

Romala's Testimony

Genesis 16:1-14

I would like to share with you testimony about how our family actually arrived in this country. Because I was asked last week to speak about God answering prayer. And that is a story that a lot of people here don't know. And I would like to share that. Part of my childhood was actually in UAE. Myself, my two younger brothers, my Dad and my mother used to live in UAE. We were originally from Pakistan. My Dad was working in the army in UAE as a nurse. So, a soldier, but a nurse. And we had a really wonderful childhood. We had such a good time together as a family there. We had all the blessings that that country had to offer. We were a nuclear family. We didn't have any extended family around us. And that was the only family we knew. We didn't have any relatives. We didn't really have many friends around us either because of just the community that we were living in.

And also, Dad was quite often sent to the desert in the camp for long periods of time. So he would come away from the camp and then come and stay a few days with us and then he would be off again for about three weeks. We wouldn't see him. But when he was there, he would always take us out for a bike ride or whatever he could manage to give us. Because we lived in a flat, you see. We didn't have a garden. And you don't want to be in the garden in 52 degrees heat anyway. So, in the evenings when it was cool, Dad would take us out. And we would just go crazy on tarmac or whatever. We'd roll down hills, these tiny little grass hills on the sides of the road. We had a blast, really.

And then our situation changed. My father realised that a lot of his colleagues were being sent back to their countries of origin by their employers. And that meant that Dad's job was also not safe anymore. Dad and Mum took a difficult decision. They decided that Dad should continue to work in UAE because there wouldn't have been an opportunity for him to rejoin his nursing career that he'd left in Pakistan. There was no job to go back to. But Mum and myself and my two brothers, we were sent back home to Pakistan to try to begin a life again there with our relatives and do our schooling there. And Dad would continue to support us and support the rest of the family by being employed in UAE.

Now, initially, that seemed like a great idea because we realised that we were going to see all the family members that we would only see during holiday time. And we used to have a great time with them. And we went there, we were excited. we were like, "yeah, this is great! We've got so many relatives." We had no relatives in UAE, and now we do. And the novelty wore off pretty quickly. I can assure you that. Because when we arrived there, yes, we enjoyed our time with the family, but nobody had prepared us for the hostilities we were going to face in Pakistan. Everything from the weather to the people. It was something that our young minds did not comprehend and did not know that we would have to face.

And then came the realisation that we were separated from our father. We were not going to see him very often. This is in the time of no mobile phones. Well, there were, but not very accessible. No video calls. Letters. Or, perhaps, a very quick phone call, because they were so expensive. It was so expensive to call via what we call landline now. It was the only telephone system. And all we could do is say, "Hello, Dad, you okay? Yeah, we're fine. Okay, okay, bye. Okay." And gradually, we started to get used to the life that Pakistan had for us. We did not get used to the hostilities, but we got better at coping with it. And gradually we were also realizing, or Dad was realizing more than us, that we were actually not able to relate to our father very well anymore. A quick 'hello' and a 'goodbye' doesn't make for a good relationship, especially as you're growing up. And I had probably the worst time because I had my teenage years in Pakistan without my Dad being there with me.

Our situation continued to get worse. It was very difficult being there without Dad. And our mom did an absolutely amazing job with what she had and what she had to go through by herself. Then we found out that Dad was able to visit us maybe every six months or once in a year, once every two years. We had some opportunities to go visit him a couple of times, but it was also very expensive to do that. And eventually we were unable to do it. And our last visit to go and see Dad, we found out that Dad's job was really not secure anymore. And Dad went to this interview, (which is a whole other story, maybe I'll get an opportunity to share one other time), and Dad came back from that interview, and he told us that, oh, he didn't get the job. And for some reason, myself and my two younger brothers, I was about 10 - 10 1/2 years old.

And we were praying all day for Dad's interview and we all as a family had this peace, in fact a joy. And 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 16 says:

1 Thessalonians 5:16

16 "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

And we as a family decided (and apparently I was the one that came up with this) and I said, "Dad, let's thank God that you didn't get that job." And Dad said, "yes, we should." And we all praised and worshipped God, thanking God that Dad did not get that job. Our visit was over. We went back to Pakistan. And shortly after, Dad called us and he said he has been employed. Not only has he been employed by someone better, he's actually been employed to go to the UK.

That was an amazing, amazing news. Because I don't know if you know, but everybody who is not British wants to be in the UK. And it's a huge privilege. And we couldn't believe what an amazing opportunity that was for Dad. Dad was here for a year. And then suddenly Dad called and he said, "there's a problem." Because I was, as I told you, a teenager back then. If I had turned 18, Dad could no longer sponsor me to join him. And this was our only opportunity to get back together as a family. We had been separated for about seven years. And it was very difficult. And all we wanted was to be under the same roof again.

And Dad began to pray because I was about to turn 18 very soon. And to top it up, a very difficult situation happened in Pakistan. There was an attack on one of the foreign embassies in Pakistan, and there were a lot of attacks in Afghanistan at that time - we've always lived in very unsettling places. And what that did was, it shut down every single foreign embassy in the country. We had had our interviews for a visa, and everybody was now worried because embassies are closed. "How are we going to get our visas now to join Dad?" "We don't know how long the embassies are closed for." "I'm going to turn 18. That means there's no way we're going to be able to have me stay back in Pakistan and Mum and my brothers join." "It's not going to happen. Everybody's going to remain as they are."

So, it was a very difficult situation. And I want to say, everybody in this very church started to pray for us. Dad reached out to Don Foster at that time because of the advice of somebody in this church to send a letter to the government. We had our interview in a tiny makeshift office in Pakistan. It was in the embassy, and we gave our interviews there and then we waited and everybody in this church was praying "Let this family come together, dear Lord God, it's been so long." And we were tired. You know how Hagar was exhausted, and she was trying to run away from the hostility she was facing? We were in those hostile conditions, and we didn't know how to get out of them.

And God was so gracious to us this house became a house of prayer for us everybody was praying and I would like to say this. **Our God is the God of impossibilities. He doesn't comply with governments. He has his own rules. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.** And despite every embassy being closed in Pakistan, can I tell you? Our visas arrived in post by FedEx. Okay, how that all happened, I do not know. But all I know is that **our God is the God who opens doors that no man can shut.** He answered our prayers.

We were small. All we wanted was to be with our Dad. And our Dad, who had suffered long years in the desert by himself, when he was ill, nobody was there around him. He was longing for his own children.

Not only did God reunite us together as a family, can I tell you that our God answers prayers better than what we're asking for? Not only did he answer our prayer to bring us together as a family, He brought us to one of the most beautiful places in this country, Bath City. Not only did He give us relief from the chaos of the place that we were living in, He gave us the peace of the hills and the valleys and the beauty of this city. But He also planted us right here in this church. He gave us, instead of just our fleshly family and our relatives, He gave us family in the Lord Jesus Christ, right here.

This became our home church. And it began to nurture us in so many ways I cannot even describe. When we had to get a home, well, Dad had to get a home for us so that we could come and stay with. Do you know how many people just started to make our home for us? This lovely couple here, right here, they gave us a settee and so many other things. Pots and pans started to arrive in our home. They made our home so that we would just arrive as a family and settle in. Patricia Dunlop, sitting right there, you know what she did? She committed herself to bringing us to church every single week. My parents did not have a car. They had to work hard to settle in this country. And they were often working long shifts and they couldn't bring us to church. People from this church would drive all the way up to the other side of the city and bring us to church so that we wouldn't miss church. We were disciplined. We were taken care of. We were part of the welcome team. I had the great privilege really of joining the choir.

God didn't just bring us together as a family. He extended us as a family. And there are people sitting right here, John Barnett, Sally, so many others, that were prayer warriors for us. And I cannot tell you the warm welcome we had when we came here. Because we didn't know that so many people were pouring themselves out in prayer on our behalf. They didn't know fully our desperation, but they stood by with us. And when we came here, not only were we joyous to be here, but we suddenly realised there were other people really happy to see us because we were the answer to their prayers.

Everybody's faith grew together in this place. This is why when I come here, you know, I always have somebody to hug. I always have a brother or a sister, a mother or a father somewhere here. You know, we as a church should know our God answers prayers. So, if there is an impossible situation in your life, if there is an embassy closed for you, God can open doors that no man can shut. believe him and don't stop praying because prayer is not just wishful thinking it is our direct connection with God Almighty and as Hagar says he's the God who sees he's the God who saw the suffering of little unknown children who really longed for their Dad he's the God who saw the suffering of a godly man longing to be reunited with his family. He's the God who saw the suffering of my mother trying to raise children in a very, very, very hostile environment. He's the God who sees, and he is the God who hears.

Amen.



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