

Franklin Graham hits back at Saeed Abedini over claims he failed to help the pastor after his release from Iranian prison



The evangelist Franklin Graham has hit back at his former ally Saeed Abedini, the pastor who has claimed that Graham did very little to help him since his release from an Iranian prison last January.

'It is unfortunate that Graham's efforts to secure his [Abedini's] release from an Iranian prison and provide transportation of him from Germany to America, his financial assistance to Saeed and Naghmeh ... his provision of marital counseling at no cost to them, and various offers of employment for Saeed have now been met with a bitter Facebook post about him and his ministry, Samaritan's Purse,' Graham's spokesperson, Mark DeMoss, said in a statement.

The response comes after Abedini hit out at the 'life-style' and alleged hypocrisy of Graham, the President of Samaritan's Purse who has supported Abedini in the past.

Abedini, who was arrested in Iran in 2012 and sentenced to eight years imprisonment for preaching the gospel, was released along with three other Americans last January in exchange for seven Iranians.

He wrote on Facebook that he was 'used' by the likes of Graham, the president of the charity Samaritan's Purse, saying that 'persecuted' Christians such as himself have 'always have been used with famous and rich pastors and preachers who used us for fundraising and recently because of special media attention on me some of them tried to show themselves as saviors of the persecuted churches and me which it wasn't true and right but their own benefit'.

He added: 'One of these pastors is Franklin Graham, who has about 1000,000 \$ salary and so many planes and private jets and every time he flies his gas price is just 10,000\$ means tides of 300 teachers with 3000\$ salaries and he flies a lot with his jets. He tries to show he is helping persecuted a lot and he has some speech about them but this kind of life style shows he doesn't have any idea of life of persecuted churches.

'This kind of people ask others to come to repentance nationally but first themselves needs to start the real repentance which starts with changing their life-style.'

The pastor, who is based in Boise, Idaho, continued: 'A week after I got released and Franklin Graham welcomed me home (because of the huge international media attention on me he badly wanted to be involve) he knew I don't have any place to go but he left me alone in Boise until I was forced to call him to ask money to rent a place.

'When all cameras and social media attention were gone in my life, all the famous pastors and lawyers were gone too, and just a week after my freedom, I saw myself so alone with my family while still news were talking about me.'

Abedini claimed that Graham refused to help him find a job to pay the bills or to meet Donald Trump.

He added that the subject of the 'persecuted Church' is 'always hot' in the media and makes 'people's heart melt to give financially' but ultimately only benefits 'famous rich pastors' such as Graham.

But responding, Graham's spokesperson continued: 'While he never raised money from others for Saeed or Nahgmeh [Abedini's wife], his ministry did provide funds to help Naghmeh travel and raise awareness for her husband's case, and to help her care for her two children and herself while her husband was unable to work and provide for them.

DeMoss continued: 'When Franklin Graham first learned that American pastor Saeed Abedini had been imprisoned for his Christian faith in Iran in 2012, he did what millions of people around the world did ? he began to pray for his release and for his family here in America. He also did whatever he could to draw attention to the plight of this pastor, including speaking personally to President Obama and President Putin about his situation and urging Christians around the world to pray for his release.'

Abedini is a former Muslim who grew up in Iran and converted to Christianity in 2000, moved to Idaho in 2005 and became a dual US-Iranian citizen in 2010.

While in Iran, he organised underground 'house churches' where groups of Christians worshipped together.

In 2009, while on a family visit to Iran, Abedini was detained at the airport and he agreed to cease all house church activities.

He travelled back and forth to Iran to build an orphanage over the next few years.

But he was again detained in July 2012 on charges of evangelising and sentenced to eight years in prison. Abedini, who said he was imprisoned for 'being a Christian and refusing to renounce my faith in Jesus Christ', suffered internal injuries from beatings he endured and was denied medical care during his imprisonment in Iran.

In February, Abedini pleaded guilty to violating a restraining order taken out by his estranged wife, Nagmeh, who had campaigned for his release from prison.

Graham's spokesperson concluded: 'Mr. Graham is no longer in communication with Saeed or Naghmeh ? having exhausted efforts to help them be reconciled ? and he does not intend to respond to future comments from either of them. However, Franklin still requests prayer for Saeed, Naghmeh, and especially their children who don't understand the adult issues they are facing.'

Graham has been criticised for his annual compensation of \$880,000 for his work with Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Samaritan's Purse has its own planes to carry out mission work. Graham, who is 64, has said that he wants to make enough money to be able to work for free when he turns 70.

Source : Christian Today