
STUDY COMPANION - ARMAN'S FREEDOM

DAVID PARKS



Study Companion to *Arman's Freedom*

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ENDORSEMENTS

Everyone loves an intriguing story, but imagine an intriguing story that illustrates complex missiological concepts. That's what *Arman's Freedom* does. It's definitely a page-turner that keeps the reader engaged, but it also brought to life the concepts we were exploring in my Missiological Anthropology class. I highly recommend adding it as required reading for your missiology students!

~Matt Cook, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Bible,
Global Missions, and World
Freed-Hardeman University

David Parks has written a gripping story that, even while being entertaining in its own right, communicates ideas that missions profs regularly discuss with their students. If you are interested in what God is doing to draw Iranians to himself, you should read this book!

~Stephen Stallard, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry
Western Seminary; Former church planter in NYC

ENDORSEMENTS

Arman's Freedom is truly a gift to anyone seeking to grow their understanding of worldview and cross-cultural communication. Using "missiological fiction" to teach something as complex as worldview is brilliant. Dr. Parks shows his expertise and experience in how well he navigates what would have been a difficult endeavor for almost anyone else. This book should be in the library of every missiologist in the Evangelical world.

~Jeremy Jenkins

Executive Director, All Things All People
Adjunct Professor of Religion, Gardner-Webb University

This supplemental guide to *Arman's Freedom* is an outstanding resource to assist both personal study and classroom instruction. Parks' novel is filled with such an engaging storyline that provocative questions are beneficial to understanding important nuances related to theological and missiological training. While the book may stand on its own, this supplement guarantees nothing will be overlooked. I recommend this tool to educators. It will assist greatly in one's lectures and classroom discussions as students are led to unearth the treasures found in the book's pages.

~ J. D. Payne, Professor of Christian Ministry
Samford University

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HOW TO USE THIS COMPANION GUIDE

Arman's Freedom Missions Study Companion

The writing of Arman's Freedom included a consistent struggle between artist and missiologist. There are many lessons that I wanted to use the book to teach, but whenever I felt like an obvious lesson would compromise the readability and enjoyment of the story, I chose art. And I don't regret it.

I didn't know for sure that goal was accomplished, however, until my master's level students read it. My fear that the lessons would be too obvious (therefore, making the story too "preachy") were quelled when it became clear they had missed some of the missiological truths illustrated in the book. While it may sound weird to read that I was glad they hadn't caught everything I intended, you should realize that this is what has made the follow-up discussions so exciting and energizing. It has been a very rewarding experience to watch the lights come on during class.

While it's easy for me to use the story to teach everything from worldview to shame/honor gospel, I realize it may not be as obvious

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even to those who are teaching missions. This is why I've written a Missions Study Companion for Arman's Freedom. It is my great hope that this guide can equip leaders (from lay church leaders to missions professors) to teach missiology in a fresh and compelling way. The companion is organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Chapter questions.** This is a guide to give to students before reading Arman's Freedom. The questions are designed to draw their attention to certain details that would be good to remember without slowing down the story. Some questions are open-ended and designed to simply make them think. You may want to use some of these questions in your group discussions. See chapter 5.
- **Chapter 2: Worldview. UPDATE** (September 2025) This was easily the longest section of the study companion. I had included a paper I wrote to help cross-cultural workers ascertain a person's worldview. I'm happy to say that **I have signed a contract with B&H Academic** that will explain and further develop the worldview mapping tool I've taught for years! Unfortunately, that means I needed to delete this section, but please keep an eye out for **Heart Worldviews and Traditional Religions** in June of 2027!

Chapter 3: Shame / Honor Gospel. Even if you're familiar with the missiological discussions around shame/honor

- gospel, you may not catch how I've attempted to use the story to illustrate these beautiful truths. This section will help you to know where I'm going with it and how to use it for teaching and discussions.

Chapter 4: Redemptive Analogies and a C.S. Lewis

connection. You have most likely learned about how to find "redemptive analogies" already present in other cultures to

- teach scriptural truths in culturally relevant ways. In this section I explain how the central metaphor in Arman's Freedom is both a redemptive analogy and directly inspired by a story in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, by C.S. Lewis.

Chapter 5: Lesson Outline suggestions. Many of you would rather just organize your reading and discussion in a way that fits your class or book study. My guess is that most who use

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this for a missions-related class will organize it themselves. Others, including those who will use Arman's Freedom as a stand-alone book study, will benefit from the four lesson outlines provided.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

C hapter 1 (Wound Care)

- How did Dahag develop as a dragon that haunted Arman's dreams?
- What is Zoroastrianism? Why do you think Arman may be sympathetic to a story that comes from this pre-Islamic religion?
- Why do you think he doesn't want to tell his cousin Farzin what caused his scars?

Chapter 2 (Selamat Datang)

- Where is Malaysia?
- What is the difference between Chinese Malaysians and the Malay people?
- What are the Petronas Towers? (When they were built in 1997, they were the tallest buildings in the world)
- What are tribalism and globalism?
- The article reference in the story is Jihad vs. McWorld, by Benjamin Barber.

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- Why would Arman be afraid that people would think he could be a terrorist?

Chapter 3 (Rojak Christmas)

- For Arman, going to a Christian event felt like rebellion. Why would he feel that way?
- Why would Arman not be used to giving and receiving hugs with a member of the opposite sex?
- What does Arman's name mean?
- What kind of freedom do you think Arman longs for?

Chapter 4 (Tourist Day)

- What was the design that Arman had printed on his t-shirt? What modern symbol was used? What ancient poem was used? What did he say it meant?

Chapter 5 (Collapse)

- What does "Allah-O-Akbar" (also spelled "Allahu akbar") mean?

Chapter 6 (The Man on the Moon)

- Who was Ruhollah Khomeini? How did he become popular? (This will become more obvious later)
- Can you think of a time in history where a country or group of people thought nothing could be worse than their current only government only to be proven wrong after a change is made?

Chapter 8 (Thou Doth Protest Too Much)

- Who were the SAVAK?

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- Knowing that these protests marked the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and that this revolution has inspired Islamic extremism ever since, what surprises you about it?
- The poet Rumi is considered to be a Sufi, a mystical tradition within the history of Islam. Is there anything in this section of Moses and the Prophet that inspires you? Anything that gives you pause?

Chapter 10 (Up On the Roof)

- Why did Ali dislike Jalal at first?
- The most unique weapon wielded by the people of Iran against the Shah was poetry. In the minds of many Iranian people, including Muslims, their ancient poets are quoted in a way that demonstrates their authority. A quotation by a revered poet could hold the same respect as the Qu'ran itself.

Chapter 13 (Deep Water)

- How would you feel if you were being hunted for something you didn't do, but you believe you could have prevented if you were smarter, especially if it's going to cost those you love dearly?
- Go back and re-read the short paragraph which includes the "metallic brown snake."

Chapter 16 (Losing a Brother)

- What political movement did Jalal's mustache associate him with? Why did Ali hate them?
- What between being "saved from" something and being "saved to" something?

Chapter 17 (The Pierced Ones)

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- What are the different beliefs / worldviews Arman is struggling with?
- How did Moses and the Shepherd make him feel a little better about what he was doing?

Chapter 18 (The Cover Up)

- What is mutah?

Chapter 19 (Stairway to Darkness)

- What is it that made Arman feel like a fraud?
- Have you ever felt like you were climbing never ending stairs trying to please God?

Chapter 20 (A War You Won't Believe)

- Who is the "hidden imam?"
- Why did many Iranians begin questioning Islam?
- What seemed like Heaven ("Paradise") to Arman?
- What do you think is the appeal of the scenes in old action movies (such as Schwarzenegger and Stallone films) when they say something that's supposed to be witty either right before or after they kill their enemy?

Chapter 21 (Hiding in a Cave)

- Sometimes the conservation of nature is simply wise care of Creation. Other times it can turn into a religious worldview. How would you describe the difference?

Chapter 22 (Blood of the Martyrs)

- What is the Ashura celebration practiced by Shi'a Muslims?

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- Habib's father lamented that "the malls are full. The mosques are empty." Do you find any sympathy for his frustration? If so, how?

Chapter 24 (Fire and Shame)

- What is the chant sung while jumping over fire on Chaharshenbeh Suri?
- What's the worst trouble you ever got into as a child or teenager? What was worse... the punishment itself or certain people (especially your parents) knowing what you did?

Chapter 25 (The Ambiguity of Freedom)

- What conversation in the Bible began with someone asking for a drink of water?

Chapter 26 (The Color Green)

- What was the goal of the Green Movement?

Chapter 28 (The News)

- How has Jesus "changed shirts" with with us?
- What's the difference between being saved from guilt and being saved from shame? What does it mean that he took our shame and restored our honor?
- What does it mean that Jesus has "defeated the works of the devil?" (1 John 3:8)

Chapter 29 (Through the Fire)

- How did "Give me your healthy glow! Take my sickly pallor!" become a prayer?

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- In "Voyage of the Dawn Treader," Eustace became a dragon because of his selfishness. When he couldn't peel his dragon skin off himself, Aslan finally stepped in to do what he could not. How is this similar to Atrin removing Arman's scars? How is this story an example of what Don Richardson calls a "redemptive analogy?"

Chapter 30 (Caspian Tree)

- What does Arman's new and beautiful relationships in this chapter have to do with being "set free"? Does this change your view of Heaven?
- What honors await us in the New Creation to come?
- In traditional Iranian culture, the Persian rugs have been made with an intentional flaw to make sure the rug maker would not become arrogant and think that he is perfect. How does this perfect rug uniquely communicate the grand narrative of the Bible?

Chapter 31 (Honor Thy Father)

- Iranians - and Muslims in general - who come to Christ often report having a dream about Jesus first. How is this encouraging? Is there anything we should be cautious about? What would a biblical theology about dreams look like?

Arman's Freedom and Worldview / Chapter 2

As we engage in cross-cultural disciple making, we need to remain aware that there will be various levels of consistency between religious labels and actual worldviews. While we need to have the ability to pivot and discuss what is happening at the heart level, we also need to avoid neglecting the stated religion. Not only is this where persecution is likely to be experienced, but it is often intertwined with their ethnic and national identities as well. This section previously included a "worldview mapping tool," which attempts to help people visualize the various competing worldviews, as well as layers of identity, in a way that clarifies the task of evangelistic communication. This will be explained in an upcoming book published by B&H Academic: *The Cartography of Culture*.

There is much that can be learned through the exercise of reviewing the major points of various worldviews and analyzing Arman's Freedom through that lens. You will find that he is a mix of various worldviews.

Which worldviews stand out to you?

Animism

- Also: polytheism, spiritism, folk religion, tribal religion, indigenous religion.
- It can be seen in the idol worship and pagan religions described in the Bible. Example: Numbers 21 recounts the story of God telling Moses to make a snake of bronze in order to allow the Israelites to show belief in his ability to heal them. But in 2 Kings 18:1-4, we see that it had devolved into them thinking it had power in and of itself. The Israelites eventually treated the Ark of the Covenant this way. Like a good luck charm, with power to be wielded however they wanted, instead of understanding the power came from a personal and independent God who cannot be manipulated.

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- Attraction is it promises short-term power without any (if at all) major demands on overall lifestyle. Does not demand personal transformation.
 - The world is populated by spirit beings who govern what goes on. Gods, demons, spirits, and other unseen forces (personal or impersonal) are the real reason behind “natural” events. Material things are real, but they have spirits or other realities associated with them and, therefore, can be interpreted spiritually.
 - Often there is a faint memory of a High God, but he left us because of our actions and is now irrelevant.
 - Often, tribes or races have a special relationship with some gods who can protect them and punish them (also *henotheism*).
 - Our current problems have supernatural explanations: Evil spirits, ghosts, people manipulating spirits to place a curse on us, etc.
 - The gods or spirits are not necessarily moral. The goal is to find out how to manipulate them and/or other impersonal forces for your benefit.
 - Very often overlaps with other worldviews/religions.
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Pantheism

- Includes Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, New Age
- God is in everything and everyone. We are all God.
- Only the spiritual dimension exists. All else is illusion.
- Spiritual reality, Brahman, is eternal and impersonal.
- Everything in the universe is connected, even divine.
- Man is to be one with reality. This can often be perceived through nature.
- Suffering: Various explanations
- Comes from not being one with reality

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- Comes from our attachments
 - It is an illusion
 - Truth comes with being at one with the universe, not through rational thought.
 - No distinction between good and evil, only enlightened and unenlightened.
 - Reincarnation and karma
 - Time is cyclical
-

Monotheism

- Christianity, Islam, Judaism. Can be seen in understanding of other religions as well.
 - An infinite, personal God exists. He created a finite, material world. Reality is both material and spiritual. The universe as we know it had a beginning and will have an end. Humans were created in the image of God. We are personal, spiritual, biological, and will exist beyond this life.
 - In this life, our ultimate responsibility is to glorify God by obeying his commands.
 - Evil exists ultimately because of the choices of human beings.
 - God defines right and wrong. He has a right to punish wrongdoers.
 - Humans have sinned and need to be forgiven in order to be right with God. Most theists believe in some form of Heaven and Hell.
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Modernism

- Includes Naturalism, Atheism, Agnosticism, Existentialism
- “First truly global worldview” – Paul Hiebert

- Human reason is the ultimate source of truth. There is no truth outside of things that can be proven through empirical and material scientific processes.
 - “I think, therefore, I am.”
 - Human existence can be explained through some form of Darwinian evolution.
 - Reality is material. No souls or spirits.
 - Mankind’s problems are caused ultimately by our ignorance.
 - We need to pursue education in order to progress. Emphasis on reaching our potential.
 - The individual is of primary importance and is at the center. Emphasis on human rights.
 - Gave rise to the nation-state, based on ideas rather than ethnic identity.
 - There are no moral absolutes.
 - No life after death.
-

Post-Modernism

- There are many truths. One must not judge someone else’s truth.
- Example: The blind men and the elephant
- Various claims of how the universe came into existence can be affirmed.
- No objective truth, only interpretations. People perceive truth through their own cultural and social constructs. Humans are products of their social settings, not necessarily autonomous and free.
- “I feel, therefore I am.” We find our truth by seeking it within.
- Truth claims are a power play.
- Our main problems are caused by judging and excluding others based on race, sexuality, nationality, etc.
- Absolute tolerance is the primary virtue.

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- Suspicious of recorded history.
- Overlap with modernism
- Progress is often assumed, though it is selective (racism, understanding sexuality, “right side of history,” etc.)
- The individual is at the center of all things
- No moral absolutes

After teaching the basics of these major worldviews, students should be asked which one(s) seem to have captured Arman's heart's attention and which one(s) are relevant, even if he doesn't believe it.

Evidence of Monotheism

Dahag and his scars. The existence of a dragon torturing him for his sins is a clear sign that he feels accountable to God. Although Dahag came into existence in his dreams after exposure to both Zoroastrianism and Allah, it's clear that for most of his life he has lived with the overwhelming presence of Islam.

Pornography. Although a pure modernist or postmodernism could experience shame after being caught publicly with pornography, it seems that he feels a shame and guilt that comes from a culture of believing in right and wrong.

- The kavadi. Arman's inner turmoil as he partakes in a religious ceremony where there are many gods present is a

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revealing insight into a young man who has at least unconsciously believed in one God for most of his life.

Evidence of Postmodernism

- Arman's shirt. Arman's wearing a shirt that has the "coexist" symbol combined with a representation of the Persian poem, *Moses and the Shepherd*. And he's not just wearing it. He designed it. It's ironic that Rumi and other ancient Persian poets, though they were Muslim at least to some degree, tended to be pluralistic in their understanding of religions, which fits well with the "coexist" symbol and modern day postmodernism. A more random fact about the poets is that they tend to commonly talk about Jesus and almost never about Mohammad.
- See the full text for Rumi's *Moses and the Shepherd* at the end of this section.
- Arman's beard. Arman hates the idea of being confused as a terrorist because they are the ultimate enemy of the pluralist. Because he wants the acceptance of those inside Iran who agree with him and those outside of Iran as well, he would rather not have the beard so he could avoid this unique shame. It's only the desire to eventually have a woman that makes him take his chances with the beard.

Evidence of Modernism

- Choice. If Arman was asked, "What is the main problem with the world?" he could very well answer, "Governments who don't let you choose what you believe." Although one could say that this fits in the postmodern category as well, we see in Arman a belief in a democratic government and a free press as the ultimate answer to these problems. Today's postmodernism, on the other hand, is sometimes more concerned with the wrong

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person being offended than they are about political free speech. One part of the story that westerners will read differently is the scene during Ashura where he tells Habib to leave the partying young people alone. “Let them choose” may sound obvious to us, but this is only because we have grown up with the modernist assumptions of democracy, which devout Muslims don’t share.

Personally, I’ve always leaned toward postmodernism as his primary worldview, but I you can make a solid case for modernism as well. It’s hard for me to choose monotheism since he is so frustrated with the religious life of Iran. If Arman was a real person with whom you were sharing the gospel, it would be wise to start with gospel explanations that would speak to the postmodern heart that wants people from all religious backgrounds to be able to love each other. Eventually, however, a real life Arman would need to be convinced that Jesus is not simply a prophet, as Islam has taught him his entire life. An explanation of the incarnation and the Trinity would be absolutely necessary.

You may already know how you would fit this into your class material, but if you’re looking for a suggested outline, please consult chapter 5.

Moses and the Shepherd (Rumi)

This poem, which is prominent in the story, was written in the 13th century and is taught widely to children in Iranian schools.

*Moses heard a shepherd on the road praying,
“God, where are you? I want to help You, to fix Your
shoes
and comb your hair. I want to wash Your clothes
and pick the lice off. I want to bring You milk,
to kiss Your little hands and feet when it’s time*

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*for You to go to bed. I want to sweep Your room
and keep it neat. God, my sheep and my goats
are Yours. All I can say, remembering You,
is ayyyyyyyy and ahhhhhhhh.*"

Moses could stand it no longer.

"Who are you talking to?"

*"The one who made us,
and made the earth and made the sky."*

*"Don't talk about shoes and socks with God!
And what's this with Your little hands and feet?
Such blasphemous familiarity sounds like
you're chatting with your uncles.
Only something that grows needs milk.
Only someone with feet needs shoes. Not God!
Even if you meant God's human representatives,
as when God said, 'I was sick, and you did not visit me,'
even then this tone would be foolish and irreverent.*

*Use appropriate terms. Fatima is a fine name
for a woman, but if you call a man Fatima,
it's an insult. Body-and-birth language
are right for us on this side of the river,
but not for addressing the Origin,
not for Allah."*

*The shepherd repented and tore his clothes and sighed
and wandered out into the desert.*

A sudden revelation

came then to Moses. God's voice:

You have separated Me from one of my own.

Did you come as a prophet to unite, or to sever?

*I have given each being a separate and unique way
of seeing and knowing and saying that knowledge.*

What seems wrong to you is right for him.

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*What is poison to one is honey to someone else.
Purity and impurity, sloth and diligence in worship,
these mean nothing to Me.
I am apart from all that.
Ways of worshipping are not to be ranked as better
or worse than one another.*

*Hindus do Hindu things.
The Dravidian Muslims in India do what they do.
It's all praise, and it's all right.
It's not Me that's glorified in acts of worship.
It's the worshippers! I don't hear the words
They say. I look inside at the humility.
That broken-open lowliness is the Reality,
not the language! Forget phraseology.
I want burning, **burning**.
Be friends with your burning. Burn up your thinking
and your forms of expression!
Moses, those who pay attention to ways of behaving
and speaking are one sort.
Lovers who burn are another."*

*Don't impose a property tax
on a burned out village. Don't scold the Lover.
The "wrong" way he talks is better than a hundred
"right" ways of others.*

*Inside the Kaaba
it doesn't matter which direction you point
your prayer rug!
The ocean diver doesn't need snowshoes!
The Love-Religion has no code or doctrine.
Only God.
So the ruby has nothing engraved on it!
It doesn't need markings.*

*God began speaking
deeper mysteries to Moses. Vision and words,
which cannot be recorded here, poured into
and through him. He left himself and came back.
He went to eternity and came back here.
Many times this happened.
It's foolish of me
to try and say this. If I did say it,
it would uproot our human intelligences.
It would shatter all writing pens.*

*Moses ran after the shepherd.
He followed the bewildered footprints,
in one place moving straight like a castle
across a chessboard. In another, sideways,
like a bishop.
Now surging like a wave cresting,
now sliding down like a fish,
with always his feet
making geomancy symbols in the sand,
recording his wandering state.
Moses finally caught up with him.*

*"I was wrong. God has revealed to me
that there are no rules for worship.
Say whatever and however your loving tells you to.
Your sweet blasphemy
is the truest devotion.
Through you a whole world is freed.
Loosen your tongue and don't worry what comes out.
It's all the light of the Spirit."*

*The shepherd replied,
"Moses, Moses,
I've gone beyond even that.*

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*You applied the whip and my horse shied and jumped
out of itself. The Divine Nature and my human nature
came together.*

Bless your scolding hand and your arm.

I can't say what has happened.

What I'm saying now

is not my real condition. It can't be said."

The shepherd grew quiet.

When you look in a mirror,

you see yourself, not the state of the mirror.

The fluteplayer puts breath into a flute,

and who makes the music? Not the flute.

The Fluteplayer!

Whenever you speak praise

*or thanksgiving to God, it's always like this
dear shepherd's simplicity.*

When you eventually see

through the veils to how things really are,

you will keep saying again

and again,

"This is certainly not like

we thought it was!"

SHAME-HONOR GOSPEL

One of the most rewarding sections of my missions class is teaching about shame/honor (SH) cultures and how to understand the gospel through a different lens. It's a challenging task, considering the fact that we in the West are primarily used to understanding the message of Jesus through a guilt/innocence (GI) approach only. My own journey in growing to appreciate the breadth of SH in the Scriptures began with a degree in missions and progressed with life and ministry in Southeast Asia. Even after moving back to Birmingham, teaching missions, and years of working with adult Chinese students in a Bible study, the SH gospel was like feeling around the fuzzy edges of an amoeba in the dark and trying to explain what was in my hands.

The basic methods I've used to teach SH gospel begin with an introduction to Jayson George's *3D Gospel*, a video entitled *Back to God's Village*, followed by looking into Scripture to see what is clearly there, but is sometimes invisible to us (If you're not familiar with the SH gospel, I would recommend both of these resources before moving forward with using *Arman's Freedom* to teach this unique aspect of the gospel. You can find *Back to God's Village* on YouTube). The

conversations were beneficial, but I never knew if they would stick. After all, I know how long it's taken me to appreciate the beauty of what the Bible has to say about shame and honor. With that in mind, one of my main goals with *Arman's Freedom* was to illustrate these stunning realities.

Since I've begun using *Arman's Freedom* to illustrate the SH gospel, I've realized that even the best readers won't automatically connect many of the details of the story to the concepts I'm actually illustrating. Overall, this is great! It means that the novel is primarily reading as a compelling story and it's not overly "preachy." Filling in the gaps through conversation - and watching the lights come on - has been some of the most fun I've had in my teaching career. The rest of this section will be a guide for you to make the connections with your students.

As you read in the story, Arman desires both freedom and the respect of those who share his similar values toward democracy and religion. One of his greatest fears is to be associated with Islamic extremism or anything related to the oppressive "Government of God" in his home country. His embrace of religious pluralism is one way of distancing himself from the people and institutions he hates. This is one of the reasons why it's his worst nightmare for him to become associated with the terrorist plot to blow up the Petronas Towers. To make matters worse, the widespread video clip of him piles on the shame by adding the label of "coward" to the accusation of murder. Now he's despised by everyone - even the Iranians and those who see themselves as citizens of a global society, whose opinions he holds dear. In addition to his own horrible predicament, Arman is also paralyzed by the thought of the shame inflicted upon his parents, knowing full well that their lives have been destroyed.

Speaking of his parents, Arman already carried deep shame because of sinful actions committed during Chaharshenbeh Suri while still in Iran. The scars don't remind him of the cost to himself only, but the shame and financial ruin inflicted on his parents as well. Western novels and

movies do not typically linger on consequences faced by parents of the protagonist, so this storyline is striking. The relational consequences with Arman's parents and the world are tangible realities throughout. Even before Arman is imprisoned, his intense loneliness is always present.

Placed in a pitch black cell, Arman encounters another prisoner named Atrin, who we eventually come to know is Jesus. Atrin earns Arman's respect, first by listening with empathy, then by revealing supernatural knowledge of Arman's struggles and sin. In a conversation on the theme of freedom, Atrin points out the fact that Arman could be released from jail, allowed immediate entry into any country of choice, but would never be free from the sting of shame that hangs over his reputation. Almost everyone will still believe he's a terrorist, not to mention that they have all seen the video of him clinging to his own life instead of helping the child. He can never be free.

As gunfire erupts outside of the prison, Atrin arranges a shirt exchange for Arman, even though he didn't realize his shirt was different now, and proceeds to inexplicably give himself up. Eventually, Arman finds out Atrin had fully confessed both to complicity in the terrorist plot and to being the one in the white shirt who had clung to his own life instead of saving the child. The authorities were still looking for Arman, but not to punish him. Rather, they want to thank him for being the hero who saved the child's life from the crumbling tower.

Arman eventually looks down in disbelief only to realize that he was wearing the same green shirt as the hero who saved the child. By switching shirts, Atrin had literally taken on all of Arman's shame. This didn't just have the effect of erasing the negative consequences of jail. It provided him with a new identity which both restored and greatly improved his relationship with the people whom he loved. It also had the effect of Atrin's father now being covered in the shame of his son (Trinitarian implications of the gospel). It's a gift that is so stunning, confusing and seemingly unfair that Arman almost immediately questions how he could possibly accept it.

Such is the beauty of the gospel, as illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The son shames the father in ways that are almost unimaginable in the culture of his day. He comes back only to ask if he could be a servant. The father eschews the cultural expectations that he would expel the shame by rejecting the son. Instead, he willingly takes on the shame by running to the son and embracing him. Instead of simply being forgiven, he is brought a robe, a ring for his finger, and is thrown a party designed to both welcome him back and restore his identity as the honored son in the sight of the community.

Through a purely guilt-innocent (GI) lens, the gospel can only be understood as God releasing us from the penalty of our actions. The SH lens illustrates both an additional aspect of our sin - the shaming of our Heavenly Father - and the extraordinary gift of honor in being his beloved children. The honor goes beyond our individual feelings. Our new status is both a present and future reality in the sight of fellow princes and princesses.

We often teach righteousness as Jesus exchanging our sinful and dirty shirt for a perfectly spotless one. This is helpful to understand how we are cleansed of our sin, but the full reality is much greater, as illustrated by Arman's new green shirt. We aren't simply released from what we have done. We get credit for what Jesus has done to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. Jayson Georges, author of *3D Gospel*, writes, "God exchanges our old status as unclean, worthless, and inferior outcasts for the status of pure, worthy, and honorable children. Those who follow Christ to the cross of shame will also follow him into resurrection glory."¹

The good news doesn't end with salvation and walking with God in this life, of course. We will one day experience the joy God has waiting on us with the New Creation. While Arman experienced deep shame among his fellow Iranians, as well as others, in his dream of Heaven he is honored by Atrin as a prince – in the presence of his fellow Iranians

1. Jayson Georges, *3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Time Press, 2017), p. 40.

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as well as people from all tongues, tribes, and nations. Incredibly, he is celebrated as he walks across a flawless Persian rug and onto the pier that, to him, would be the greatest physical beauty and emotional beauty imaginable. No longer is there any hiding or concern that you can't trust someone. He is perfectly loved and experiences perfect peace with everyone there. He can love people, including beautiful women, without the slightest temptation to do, say, or think anything that would diminish their dignity. And most of all, he can look at Atrin (Jesus) and see nothing but complete acceptance. He is an honored child of God.

As you follow up on Arman's story to teach the SH gospel, I hope you have the same experience of watching the students' eyes as the concepts connect as I've had. You may already know how you're going to add this to your class or Bible study, but if you're looking for an outline to teach it, please go to chapter 5.

REDEMPTIVE ANALOGIES AND A C.S. LEWIS CONNECTION

Missionaries faced with the task of explaining the gospel to people in radically different contexts have often found bridges embedded within the culture itself. Don Richardson became known for the book, *Peace Child*, in which he recounts being a missionary in New Guinea wrestling with how to share the gospel with tribes who are perpetually at war. Eventually he discovered a practice where two tribes would give one of their children to the other tribe to be raised as one of their own. In such a scenario, it would guarantee that neither tribe would be likely to attack the other. Richardson then used this practice as a means to contextualize the gospel message, saying that God has given us his Son as a “peace child.”¹ In later years, Richardson popularized the term “redemptive analogy” and wrote about how such analogies are used throughout Scripture, including Paul’s employment of the “altar to the unknown God.”² While all analogies break down at some point, there are often practices and stories within other cultures that can be used to point to the gospel.

1. Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2005).

2. Don Richardson, “Redemptive Analogy,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 430-436. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009.

Missiological fiction provides the opportunity to explore redemptive analogies in a unique way. This became clear to me as I discovered the song sung before jumping over fire during Chaharshenbeh Suri. To me the redemptive qualities immediately stuck out.

“Take my sickly yellow pallor (or, *pastiness*). Give me your rosy glow.”

This expressive desire for new life became the central metaphor for communicating the gospel in *Arman's Freedom*.

As a fan of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it was natural for me to connect the “rosy glow” metaphor with C.S. Lewis’s famous story of Eustace Scrubbs, whose selfishness and greed turned him into a dragon. In his misery and shame, Eustace tried to use his claws to tear off the dragon skin, but all he managed to do was cause himself a great deal of pain and depression. In the height of his frustration, he encounters Aslan.

Then the lion said - but I don't know if it spoke – ‘You will have to let me undress you.’ I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

“The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know - if you've ever picked the scab off a sore place. It hurts like billy-oh but it is such fun to see it coming away.”

“Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off ... And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me - I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on - and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became

perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again..." - C. S. Lewis, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

This well-known and beloved story is a beautiful illustration of how we cannot save ourselves through our own effort nor do we accomplish sanctification by works, but all are in need of the saving grace of Jesus.

In *Arman's Freedom*, Arman is plagued by scars which he earned by foolish behavior while jumping over fire the year before in Iran. His actions, which he understands to be sinful, had substantial consequences for both him and his family, causing them all to live with deep shame. For many months, Arman had been hiding his three scars while desperately hoping they would heal on their own. His wounds, and his inability to make them heal, serve as a constant reminder of his sin.

While in a dream, Atrin - who represents Jesus - tells him to jump over a fire. Before doing so, Arman realizes that the ancient chant of "Take my sickly yellow pallor, give me your rosy glow" feels more like a prayer. Taking the leap, time slows to an impossible crawl. At first he is visually reminded of his sins and assumes that he is about to be eternally judged. Then something very different happens.

A flame shot out of the fire like orange lightning. It entered into the scar on Arman's ankle, shot up his left leg, through his torso, and into the wound on his chest, which was now emanating a dark yellowish glow. It flew out of his chest and slammed into his face, knocking his head backward. It coursed through his flesh and bones with an immobilizing force, drawing the very air out of his lungs. And yet, he began to understand that this was not a hopeless pain. It was more like a doctor wrenching a dislocated shoulder into place.

It is my hope that this parable connects with lovers of fiction in a way that both makes the gospel beautiful and helps them see how to find redemptive analogies in other cultures, such as those heavily governed by shame and honor, in order to make the gospel known. Again, you may already have thought of a way to work this into your class material, but if you're looking for a suggested outline, please consult chapter 5.

3. Ibid., 263.

LESSON OUTLINES

If you teach missions and are using *Arman's Freedom* to supplement your curriculum, I would recommend that you simply adapt the previous lessons into your classes however you think they would best fit. If, however, you are using *Arman's Freedom* as an informal missions book study, you may find the suggested lesson outlines helpful.

There are certainly interesting stories and facts to discuss that come out of the early chapters, but I don't recommend a slow approach that only discusses a few chapters at a time for each lesson. Think of this as something in between a non-fiction book study and a book club that only meets one time. There are at least two good reasons to avoid the slow approach of reading a few chapters at a time. First, they will forget major parts of the story as the weeks pass. It will cease to be one compelling novel and would feel like they watched a movie fifteen minutes at a time, over the span of months. Second, the real meat of the missiological lessons won't come to light until the end of the book.

Lesson 1: *Pre-reading – Chapters 1-15*

Introduction question: What is freedom?

- Read John 8:31-38; 48-59 and ask, “What does it mean to be a slave to sin?”
- What is the gospel?
- Transition: “Arman” means “longing.” Arman’s greatest longing is for freedom. As the story goes on, we will learn what he discovers about what this means.
- To understand the background of this book, students should know that it was born out of a multitude of private discussions with Iranians who wished they had the freedom of choice we enjoy in America. I eventually learned to turn these conversations into gospel opportunities. “I like my government better than yours,” I would admit, “but we can have freedom of choice and still choose things that make us slaves to sin. So... what *is* freedom?”
- Why is Arman in Malaysia?
- Why was he hesitant to go to the Christmas party?
- Where did Dahag come from? What do his three heads represent? (guilt, shame, and fear)
- What is the symbol on Arman’s shirt? What are the two symbols and what do they mean?
- How do you see the forces of globalism and tribalism illustrated in Malaysia?
- What did you learn about the Iranian Revolution?
- Can you think of any other times in history when an oppressive movement began with the justification, “nothing can be worse than this”?
- How are Iranians different than most Muslims? (Many things could be said here, but the main thing that sticks out to me is that they have a strong affinity for their pre-Islamic history. King Cyrus is a hero and many of them can easily imagine an identity without Islam)

- What did else did you learn about Malaysia or Iran?
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Lesson 2: *Pre-reading – Chapters 16-31*

Main topics: Recap of story and Redemptive Analogies

- In chapter 16 (Losing a Brother) Arman expresses a desire to not simply but saved “from” something, but to be saved “to” something. How does this relate to our relationship with God? How does this relate to our discussions about freedom in the U.S.?
- Who is Habib? Is there anything about him you can sympathize with? What were your thoughts when his father said, “The malls are full. The mosques are empty”?
- Habib became one of the Basij – i.e. the “moral police.” Are you aware of the 2022 protests that began when Mahsa Amini was arrested by the moral police for not wearing a hijab, then beaten (and probably raped) while in Evin Prison? She eventually died and the protests sparked by this incident rivaled the protests of 2009.
- While in a dark cell, Arman meets Atrin. The conversation begins with Atrin asking for a drink of water. Can you think of a conversation in the Bible that began with someone asking for water? (John 4. I actually organized the entire conversation between Atrin and Arman to mirror the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. If you have time, read this passage and go back over the conversation between Arman and Atrin)
- Using chapter 5, explain the concept of redemptive analogies. Then ask, “Where do you see a redemptive analogy in Arman’s Freedom?” If they don’t go to Chaharshenbeh Suri (the fire analogy), then you will need to just lead them there.

- How can the Iranian New Year practice of jumping over fire be used for an explanation of how Christ gives us new life?
 - How did it show that we are powerless to save ourselves?
 - (If none of the students have watched or read any of the Chronicles of Narnia, skip this part) Ask them if it reminded them of anything in any of the Chronicles of Narnia books/movies. You will most likely need to point out the Eustace Scrubbs connection, but I've had some people see it clearly without my prompting.
 - How can the practice of using aspects of other cultures to explain the gospel be helpful in the practice of missions? Can you go too far with it and fall into unbiblical teachings?
 - How has getting inside the head of an Iranian young person, who obviously needs Jesus, affected the way you think and feel about the unreached of the world?
 - For about ten years (circa 2010 to 2020), the fastest growing church in the world was inside Iran. How does this encourage you to believe what Jesus said about people from all tongues, tribes, and nations one day being present around the throne of God? (Mt. 24:14)
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Lesson 3

Main Topic: Worldview

- Use the material in chapter 2 to discuss the following:
- What is a worldview?
- What are the major questions that will reveal someone's worldview?
- What are the major worldviews and how do they answer those questions?
- What does it mean that many people are a "mix" of worldviews?

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- In particular, you will need to explain how modernism and postmodernism are the “antagonists” of the traditional worldviews.
 - Explain the idea and process of “worldview mapping”
 - What is Arman’s worldview?
 - Have them draw it out and ask them why they made those choices
-

Lesson 4:

Main topic: Shame / Honor Gospel

- Watch the video “Back to God’s Village” (on YouTube)
- Discussion: What is different in this explanation of the gospel than what we are accustomed to?
- Go to someone’s Bible software and have them see how many times the Bible specifically mentions guilt (English translation is assumed). Then see how many times it mentions shame. Then ask, “When you explain the gospel, how much of the explanation addresses guilt vs. shame?”
- Read Luke 15:11-32 (Parable of the Prodigal Son)
- How does the video help you to see aspects of shame and honor in the parable of the prodigal son?
- Where do you see shame / honor aspects of culture playing out in Arman’s Freedom?
- Use chapter 4 to guide this discussion.
- How would you explain the gospel to someone in a way that makes the shame / honor aspects of the gospel clear?

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