

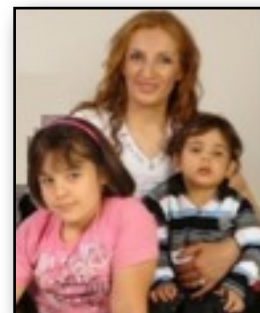
## Week 5: Pray for Behnam Irani (Iran)



**Arrest and background** Behnam Irani (42), from the city of Karaj near Tehran in northern Iran, is serving a six-year sentence for holding house church services. Born into a Muslim family, he became a Christian in 1992 and has been a pastor since 2002. He has been arrested twice (in 2006 and 2010) because of his Christian activities and his house church has been raided – security officials interrogated those attending and confiscated Bibles, Christian literature and DVDs. He is not due for release until 2016.

In prison, Behnam was placed in a cell with murderers and drug dealers and suffered many beatings from these violent men, with the apparent approval of prison officers. His health deteriorated in prison and in July 2012, he began vomiting blood and losing consciousness as a result of a chronic stomach ulcer. He received some treatment in prison but a doctor's diagnosis that he required surgery was not acted on by the prison authorities who refused to send him to hospital despite appeals from his family and also from international groups including Church in Chains.

**Family and church** Behnam is married to Christine who is an Armenian Christian. They have a daughter, Rebecca (11) and a son, Adriel (4). In December 2013, Iranian secret police raided the family home and confiscated her laptop and Christian materials. They yelled at Christine, which really frightened the children. It is thought that the raid was intended to frighten them into silence.



Behnam Irani is a pastor in the Church of Iran denomination (like Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, who was released in 2012). The Church of Iran has been described by some Christians in Iran as non-Trinitarian, although this is disputed.



**Latest news from prison** In February 2014, Behnam was finally taken to hospital where he had successful surgery. After his operation, he was visited by his younger brother (pictured left) before being returned to prison. On 5 March, Behnam's cell was searched by prison officers and secret police. They confiscated his Bible, Christian books and books that he had borrowed from the prison library. According to Iranian law, each prisoner should have access to their religious materials, but as Behnam is considered an apostate from Islam he is denied this right.

### Prayer Points

1. Praise God that Behnam was finally brought to hospital and that the operation was a success.
2. Pray for Behnam's spiritual life as he lives without a Bible to read and as he interacts with other prisoners.
3. Pray for Christine as she cares for Rebecca and Adriel and as she faces such hostility from the Iranian authorities.