

Wherever there is water, there is life.

Ribbons of green bisect valleys squeezed between towering snow-capped mountain ranges, kept green and alive only by seasonal melting snows that feed small, winding rivers crisscrossing the landscape. In this land of extensive mountain ranges and deserts, life is tenuous.

Afghanistan has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Extreme poverty and crumbling infrastructure mean that few have access to clean drinking water or basic medical care. Political instability, corruption and underlying tensions between people groups elicit feelings of anxiety and helplessness.

For the 30 million people who call Afghanistan home,









FEARLESS WITNESS

Abdul-Hadi,* a young Afghan man from an isolated mountain town, grew up in a conservative Muslim family. While studying in the capital city, he was introduced to the Gospel by foreigners and made a commitment to follow Jesus. After graduating and returning to his hometown, his father found his New Testament and beat him severely, throwing him out of the home.

Despite his father's rejection, Abdul clung to his faith in Jesus. His consistent positive witness and the evident change in his life was such a powerful testimony that his father invited him back into his home with a feast. Abdul married and had three young daughters. He and his wife suffered for their faith, but remained steadfast.

A couple of years ago Abdul-Hadi and another believing local friend were imprisoned for a month. Thrown into an overcrowded cell with a group of prisoners, including some with Taliban connections, they experienced many dark days. But God was faithful, providing unexpected protection for them from a former classmate who was respected and feared by the other prisoners as a powerful "bad guy." Abdul-Hadi and his friend remained committed to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One day they were suddenly summoned, flown to the capital city, and unexpectedly released.

While Abdul-Hadi and his family were visiting a neighboring country, they were being encouraged to apply for asylum and move to the West, where they would be safe from the risk of another imprisonment. But Abdul-Hadi sensed God speaking to him during those days, encouraging him to return to his homeland in order to have a bigger impact for the Kingdom of God. In spite of the opportunity to flee (see Paul's similar experience in Acts 21:18-14), Abdul-Hadi returned to Afghanistan with his wife and children, where they have been actively involved in discipling and training believers from around the country. They have not been silenced from fear or the threat of persecution. Their fearless witness and faithful ministry portend a great hope for a shattered land and people in desperate need of knowing God's true love.

*Name changed to protect identity.
Photos do not represent individuals in the story.





"But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name..."
—John 1:12. HCSB

Pray that Afghans would cry out to the Lord.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would bring spiritual desperation to Afghan hearts.

Pray that Afghans would wake from their stupor of following tradition and genuinely seek after the Truth.

Pray for Afghanistan's women.

Afghan women long to be under someone's protection and love. They long

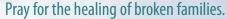
for healthy pregnancies and babies. They long for their children to receive a good education. They long for deep relationships. They long for peace in their homes. Pray that God would open their hearts to see that their deepest longings can be satisfied in the fountain of His saving love.

Pray for Afghanistan's orphans.

There are over two million orphans in Afghanistan. Pray that God would provide safe homes, food, care and education. Pray for protection against predators. Pray for God to be a Father to the fatherless—that He would bring messengers of hope to these children who would tell them about the Jesus who understands their suffering.



Pray that God will draw fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins to Himself, so that networks of extended family members can worship together and encourage one another in the faith. Pray that family members asking questions will find answers through the Word, through Christian radio and television, and through the lives of other believers.



There are many scars from years of war. Pray that as people turn to Jesus, they would experience hope for a future. Pray that they would reflect Christ's mercy to their own families. Pray for the comfort and sustaining of Afghan believers. Pray that national believers will have comfort in the glorious hope of eternity with God. Pray that they would pour out their lives for the salvation of their families and friends.

Pray for those being persecuted.

Pray that by the strength of the Holy Spirit they will stand strong. Pray for those who are mocked and beaten by their families, that they would have boldness and not be crushed under the weight of distress. Pray that the Lord Jesus would minister to these and that they would be strengthened to endure the attacks. Pray that they would be assured that they are standing for Truth.

And you became followers of us and of The Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit... For from you the word of The Lord has sounded forth."—1 Thess. 1:6-10



DEEP WOUNDS

In northern Afghanistan, a stout Uzbek man optimistically proclaims, "There is no Uzbek, no Tajik, no Hazara, there is only Afghanistan!" A short time later the same man soberly reminisces about a shattered Afghanistan in the late 1990s. "We were all terrified of what the Taliban would do," he recalls, "I was taken into jail and beaten just for having trimmed my beard."

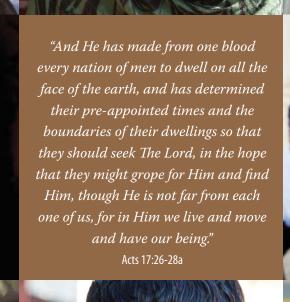
The memory of the Taliban is a menacing specter. Many men in Afghanistan seem to mark time by the rule of the Taliban—it is a time remembered with anguish.

On the banks of the Amu Darya River, a surreal scene unfolds. A young bodybuilder flexes as he proudly poses for pictures. His manager expresses respect and concern for his pupil. "He is from the Helmand province," he explains, "and he cannot go back there or the Taliban will kill him. . . but he says, 'I don't care, I will do this until I die.""

In Kabul a young Hazara man shows gruesome pictures of his wounds from a brutal attack. While walking down the street, he was jumped by several Taliban who beat and stabbed him with a bayonet. He survived, but more than his body was broken. He confesses, "The person I used to be is no more. I am a different man now."

As foreign troops withdraw from Afghanistan, tension between ethnic groups simmers under the surface of an uneasy calm. The wounds of the country go deep. There is concern the country could splinter along tribal and ethnic lines, devolving into civil war as rival groups grab for power.

Forgiveness and reconciliation is the only way to move toward a future defined by peace.





"Lord, who will not fear and glorify Your name? Because you alone are holy, for all the nations will come and worship before You because your righteous acts have been revealed."

—Rev. 5:4, HCSB

Pray for the Pashtuns.

The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan yet there are very few Pashtun believers. Media has become vitally

> important for communicating the Good News to the Pashtuns. Pray that media being developed will clearly express the Gospel. Pray for a complete Bible in print and audio format.

Pray for the Qizilbash.

Pray for the soil of their hearts to be prepared by the Holy Spirit to hear the Truth of Jesus Christ. Access to the Qizilbash is extremely limited. Pray for doors to be opened for believers to plant seeds of the

Aimag 1,300,000 Rushon 6,000 Brahui 121.680 Shuahni 36,302 Southern Pushtun 5.000.000 5.000.000 Hazara 2.000 Taiik 8.800.000 Kyrgyz Northern Pushtun 9,000,000 Turkmen 1.000.000 Nuristani 129,500 Southern Uzbek 2.900.000 Pashavi 200,000 Wakhi 15.126 Oizilbash & Afshari 205.000

Afghans are made up of a multitude of different people groups and tribes, each with its own heart language and cultural worldview.

Pray for the Hazaras.

Descendants of the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan, the Hazara people make up the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and form a significant working class. As a minority group, Hazaras are constant targets of oppression and persecution. Pray for many Hazaras to believe the Gospel and form healthy churches.

Pray for Tajiks.

The Jesus film and the entire Bible are available to Tajiks in Dari. Pray that Tajiks will become aware of this, consume the Truth and believe the Gospel. Pray for emerging Tajik leadership to heart for God's glory to be made known among

Pray for the Kyrgyz.

The Kyrgyz of Afghanistan are one of the most remote people on the planet. They have very little access to health care, markets, and schools. Due to harsh living conditions, the Kyrgyz often turn to opium usage to cope with day-to-day life. Pray for the Kyrgyz to find hope in Christ and a desire to live for His glory.

Pray for the Baluch, Shugni and Wakhi peoples.

The Baluch are a tribal people who long for their own homeland. Pray that they would cry out to the Lord and that He would save them. The Shugni and Wakhi are two small people groups access to the Gospel. Pray that one day these people would love the cross of Christ.

Pray for Afghan believers to seek unity.

After centuries of war and revenge among different people groups, pray that the Church in Afghanistan would be known as a place where God forgives, and His followers seek and give forgiveness to others. Pray for opportunities for believers to forgive their families, their neighbors and even their enemie

THE GREAT GAME CONTINUES A brief look back through history

Down through the centuries the territory that is now known as Afghanistan has been contested soil. The region was caught up in the eastward expansion of Alexander the Great's sprawling Greek Empire and then was incorporated into the Persian Empire. When warriors under the command of Genghis Khan swept across Central Asia, the region was consumed by the westward expansion of the Mongol Empire. In the late 19th century, the strategically located territory became the buffer zone between the rapidly expanding Russian Empire and territories under the rule of the colonial British Indian Empire. The clash of the British and Russian Empires in Asia was an epic struggle characterized by Rudyard Kipling in his book *Kim* as "the Great Game."

Always at the nexus of the converging interests of bigger and stronger kingdoms, Afghanistan can't seem to escape the Great Game. Regional and international powers are still vying to gain control and exert their influence over the country, but Afghans refuse to be ruled by foreign powers. In the late 19th century when the British sought to install and control an Afghan ruler, the venture ended in disaster. The British Army of the Indus retreated in 1842, under pressure from angry local tribal leaders who had killed two top British officers. It was already January, the dead of winter. More than four thousand troops, accompanied by wives, children and servants, struggled through snow-covered mountain gorges as Pashtun tribal warriors aided by the harsh weather decimated the doomed contingent. Tradition says that a lone British man—an army surgeon named Dr. Brydon—made it alive to the safety of the British fort in Jalalabad to tell the tale of one of the most humbling engagements in British military history. But even after this embarrassment, the British empire continued to intervene in Afghan affairs well into the 20th century.

The region has never known stability or peace for any considerable length of time. Many consider the "Golden Age" of Afghanistan to be the reign of King Zahir Shah. For almost 40 years there was a modicum of peace and stability, but the chill of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began to creep across the borders. In 1973 Zahir Shah was overthrown in a coup by his cousin Daud. The growing influence of the USSR was felt in a series of bloody communist-led coups that paved the way for the 1979 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

After the Soviet occupation, ten years of brutal warfare devastated the country as poorly armed Afghan *Mujahedin*, "Holy Warriors," attempted to drive Soviet troops out of the country. The US government cautiously and quietly increased its support

of the Mujahedin during these years, using the Pakistani military and intelligence services to funnel funding and arms. Pinned in major cities, the Soviet forces stepped up their fight against the insurgents by bombing and mining huge areas of the country, precipitating the largest exodus of refugees in the world at that time. At least five million Afghan refugees poured over the borders into Pakistan and Iran. Many eventually made their way to Europe, Australia and the United States.

In 1989 the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, but the violence did not end. The Mujahedin splintered into various factions. Unable to agree on how to share power, they turned their weapons on each other. An old Pushtun saying speaks to this very situation: "It's me against my brothers, it's me and my brothers against our cousins; it's we and our cousins against the invader."

Another period of bloody civil war began. Innocent civilians were often caught in the crossfire. In the capital city of Kabul indiscriminate rocketing and constant street battles killed thousands. As chaos and banditry by former Mujahedin commanders spread around the country, an unknown group of young religious students called the Taliban led by Mullah Mohammed Omar emerged from the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and began to take over the country. The capital city of Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996. By 2001 almost the entire country had fallen under the sway of the Taliban's increasingly extremist power. The Taliban hosted Osama bin Laden

"It's me against my brothers,

it's me and my brothers against our cousins;

it's we and our cousins against the invader."

—Pashtun proverb

and his al Qaeda forces, which had been groomed for fighting during their years as Mujahedin supported by the US.

The horrific 9/11 attacks by al Qaeda

on New York City and Washington, D.C. provoked a military response. The world watched as the US became a public player in the Great Game. In late 2001 the Taliban was deposed as a result of US military intervention and Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda forces were pushed over the border into Pakistan. Over the last decade the news has chronicled yet another insurgency of Mujahedin fighters sheltered along the Afghan-Pakistan border as they have attempted to cripple yet another international power and its installed Afghan leader—President Ahmad Karzai. The actors have changed, but the scene remains eerily familiar. And so today the Great Game continues, as the Afghan people remain caught in the front lines, trapped in the middle of a battle with international stakes that is destroying their lives and devastating their country, their homes and their families.



THE FACE THE WORLD SEES

The owner of an internet café in Kabul stood on the roof of a building and motioned at the muddy river choked with garbage, and said, "This is the capital of Afghanistan—this is the face that the world sees." In his opinion, the filthy river resembles a flow of corrupt leaders that are destroying the country. "Our leaders are illiterate thugs," he explained, "who go into politics for money and power." He observed that even some religious leaders are hypocrites who go from daily prayers to parties replete with alcohol and prostitutes.

In another region of Afghanistan a young man holds court with his gang. Everyone gives the young man a wide berth in his village because his father is a powerful leader. The open secret in the village is that the father lives in "naked sin." The father is known to be involved in *bacha bazi*, which means "boy player." The boy players dress up as young women and dance for older men, who later take advantage of the boys.

In a city in northern Afghanistan, the government buildings are pockmarked from bullets and damaged by

mortars, visible remnants of the aggression of a fierce warlord. The tension in the city is palpable as community leaders and citizens fear invoking the anger of the warlord who holds no political office, but controls the province.

A proud, smiling Afghan became sullen when asked what would happen when the American military left Afghanistan. "They can't leave," he said. "If they leave it will make the worst days of the Taliban seem like peace time."

Afghanistan needs leaders who will govern the country with integrity and vision. The country needs leaders who will restore the fortunes of those diligently working for the future of their people. The country needs leaders who will protect the most vulnerable members of society and encourage religious freedom. The future of the country is dependent on the quality of its leadership. May the Lord raise up political, tribal and religious leaders who will rule justly and love mercy as they seek God first.



Pray for the maturation of Christian leaders. Pray for the development of theological education and leadership training that is effective and reproducible in Afghanistan. Pray that leaders would be devoted to the Scripture's authority and be led by it in humility. Pray that God's hand of protection would rest over this work. Pray for favor toward believers. Pray that influential leaders in Afghanistan would show favor to believers, allowing them to have ever broadening circles o influence for the Gospel's sake. Pray that they would become people of peace that would allow the building of cultural bridge for sharing the Good News. MAY THERE BE **RESTORATION** prayers for the leaders of Afghanistan and the future of the country Pray for the salvation of influential leaders. Pray for protection of life. Pray for political peace and stability. Pray that God would open the hearts of political, tribal and No one is exempt from a daily threat of death in Afghanistan. Pray for political leaders of integrity who are committed to judge community leaders. Pray for believers to find open doors into Some Afghans are targets of planned military attacks; others justly and rule uprightly. Pray for an end to widespread corruption are simply trying to pick up their children from school. The fear the lives of powerful people. Pray that leaders would come to at all levels of society. Pray that God will bring Himself glory understand and accept Jesus' identity as the Son of God and deadens into a dull lethargy, but it never goes away. Pray for God by accomplishing a work of political stability which the most would repent, believe and submit to his Lordship in their lives. to show mercy by protecting lives. influential world powers have failed to succeed. Even as Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, pray that the Pray for perseverance. Pray for religious freedom. Lord would reveal himself in miraculous ways through dreams and visions to some influential individuals who would become Pray that leaders of integrity will not lose heart as they work Pray that leaders, even Muslim religious leaders, would allow the vibrant witnesses and leaders in the church. toward the restoration and rebuilding of their country. Pray distribution of books like the New Testament so that many can that they will not give in to temptations to dishonesty in order learn about Jesus and the Gospel. Pray that one day, believers will to accomplish their vision. be allowed to worship in public without fear.

BROUGHT NEAR "I am hopeless," Aisha* often says.

in foreign lands

A desperate search for home She survived and recovered from a recent attempt to take her own life, but her spirit still staggers. With light skin and auburn hair, Aisha resembles an American more than an Afghan. Many mothers Aisha's age are changing baby diapers—Aisha, however, bears the responsibility of caring for two mentally challenged teenagers, children born as a result of her early marriage.

> Aisha grew up in an Afghan city heavily attacked by Russian rockets. She is haunted by memories of fleeing with her family to hide for days at a time. As a young teenager, Aisha was married off to a mentally and physically challenged boy who was unable to work.

After she and her husband relocated to Iran with her in-laws, it was not long before her husband became violent. She began to fear for the lives of her two small children. One day the Iranian police came to the door and took her husband away. Aisha never saw him again.

More than 3 million Afghans have fled their homeland over the past 30 years. Invasion, civil war and the cruel reign of the Taliban resulted in the separation and dispersion of Afghan families around the world. Today multitudes of Afghans, who make up the Afghan diaspora in Iran, Pakistan, Australia, Europe and the United States, are searching for meaning, purpose and identity.

The United Nations resettlement program for Afghan widows whispered promises of new life, happiness and security. But when Aisha moved to Australia, she was overwhelmed by stress and fear. She could not speak the language and she was afraid to leave her small apartment. She did not know how to go about living. After only a few months in Australia, she tried to take her own life.

Since then, she has met a Christian named Lily* and begun to open her heart. When Lily hears Aisha talk about being hopeless, Lily always remembers Ephesians 2:12, "At that time you were without the Messiah...without hope and without God in the world."

Lily has renamed Aisha "Hope" because the very thing that Aisha realizes she does not have—hope points to the very One whom she most desperately needs. Lily longs for the day when she can look into Hope's eyes and proclaim the rest of her story, "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah."

*Name changed to protect identity. Photos do not represent individuals in the story



MAY THEY FIND HOPE prayers for refugees and Afghans living abroad

Pray for the salvation of Afghans living abroad.

Many Afghans are drawn to the local mosque in their new home city because it is a place of comfort. Pray that God will sovereignly bring the Gospel into their lives—through dreams and visions, Christian shelters,

> churches or an encounter with a believer at a park or market who will explain what it means to have an identity in Christ Jesus.

Pray for an eternal home.

Many Afghans struggle with language and culture when living abroad, quickly retreating into their small circle of Afghan peers. Pray for encouragement of heart as they labor to adjust and for quick acquisition of language and culture. Those living abroad are searching for purpose, identity and a sense of home. Pray that they will find their eternal home in Christ.

Pray for Afghan children growing up in a host country.

These "third-culture-kids" speak one language at school and another at home. They become experts in flipping between the two cultures, all the while feeling acutely that they don't fully belong in either world. Pray that a neighbor or school friend will help them understand how much God loves them while sharing the Gospel with these children.

Pray for the small number of Afghan believers.

""How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" she asked Him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would ask Him, and He would give you living

> Pray that Afghan believers would become examples of the grace and forgiveness of God as they grow in faithfulness and maturity. Pray that Afghan believers would be burdened to spread the Gospel in their own homeland. Pray that God will protect and bless those who are writing, voicing, and producing radio and TV programs that proclaim Truth in Afghan languages.

Pray for Christians in Australia, Europe and Canada reaching out to Afghans.

Pray that Christian workers based in these countries would learn the Afghan culture and language. Pray for wisdom and open doors as they look for opportunities to connect with Afghan communities. Pray for diligence to clearly explain the Gospel.

Pray for those brought near—Afghans living in the US.

Pray that Christians in America will have the compassion of Christ towards Afghans living in their neighborhoods and in nearby cities. Pray that churches would be compelled to reach out to Afghans in love and mercy, effectively showing and telling the Good News. Pray that Christian homes and churches would welcome Afghans seeking the way, the truth and the life.

















