a chain-link fence. Her eyes are looking directly at the camera. A large metal padlock is attached to the fence in the foreground, partially covering her face. The background is dark and indistinct.

FOREWORD BY ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ

A REMARKABLE
TRUE STORY OF HOPE
AND TRIUMPH AMID
THE HORROR OF
TEHRAN'S BRUTAL
EVIN PRISON

CAPTIVE IN IRAN

MARYAM ROSTAMPOUR & MARZIYEH AMIRIZADEH
WITH JOHN PERRY

**A REMARKABLE TRUE STORY OF HOPE AND TRIUMPH
AMID THE HORROR OF TEHRAN'S BRUTAL EVIN PRISON**

| | |

CAPTIVE IN IRAN

MARYAM ROSTAMPOUR & MARZIYEH AMIRIZADEH
WITH JOHN PERRY



**TYNDALE™
MOMENTUM**

AN IMPRINT OF TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Tyndale Momentum online at www.tyndalemomentum.com.

TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. *Tyndale Momentum* and the Tyndale Momentum logo are trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Tyndale Momentum is an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Captive in Iran: A Remarkable True Story of Hope and Triumph amid the Horror of Tehran's Brutal Evin Prison

Copyright © 2013 by Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of chain copyright © Radius Images/Corbis. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of woman copyright © Jose AS Reyes/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

Interior photographs are the property of their respective copyright holders and all rights are reserved. Woman on phone © AP Photo/Vahid Salemi; women in prison © ATTA KENARE/Getty Images; prison guard © Abedin Taherkenareh/epa/Corbis; behind prison bars © Kaveh Kazemi/Getty Images; Judge Salvati © AFP/Getty Images; Ayatollah Larijani © AP Photo/Vahid Salemi; Tehran skyline © Elmira Torabi/iStockphoto. All other photographs are from the personal collection of the authors and are used with permission.

Authors' photograph taken by Hung H. Le copyright © 2012. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jennifer Ghionzoli

Edited by Dave Lindstedt

Published in association with the literacy agency of Calvin Edwards & Company, 1200 Ashwood Parkway, Suite 140, Atlanta, GA 30338.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Because of the sensitive nature of the stories told about women imprisoned in the Vozara Detention Center and Evin Prison in Iran, many names have been changed to safeguard the privacy and dignity of the individuals involved.

ISBN 978-1-4143-7120-7 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4143-8304-0 (International Trade Paper Edition)

Printed in the United States of America

19	18	17	16	15	14	13
7	6	5	4	3	2	1



CONTENTS

Foreword by Anne Graham Lotz vii

CHAPTER 1:	Nothing to Worry About	1
CHAPTER 2:	The Guilty Girls	13
CHAPTER 3:	The Road to Vozara	23
CHAPTER 4:	A Sign of Honor	39
CHAPTER 5:	New Friends, Old Questions	51
CHAPTER 6:	Celebration of Faith	63
CHAPTER 7:	Evin, Our Church	73
CHAPTER 8:	Children of God	83
CHAPTER 9:	Feeding the Hungry	93
CHAPTER 10:	A Nasty Reputation	103
CHAPTER 11:	Willing Spirit, Weary Flesh	115
CHAPTER 12:	Fairness and Integrity	125
CHAPTER 13:	Blindfolded and Blessed in Ward 209	139
CHAPTER 14:	“Execute Us!”	153
CHAPTER 15:	A Lesson in Faith	163
CHAPTER 16:	A Different Freedom	173
CHAPTER 17:	A Watching World	185
CHAPTER 18:	Waiting for News	193
CHAPTER 19:	Beyond Comprehension	205
CHAPTER 20:	God at Work	215
CHAPTER 21:	A Change of Season	225
CHAPTER 22:	Mysterious Visitors	233
CHAPTER 23:	Guilty As Charged	241
CHAPTER 24:	Waiting on the Lord	253
CHAPTER 25:	Not What We Expected	265
CHAPTER 26:	The Day Will Come	275

Afterword 287

Notes 289

How This Book Came to Be 291

Acknowledgments 293

About the Authors 295

FOREWORD

RECENTLY I RETURNED from a ministry trip to India, but within thirty-six hours I was on the road again. This time my destination was a women's retreat about ninety minutes from Atlanta, Georgia. I spoke in the evening, and the next morning the director of the retreat came to my cabin with two Iranian women she felt I would be interested in meeting. I was given the American version of their names: Marcie and Miriam.

We chatted for a moment, and then, knowing they were both from a Muslim nation, I asked them each to share how they had come to place their faith in Jesus Christ. I wasn't prepared for the thrilling blessing they began to pour out upon me as they shared their personal journeys of faith. They hadn't been just saved from sin. They hadn't just converted to the Christian religion. They were both in love with Jesus! For the next hour or so, they shared with me why—it was a love forged in the fires of pain and persecution.

Toward the end of our time together, with tears streaming down their lovely faces, they made a comment that haunts me still: They said it had been easier for them to experience God's peace and presence and power inside Evin Prison than on the outside in America. Evin Prison! The prison in Tehran that has a worse reputation than Alcatraz or Angola in the United States. A place that causes even the strongest to shudder. How could that be?

Because I had a plane to catch, there was no time to find out why they would make such a comment. Or to hear some of their experiences inside Evin Prison. Or how they had known God there. Or how their faith had not only survived the experience, but thrived in it! So several weeks later,

when I received a letter from them asking for permission to send me the manuscript of their new book for the purpose of writing the foreword, I quickly agreed. I couldn't wait to plunge into the details of their experience. And I was not disappointed.

As I read, I was held spellbound page after page, story after story. But what impacted me most was not the words they used to describe life behind prison walls, but what I read between the lines. I was, and still am, blown away by their boldness, their strength, their steadfastness, and their unwavering declaration of Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the risen Lord and King. They lovingly and fearlessly presented Him to broken women who responded with tearful desperation, to manipulative women who tried to use them for their own purposes, to hostile officials and guards who had the power to torture, to judges who could have released them earlier if they had just been willing to compromise their faith.

Inside the dark hell of Evin Prison, Marcie and Miriam turned on the Light! Their love for the least, their kindness to the meanest, their gentleness to the roughest, their willingness to serve in the dirtiest place imaginable is truly a stunningly clear reflection of the Jesus they love, as well as evidence of His presence inside those walls. He didn't just carry them through *somehow*—He carried them through triumphantly!

And I wondered . . . has God brought them here, to America, to share their remarkable stories in order to prepare His people for what's coming? So we will know that our God is faithful and true, wherever we find ourselves? Because we all have our prison experiences, don't we? Prisons of physical pain, of financial ruin, of emotional brokenness, of spousal abuse, of marital betrayal . . .

Captive in Iran has strengthened my faith. Read it, and I believe you will be strengthened in yours, also.

Anne Graham Lotz

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

MARYAM

I arrived home from the dentist to an empty house, and my jaw was throbbing. As I poured a glass of water to take some pain medication, the phone rang. It was my sister, Shirin.

“I’m so glad I caught you at home,” she said, her voice anxious. “I had a terrible dream about you last night. I dreamed you had disappeared, and a voice told me you would be in a dark and dreadful place where you would be afraid. Suddenly the sky opened above your head and you were pulled upward by your hair into a beautiful green landscape. Then the voice said, ‘This is what is happening to your sister.’”

“Forget about it,” I said lightly. “You’re getting yourself all worked up over nothing. Everything’s fine. Marziyeh and I are going on vacation for two weeks during the New Year’s holidays, and you and I can talk again while we’re on the road.”

The truth was that Marziyeh and I would be traveling, but not on vacation. That was just the story we told our friends and family for their own safety. We would actually be spending the time in other Iranian cities, handing out New Testaments.

To be honest, Shirin's dream bothered me more than I would admit, because I had also recently had a disturbing dream, one in which Marziyeh and I were standing on a hill with a group of boys and girls. A shining old man told a prophecy about each of us. When he looked at Marziyeh and me, he said, "You two will be taken."

With our upcoming trip, and now these two dreams occurring so close together, it was more than a little unsettling.

Whatever God has planned is what will happen.



I was dozing on the couch when the doorbell rang. I heard Marziyeh's voice in the hallway and some other voices I didn't recognize.

That's odd. Why doesn't she just come in? Maybe she forgot her key.

Peering through the peephole, I saw Marziyeh, another young woman in Islamic dress, and two young men.

"Open the door," the young woman said.

My mouth hurt and my mind was fuzzy from the medication, and I needed time to think.

"You'll have to wait until I change my clothes," I said through the door. For a man who was not a relative to enter the apartment, Islamic law required that I observe the strict dress code prescribed by the Koran.

"Don't worry," the woman answered. "Only I will come inside."

When I opened the door, the woman pushed her way in and immediately escorted me to my room to put on acceptable clothes. When we returned to the living room, Marziyeh was sitting on the couch with her hair properly covered, and the two young men were ransacking our apartment. As we watched in shock and horror, they methodically rummaged through every corner of every room, emptying drawers, cabinets, and closets, and pawing through our books and CDs. They even searched the food pantry in the kitchen.

Of course, they had no search warrant, no written orders of any kind. They were *basiji*, part of the Revolutionary Guard, and they didn't need permission to do anything. Like most *basiji*, these two were young and arrogant, bullies in their late teens or early twenties dressed in ragtag out-

fits that reflected their semiofficial status, somewhere between government militiamen and common thugs. They wore no uniforms, and because they wanted to blend into the crowd, they didn't even wear *chafiehs*, the black-and-white-checked scarves that some *basiji* wore symbolically as followers of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Their clothes were as dirty as they were.

Marziyeh and I had shared this simple apartment north of central Tehran for the past year. It was a quiet flat on a hill, with a fireplace in the living room, white walls, dark red curtains, and modern furniture covered with bold, dark orange fabric and big poofy pillows. The windows in the two bedrooms looked out onto the beautiful Darkeh Mountains, a popular destination for mountain climbers. From the balcony off the kitchen, we could see the street below and the severe, high walls of a nearby prison.

This apartment was our home, our refuge, and also the meeting place of a secret church of young people and others who risked imprisonment or death to worship Jesus Christ with us in violation of the law. In our bedrooms, we each had a stack of plastic chairs and a supply of Christian New Testaments and other literature. From our base of operations, we were quietly spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in this sprawling city of more than seven million. Now these strangers had arrived without warning and were ordering us around.

"Sit on the couch," one of the *basiji* snapped, "and don't talk to each other."

He was lanky and nervous, more a boy than a man, with heavy eyebrows, a shock of thick black hair, and a sparse, fuzzy beard. Emboldened by his position and by Islamic law—which places women under the authority of men from age nine, the time girls are considered old enough for marriage—he left no question that we had better cooperate and keep our mouths shut.

The other *basiji*—older and taller, with fair skin and green eyes—who seemed to be in charge, took a more conciliatory approach. "Don't worry, ladies," he said. "Just stay seated and remain calm."

Though the two men were clearly in command, they had to have a female chaperone, according to Islamic law, in order to enter our home, because we were not relatives of theirs. The young woman wore a *chador*, the long, loose,

lightweight robe that Muslim women must wear in public or in the presence of men who are not relatives. Underneath, we could see her green uniform. Maybe she was some kind of police officer.

Fortunately, while the *basiji* were searching, Marziyeh and I found an opportunity to hide our cell phones. Our address books, text messages, and photo archives could tie our friends to us and put them in danger. There were pictures on our computer of our missionary trips to India and South Korea. Unfortunately, I hadn't turned off the television before the intruders burst in; our TV was illegal because it had satellite service with programming that was uncensored and therefore a threat to the purity of the Islamic state.



Marziyeh

As the minutes stretched into an hour and then more, the young police-woman kept a close watch on us as the two men began tossing our belongings into boxes on the living room floor. They had found hundreds of Christian-themed CDs and New Testaments in Farsi, the language of Iran. They noticed Christian messages posted on the refrigerator.

"Have you become a Christian?" the older *basiji*, whose name we learned was Mohammadi, asked Maryam.

"Yes," she answered, her voice strong and confident. "I have been a Christian for eleven years."

He turned to me. "Why did you become a Christian? What bad has our Imam Husein ever done to you?" he demanded, referring to one of our Islamic religious leaders.

"I became a Christian because I met Jesus," I explained. "I didn't turn away from anything. I turned toward Jesus because He came into my heart and called me to Himself."

"So you met Jesus?" Mohammadi asked sarcastically. "What did he look like? Was he black or blond? Did he have a beard?"

I didn't answer. As I watched the systematic destruction of our apartment, I remembered the dreams I'd had that I would one day be in prison, doing battle for my faith. I had told only Maryam and a few other friends about this premonition that I would somehow end up behind bars. "Aren't

you afraid of the thought of prison?” they had asked me. “Aren’t you afraid of being tortured or raped?” My answer was always the same. “God is my Father, and He would never let these horrible things happen to me. If He did, it would be to fulfill His will in a way I could not understand. It is a mystery, but I will always trust the Lord.”

By now it was after 6:00 p.m. and the *basiji* had been ransacking our apartment for more than two hours. Asking permission to leave the couch, Maryam and I brought them New Testaments and CDs they had overlooked, and even helped to count them: 190 New Testaments and 500 CDs.

Refusing to be intimidated, Maryam said, “You must return all of these to us!”

“I’m sure you’ll get them back,” Mohammadi promised unconvincingly.

Maryam picked up a New Testament and handed it to him. “You should take one of these and read it.”

“I have,” he insisted. “But I’ve read the real and true version, not one of these distorted ones.”

By that he probably meant that he’d read the so-called Gospel of Barnabas, a false version of Scripture, published in Farsi in the 1700s, that portrays Jesus not as the Son of God and Savior of the world, but as a lesser prophet in line with the Koran’s description of Him. Many Muslims think this is a Christian Gospel because they’ve never had a chance to read the real thing.

He held up another book, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. “What are you doing with this book?” he demanded.

“You can get it in bookstores all over the country,” I replied. “We thought it would be interesting.”

As Mohammadi continued poking through our books, I wasn’t sure he could even read. If he could, his knowledge of books was sketchy at best—typical of the close-minded, poorly educated people the government had on its payroll by the thousands. He couldn’t tell Christian books from the rest. He didn’t recognize CDs we had by one of the top music groups in the country.

“The Lord seems to be everywhere in this house,” Mohammadi said after a minute.

“You won’t find anything but the Lord here,” I replied, “because we live with the Lord.”

We were on dangerous ground. These people had searched our apartment without a warrant. Now they were likely to arrest us without bringing any charges. Technically, it’s not illegal to be a Christian in Iran. However, in practical terms, policemen, Revolutionary Guards, judges, and every other authority in the country interpret the law for themselves and aren’t accountable to anyone. These two boys and the young woman with them could charge us with anything, or hold us and not charge us at all. And though being a Christian was not a crime, converting from Islam to another faith and evangelizing on behalf of that faith were considered crimes of apostasy and punishable by death.

While it was true that Maryam and I had been raised in Muslim households and had Islamic names, we had not embraced Islam as children or young adults. In our minds, we had never “converted” from Islam because we’d never really believed in Islam to begin with. We had met each other at an evangelical conference in Turkey, had decided to work together, and had spent the last three years in Tehran quietly sharing the gospel with anyone who was interested. For two of those years, having divided the city into squares on a huge wall map, we had gone out at night between 8:00 p.m. and midnight, visiting one sector at a time. We handed out New Testaments in cafés, gave them to taxi drivers, and left them in cabs, coffee shops, and mailboxes. When we finished a section, we marked it with a cross on our map. In three years altogether, we had given away about twenty thousand New Testaments.

We also traveled outside Tehran, taking Bibles to other cities. We even left some New Testaments inside the temple at Qom, the most sacred holy place in Islam, a place Christians are not even allowed to enter. But what better place to introduce people to the truth of Jesus Christ! Over the years, we had learned to be cautious and to depend on God to protect us wherever we went.

Nonetheless, we had aroused official suspicions. We weren’t going to deny our faith or hide it, under any circumstances, but now that the government had its eye on us, our challenge would be staying true to Christ while continuing our ministry without getting caught.

These thoughts and memories raced through my mind as Maryam and

I helped the *basiji* pack up everything they wanted—New Testaments, CDs, our private journals, personal belongings, identity documents, and more. They ordered us to come with them, though we weren't allowed to take any extra clothes or supplies. We had no idea where they were taking us or when we would be home again.

“Should we take winter clothes or summer clothes?” Maryam asked, trying to lighten the mood. There was no answer.

The young woman escorted us out to a small, dingy white car and sat between us in the backseat. The men followed, carrying boxes of our belongings. It was dusk and the wind was getting cold. The street outside our apartment was quiet, but as we drove through the neighborhood, the streets became crowded with holiday shoppers preparing for the Iranian New Year's celebration, which was a little more than two weeks away. Cars jostled for room along the narrow roadways, and the sidewalks were packed to overflowing.

We drove past the prison walls we could see from our kitchen. It was Evin Prison, a notorious compound built during the reign of the Shah to hold those who opposed his regime. Since the Shah's fall from power in 1979, Evin has been used for political prisoners, solitary confinement, and torture of those considered enemies of the Islamic state. We passed its towering red brick walls almost every day. Often we had wondered who was imprisoned there and what their lives were like. Maybe we were about to find out.

Finally we pulled up to the police station in the Gisha neighborhood, a three-story brick building where people came and went all day for motor vehicle documents. As usual, the main entrance was busy. But instead of taking us in through the front door, the *basiji* ordered us out of the car and escorted us to a quiet back alley out of public view, with extra guards at the door. This was the entrance to Base Two, the facility for the security police who deal with crimes against the state.



Our incredible, frightening journey had started early that morning, March 5, 2009. As Maryam and I were getting ready to go our separate ways to run some errands, I received a mysterious phone call. A polite voice

on the line informed me of a problem with my car registration and asked me to go to the Gisha police station before two o'clock to sort it out. I quickly called the former owner of the car to see if he knew of any problem, but he didn't answer his phone. Then I called an attorney friend to ask if I should be concerned.

"No," my friend assured me. "These problems come up all the time. It's nothing to worry about."

Even so, I couldn't help thinking about what had happened a few days earlier when I went to have my passport renewed. One of the forms had asked me to indicate my religion, and I had checked the box for "Christian." When my turn came at the counter, the clerk was indignant.

"How is this possible?" he demanded. "You have an Islamic name. Your parents are Muslims. How can you be a Christian?"

"With the Lord, anything is possible," I said. The clerk shot me a stern look but said nothing more.

I remembered that exchange as I went on my errands and visited my sister, Elena, before arriving at the police station at about 11:30. A guard at the door stopped me.

"What is your business here?" he asked.

"I received a call saying there might be a problem with my car registration," I explained.

"You should not enter here dressed that way."

I was modestly dressed, with my hair completely covered, as required in public, but I was not wearing the Islamic *chador* because I am not a Muslim.

"But I have covered myself," I said.

"I've said what I have to say," the guard replied. "The rest is up to you. But if you come in dressed that way, you will be ignored and no one will help you."

In the interest of getting to the bottom of the documentation mystery, I went back to the apartment and changed, then returned to the police station. By then, the office was closed for lunch and for one of the daily calls to prayer required by Islamic law.

I explained to the guard that I had been told to be at the office no later than 2:00 p.m. The guard insisted the office was closed and that no one could

help me now. After several minutes of arguing, I finally convinced him to let me inside, where I explained to the clerk at the counter about the phone call.

“That’s impossible,” the clerk declared. “I don’t think we called you. You must be mistaken.” He handed me an address. “Try this office instead.”

At that moment, an overweight, middle-aged man in a police uniform walked by. “I am Mr. Haghghat,” he said pleasantly. (*Haghghat* is the Farsi word for “truth.” Police officials, judges, and other people in the Iranian government don’t use their real names. This man’s alias would soon prove ironic.) “I think I can help you,” he said. “Follow me.”

He led me down a hallway to a sparsely furnished room where a husky man with a big, square face covered with heavy black stubble sat waiting at a table. His dark, deep-set eyes seemed too small for his head, and his brow was deeply furrowed with a constant scowl.

To my surprise, the man smiled and said, “You’ve come to the right place. I am the one who called you this morning. My name is Mr. Rasti.” (*Rasti* is another Farsi word meaning “truth.”) “Please take a seat,” he said. Mr. Haghghat left the room and closed the door behind him, leaving me alone with Mr. Rasti.

“Show me your papers,” he said.

I handed over my identification card, driver’s license, and vehicle registration. After looking at them for a long moment, Mr. Rasti began asking questions, without looking up.

“Are you married or single?”

“Single.”

“Do you live alone or with your parents?”

“I live with a friend.”

He asked for my address and some other personal details. Then there was another pause.

“Are you a Christian?”

Aha! This was their purpose all along. The car had nothing to do with it. They’ve called me in because of my passport application. “Yes, I have been a Christian for eleven years. Why do you ask me now?”

“Do you know the Bible?”

“Yes, of course. I am a Christian and I know the Bible. I have a Bible. Is there a problem with that?”

Mr. Rasti didn't answer; instead, he asked if I had been at a certain restaurant on a specific date. It was a popular restaurant that served customers in traditional style, reclining on couches at tables placed on low platforms. The food and music were traditional as well. Young people packed the place, and plainclothes security police watched it constantly.

"I don't remember," I replied. "I can't even remember what I ate yesterday. I think I know this restaurant, but I don't know if I was there on that date or not."

Mr. Rasti looked up at last, his eyes drilling into mine. "Our security guards saw you and your friend at that restaurant last month, giving away Bibles. They took down your license number, and now we have found you. Did you give Bibles to people in that restaurant?"

"I am a Christian," I repeated, "and I believe in the Bible. If somebody asks me questions about the Bible, I answer them. If somebody asks me for a Bible, I will give them one. It could be that I gave someone a New Testament in that restaurant. Is there a problem with that?"

Mr. Rasti's mood and expression changed completely. He sprang from his chair with a sour expression on his face and shouted, "I'll tell you the problem with that! Guard! Get me two female officers in this room immediately!"

The sudden change of atmosphere was startling, and it frightened me for a moment. Then I remembered the promise I had made to the Lord long ago: *I will never deny You. I trust You to be with me always and overcome my fear.*

Two women in *chadors* and long veils rushed into the room. "You are under arrest," Mr. Rasti said as one of the women fastened handcuffs around my wrists. He left the room and returned with two other men, one young and lanky, the other a little older and fair skinned.

"We have orders to search your apartment," Mr. Rasti declared. "You must go with these two while they conduct the search. What about your roommate—where is she now?"

"At the dentist," I replied.

"At the dentist, or off somewhere handing out Bibles?" Mr. Rasti said with a smirk.

Still in handcuffs, I was hustled into a small white police car with the two young men and a young woman named Zahra, who beamed at me with a superior air. On our way to the apartment, I leaned over to Zahra

and whispered, “I am a Christian. You have shackled me for my faith and for no other reason. I am honored to serve Christ this way, and I want you to know I’m not upset with you for what you did.” Zahra’s smile quickly faded, and she didn’t look at me again for the rest of the trip.



MARYAM

Before going to the dentist, I had spent part of the morning shopping for the upcoming New Year’s celebration, braving crowds so dense I could scarcely walk through the streets, where shop windows were piled high with goods. Some of the items, such as painted eggs, were available only around the holidays.

As I made my way through the crowded streets, I thought, *Maybe after I’m done at the dentist I’ll buy a couple of traditional New Year’s goldfish—a red one for Marziyeh and a black one for myself.*

I had overheard Marziyeh’s phone call about the car registration that morning and the call to her lawyer friend asking for advice. The story about the car had sounded suspicious, and I was worried. But I reminded myself, *Whatever God has planned for our lives to fulfill His purpose is what will happen. No person, no regime, has the power to change it.*

After thirty minutes in the dentist’s chair, I made a follow-up appointment for a few days later. Still worried about Marziyeh and the mysterious call, I called her cell phone.

“I’m at home,” Marziyeh said, “but I’ll only be here long enough to change clothes so that the clerk at the police station will help me.”

“Wait till I get there,” I said. “Something isn’t right about this. Let’s talk it over and think about what to do.”

“You’re right that we have to be careful,” Marziyeh said, “but I want to get back to the police station and get that taken care of so I can do the rest of my errands. I’ll write the address down and leave it for you.” Little did I know that Marziyeh was walking into a trap and would return home under arrest. Our faith in God was about to be put to the test.

Only two days earlier, she and I had been talking to each other about Luke, who had become a follower of Jesus at a dangerous time and had

followed the apostle Paul faithfully until Paul's martyrdom. Could we be that faithful, that strong? Yes, we could, we agreed. We would go anywhere for Christ—Saudi Arabia, Moscow, wherever the voice of the Lord was threatened the most.

But could we really? Would we truly go anywhere to follow Jesus and do His work? The commitment seemed easy enough when we were talking about it alone in our apartment. Now we were under arrest and in police custody, and the prospect was a far more serious matter. From the look on Marziyeh's face, I could tell she felt the same way I did: trying to appear confident on the outside, but petrified with fright on the inside. My already queasy stomach had turned to knots and my mouth was suddenly as dry as the Dasht-e Lut desert, but an electric surge of adrenaline pulsed through my veins.

Fighting my rising panic, I knew we were weak and not brave. Even Peter, Jesus' closest friend, had denied the Lord when facing danger. Would we deny Christ to save ourselves? If we failed as Peter had failed, how could we ever forgive ourselves? I prayed for the Lord to keep us strong. We could be brave and resist only in His strength, not our own. Without Christ we were nothing. With Him, we were covered in His strength and protection.

These thoughts comforted me as Marziyeh and I were escorted through the same crowded building where she had been by herself just a few hours earlier. The men who had searched our apartment led us up a flight of stairs to a small office with bare walls, a big desk with a window behind it, and four chairs. What appeared to be confiscated property was piled on the desk and all over the floor. We sat down and watched as they brought in everything they had taken from us and stacked it on the desk with all the rest.

"Sit still and don't talk to each other," a female guard ordered.

We did as we were told. Then we heard footsteps in the hallway.