

God, the Internet, a Mosque, Tangerines and Christians... or one day from a techie's life.

*"It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.
Isaiah 65:24*

I serve as the IT Manager at Nile Union Academy, Cairo, Egypt. The technology here is far from being stable and reliable due to a weak electricity supply, a lot of sand/dust and unreliable service suppliers.

Obviously I am looking at this with the eyes of a westerner. If you look with the eyes of the indigenous person – we have the best infrastructure for miles around.

However good it is, we're still dependent on other people and companies to deliver services to us. Internet provision is also included on that list.

Internet outage

About two weeks ago, of the three enabled internet lines we have access to, we were left with none. During the revolution last year some cable was cut and stolen, which disabled 2 lines and this year the most stable internet line ceased.

These things usually take a long time to get fixed, and in the eastern culture even more so. Because of constant issues I got really discouraged and was ready to give up on the whole thing. We tried calling internet and telephone companies to get them to come out and fix the problems, but all we got in reply was "wait 24-48 hours", "we're working on it", "did you restart your router?" etc. Two weeks without internet on campus can be quite frustrating – especially if you're an IT Manager and you're the first person to be asked about internet. I reckon during these 2 weeks 90% of individuals on campus asked me directly about the status of the internet. My Sabbath was not the day of expectation either.

I felt powerless. I felt a foreigner in the country where I couldn't put pressure on any service provider, due to their limited English knowledge and due to my very limited Arabic. I thought I had tried everything possible.

Sometimes, being a techie guy, it is easy to think that all God cares about is people around me being converted to Christianity; He cares more about Bible classes and helping pastors, whilst techie guys just carry on doing their job.

Not that I thought God didn't understand any of this, since He is the Creator, but I always regarded technology as being boring. It is for geeks who communicate in binary. My guess is that I formed this attitude because of how the people around me looked at technology.

So one day I thought – "I have nothing to lose – I can ask the God of Heaven to help me out with this". Maybe He will be gracious enough to listen. And so I did. And so He was...

The day it all came together

I got up in the morning and the first thing I did was to pray to the Lord – I asked for guidance. "Tell me where I need to be today and do what needs done". Two minutes later – a knock at the door – someone from the office was looking for me, whilst my mobile was still switched off. The Internet company representative – Ahmed – had come to check our status. He did phone last night and said he was coming – why he phoned and decided to come – I am not exactly sure.

After I met him -he started on his checks. Some of these checks I was uncomfortable with, however I did not resist. Eventually we got out from the school to check the telephone box outside. The technician barely had any tools with him. But somehow the maintenance engineer from campus was available for us to find the ladder and the power extension cord. He was negotiating with the shop to allow us to use their power socket. The office registrar was staying with us as a translator too (I am sure she had other work to do).

Some moments later the Internet engineer has finished identifying the problem and we were standing there chatting not knowing exactly what to do next, as he said “It has nothing to do with the internet company – you need Telecom Egypt to replace the old wires that go to your school.”

God’s timing

As soon as he finished the phrase, a motorcycle turned into the small street we were in and stopped right behind us. I heard the driver’s voice, and although I did not understand the words he was saying –I realised that he was unhappy and was enquiring who gave us permission to work on the equipment. I was aware of secret police operating in the country, but I never saw one in action – especially this quick. We were out here for 10 minutes max –“that was really fast”, I thought to myself. The gentleman looked serious and unhappy. I was silent, waiting to see what would happen next.

After greetings and apologies from Ahmed I understood that the other man (Ibrahim) was the technician from the telephone company. They had their conversation and transfer of responsibilities, after which Ahmed left. Now guys from Telecom Egypt were evaluating the situation.

They gave us a price to replace the cable 1500-1700 Egyptian pounds (around £170 GBP –a full month’s salary for a worker here at the school). There was no way we could pay that. And then somehow the maintenance engineer – Malak- said that he has some telephone cables in the school’s workshop. I didn’t believe him and suggested he was mistaken, but we all went to check this. At this point I felt a little bit discouraged. But after checking - he appeared to have the exact length we required in two pieces which we could connect together.

At this point I stopped doubting and was sure God’s hand was in this and I looked forward to see it all unfold.

Christians in and on the mosque

The next difficulty was to speak to the Imam of the local mosque to get his permission to replace the cable that was running over the top of the mosque just outside our campus. In order to do that, we had to go on top of the mosque.

Now, half of our crew are Christians. And being one myself–I didn’t think this task would be easy enough to achieve especially in our current religious and political climate. But here is what happened - Imam was shopping for tangerines from our farm, right at the gate when Malak spoke to him. “How often does this coincide?” –I thought to myself. Malak spoke for me too... and the Imam gave his permission!

By that time I was amazed and only could think “Wow, that is great, thank you, Lord!”. Kate (my wife) has bought me a camera for use on such occasions.

Shortly we made our way towards the mosque and entered it from the ground floor, underneath the prayer hall. There was another person responsible there and we all shared greetings with him. Eventually he led us up the stairs to the top. As we were waiting for the key to the door –this gentleman spoke to me and with my little Arabic I managed to have a short funny conversation.

Finally, the key was brought, the door opened and as I took my shoes off –he asked me quite seriously – “Are you going there too?” I decided to stay humble and respectful even before we got to the mosque, so I simply left it under

his authority by replying “Yes, can I, please?” I think he was either a little bit stunned or disarmed by this question- he simply replied, “Yes”.

As I proceeded through the door into the prayer hall and straight round the corner towards the ladder leading to the roof, he asked another question. This time I did not understand him. After seeking help from my other Arabic friends, I heard the question, “Are you going to help there ?” I felt that he was really asking me “Are you not going to cause any trouble for you and me?” In response I just nodded and he let me proceed.

All this time I thought to myself- “Am I not the unrighteous person in the eyes of these people, and yet they let me enter the house of their prayer? Surely God’s hand is in all of this”.

Whilst being on the top of the mosque I took several pictures of our campus. We never had such pictures before, or could dream of even having them, and yet God provided this unique opportunity!

When the work with the cable was completed (we paid only 100 L.E. around £10 GBP) to the telephone engineers for their help. And even then –it was only baksheesh, a polite, not strongly required payment.

When the three of us –Normeen the registrar, Malak the maintenance engineer and I made our way to the school –we had another pleasant surprise. In the office –the breakfast was served and nobody had eaten yet. The office staff members were waiting for Normeen before they would eat. We just made it on time for the little feast. Even the office doors were shut for about half hour.

Once again, God has proved himself to be a wonderful God with His own timing and His unique way of dealing with things and providing surprises.

“He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights”. 2 Samuel 22:34

