

Watch What God Can Do!

Ruslan is a man who makes for good stories because of how he interacts with so many other people. I have heard many stories from Ruslan and even more about Ruslan from others. He lives in a majority Muslim world. The following is one of my favorites, which I heard some years ago.

Ruslan would walk to church every Sunday morning, and a small group of thugs started to bother him as he made his way to church each week. When asked about his bloody nose or bruised cheek, he made light of it, but this continued for several weeks. (I wondered why he didn't find a different route to church, but I never asked him about it.)



Typical Ruslan talking with a friend.

It was another Sunday morning, and Ruslan was walking to church. The biggest thug saw him coming and approached Ruslan. Sensing another unpleasant experience, Ruslan remembered he was wearing the new wristwatch he had recently received for his birthday. He slipped the watch off his wrist and held it out to the looming figure before him. "Here. This is a gift for you, my friend."

The thug stopped and looked at the watch. Then he took it, put it on his own wrist, and let Ruslan go his way.

Ruslan made it safely to church, and after the service that morning, one of the women talked with Ruslan and asked him a favor. She told Ruslan she was very concerned about her son Dilshod – he "was hanging out with some unsavory people." Would Ruslan come over and pray with her for this straying child? Ruslan agreed, and they set a day and time when Ruslan would visit this woman and pray together for Dilshod.

The day came, and Ruslan made his way up the stairs to the woman's apartment. He knocked loudly on the door and waited. A minute later, the door swung open, and Ruslan saw a hairy arm—wearing his watch! Yes, the wayward son of the woman, whom Ruslan had come to pray for, was Dilshod, the thug who had received Ruslan's watch.

It didn't happen right away, but God softened this young man's heart. You see, Dilshod saw something different in Ruslan. Ruslan and his mother were praying diligently for him to come to faith. And one day, he did just that. Dilshod, the thug, became Dilshod, the former thug, when he surrendered his heart to Jesus.



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It wasn't too much later that Dilshod knew he needed to help other young men who were going astray. So, he started a boxing class as part of Ruslan's church. Dozens of boys joined Dilshod's boxing class and began to hear about the love of Jesus through this former thug. Many of those boys also put their faith in Jesus.

This work of God was all possible because Ruslan, instead of fleeing those who wanted to harm him, said, "Here. This is a gift for you, my friend." Ruslan enacted the words of Jesus when He told us to love our enemies. And more souls were won for the Kingdom.

When I asked Ruslan if I could share this story, he reminded me that God is the one who changed Dilshod's heart, not him. Ruslan suggested I change his name because he did not want to be painted as a "hero." But Ruslan is a hero of the faith. Naming him inspires us and will not detract from his eternal reward. And after a short discussion, Ruslan agreed I could use his name.

Ruslan also shared that Dilshod was the leader of his gang, and he was determined to shoot Christian pastors. Years later, Dilshod is still following Jesus and is an elder in his church.



Dilshod, Ruslan, and another friend today.