

Dear Friends & Ministry Partners,

April 2024

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

Afghanistan might seem like ancient history to most of you, but it is a very present reality for me. The aftermath of Afghanistan’s fall in August of 2021 is ongoing, as our Novo staff pick up the pieces and lay a foundation of ministry across the border in Pakistan. It is said that a picture paints a thousand words. In a similar vein, a story does the same. Here’s a testimony from those earlier days of Project Alpha, when we were moving Afghans across the border to places of refuge and positioning them for what God would hold next in Pakistan. Discovery Bible Studies are multiplying via Afghan diaspora!



Project Alpha: The Testimony of Permaz

In fear for our lives, we left behind all our loved ones and all our belongings the day Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. We were among the first targets for arrest by the Taliban; me, a woman working for Western interests and my husband, a human rights defender. I never imagined that the jobs we studied for and worked so hard at all our lives would one day cause us to flee our own country, the one we wanted so very much to serve.

I received a call from my sister. She was panting for breath while running through a crowd, telling me that the Taliban had entered Kabul. I was in my office, destroying the documents that I had worked so hard on for years. My hands were shaking and my heart was grieving deeply. As we fled, I collapsed when I saw a schoolgirl with her backpack on her back, her favorite book in her hand asking her mother, “Can’t I go to school anymore?” Her mother sighed deeply, held her daughter’s hands tighter and asked her to run. As we passed through the crowd of people on the street, everyone fleeing in fear of the Taliban, the book fell out of her hands and was trampled underfoot by the crowd. My only thought was to stay alive. I knew if the Taliban arrest me because I’m not wearing a long black hijab to cover my head and I work for foreign people, they could cut off my head. Then what would happen to my son and my daughter?

I saw 20 years of toil and effort collapsing before my eyes, the efforts of the Afghan people who were now running in terror while the whole world watched us in horror! When I finally arrived home safe and in shock, my husband said that his contacts had a plan to evacuate us out of the country. We only had one hour to pack and go with them. Out of all our belongings in the house, each full of memories for us, we could only take one set of clothes per person. Anything else would make the border crossing more complicated. In that one hour the only thing we could do was to go to the shoe

store and buy a pair of shoes for each of us for the hard journey we had ahead. So, we all went to the shoe store, each of us rushing to try on shoes. I was looking for a comfortable and sturdy pair when suddenly my eyes locked on a pair of white sneakers, the same shoes that a schoolgirl named Malika once wore. She was killed in a suicide bombing in front of her school along with dozens of other girls, all buried with their dreams. Malika's shoes were all that remained of her, and the photo of her bloody shoes was circulated on social media.

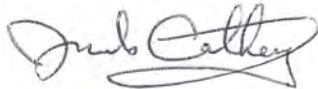
I chose that pair of shoes quickly. It reminded me that now the girl who wore those same shoes was not alive anymore to follow her dreams, so I would put my feet into the same shoes in memory of Malika and all young victims of war. I would follow their dream to be free! Those shoes would give me the strength of heart to be determined and not to give up. When I wanted to wear the shoes, my husband said worriedly, "You cannot wear these shoes! These are the white and light color that is forbidden for women by the Taliban. What will happen to you if the Taliban stop you and find out your background?" So, I couldn't wear the shoes, but I packed them in my bag. I walked across the border without wearing the shoes. A long, narrow path with barbed wire on both sides and thousands of people standing under the scorching sun, all struggling to get out of the country. As we reached the beginning of the line, the Taliban whipped an old man standing next to me and started hitting him with the butt of a gun. My son watched the scene from my arms and began to scream and cry in panic and grabbed at the barbed wire.

Project Alpha brought us to safety in Pakistan, gave us food, shelter, classes for our children, and so much more! Project Alpha rescued several other members of my family, as well. I was heartbroken to leave Kabul and I am now miles away, but when I look at my son and daughter, I know they will have a bright future in this country. I thought I would never laugh, never really live again. For the first time, I have a strange feeling of being sad and happy at the same time, and tears fill my throat while bending over to tighten the laces of my white shoes. No! *Malika's* shoes. Each of us can be a free Malika with white sneakers!

A Promised Peace

We live on a planet that provides us with plenty to fear. Nothing in world history gives me much hope for peace. If I want peace, I need to turn to Jesus who spoke peace to His followers just before His crucifixion. To promise peace in such a circumstance is extraordinary, passing all understanding. Jesus offers a way out from troubled and fearful hearts. I need to take it. Thank you for laboring with me in extending it to others, like Permaz. May God's goodness, mercy and peace follow you always!

For Troubled and Fearful Hearts,



Mark Cathey
Director, Empowering Leaders Division, Novo
651-800-5667 (Mobile)
mark.cathey@novo.org (Email)
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