

Why am I a Missionary to Muslims?

E.J. Martin

Four medical staff of Jibla Hospital in Yemen were gunned down in a morning meeting. Bonnie Witherall was shot on her way to a maternity clinic in Sidon, Lebanon. Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry were arrested in Afghanistan for showing a video on the life of Jesus. Martin Burnham was kidnapped and murdered in the Philippines. Four countries. Five missionaries killed. Two detained for months. And this list includes only some of the North Americans who have recently made U.S. headlines.

Being a missionary among Muslims may seem to have suddenly become a dangerous business. Actually, it's nothing new. Nor is it a dangerous occupation only in Muslim countries. Yet in light of these recent atrocities, it's reasonable to ask: Why do missionaries to Muslims intend to carry on with our work?

First, perhaps it's useful to sort through some of the reasons we can rule out.

E.J. Martin holds a master's degree in education and worked for several years in a Muslim country, where her husband was accused of distributing Christian literature and jailed for several months without being charged.

I am not a missionary to Muslims for any political reason. Many (although not all) Muslim nations are governed by various repressive regimes that pay mere lip service to the notions of human rights. Of course, I am particularly concerned about the basic human right of religious freedom. Under the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Those who would oppose this are opposing human rights and the most fundamental principles of freedom of belief and expression. In most Islamic countries, I have found that Christians have the freedom to become Muslims, but Muslims enjoy no such freedom to change their religion. Though I am appalled by this hypocrisy, bringing political change is not my aim. I am not interested in ensuring that

the West wins a so-called "clash of civilizations," because I believe there could be no winners in such a clash.

I am not a missionary because I wish to lure needy people into a soul-for-food trade. This accusation rankles. First of all, it assumes the basest of motives on the part of Christians who leave the comforts of their own homes in order to provide compassionate humanitarian aid. Secondly, it assumes that I think such "conversions" would have any real meaning—as though I'm playing for points in heaven. Finally, such a ridiculous scenario insults the intelligence



Bonnie Witherall,
OM missionary
killed in Lebanon

Inducements

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of Muslims. Inducements would not lead to genuine spiritual change, and everyone involved would know it. This is a ruse thrown up by cynical on-lookers.

I am not a missionary because I have a martyr complex. Though

The Qur'an agrees with the Bible on this point: God converts whom He will.

I realize there are dangers, I don't wish to pay the price my recently fallen colleagues have paid. We are not wild-eyed weirdos, recklessly throwing away our lives. While we take reasonable precautions to protect ourselves (as I have done in writing under a pseudonym), risk is inherent in what we do.

The lifestyle of the missionary does come with certain perks. I enjoy adventure and travel, as do many of my colleagues. Our children benefit from their multicultural exposure. We enjoy experiencing new places and foods. We (mostly) enjoy the challenge of language and culture learning. Yet the fascination of adventure fades as quickly as most infatuations do. Thankfully, deeper affections take root.

For example, I enjoy my life as a missionary to Muslims because I have made many Muslim friends. As they show me the world from their angle, they enrich me. I discover in them a common humanity—people who love, hope, fear and dream as I do. I have even found in Islam many things that we can affirm together as true about the holy God.

Through knowing each other, we lay waste to the fallacious stereotypes that would pit our cultures against one another. I am eager for my friends to realize that I as a Christian join them in repudiating the moral degradation that the so-called "Christian West" represents for them; my life is not a Hollywood movie. On their side, they are eager for me to realize that not all Muslims are terrorists. Of course, some of the murders and atrocities dominating the news were

committed by terrorists who claim the cause of Islam. But for every Islamic jihadist, my colleagues and I know many more peaceable, loving Muslims as our friends.

Still, this is an insufficient answer to the question of why my colleagues and I choose to be missionaries.

Jesus Christ gave us the reason when he walked the earth: Do unto others as you would have them do to you. If I were poor and living in Yemen or Jordan, would I want someone to come and help me deliver my babies safely? If I desperately wanted to work but had no

am. I have been given so much. Do unto others ... Can our society no longer understand the Golden Rule?

Have I "converted" Muslims? My Muslim friend tells me that the Quran agrees with the Bible on this point: God converts whom He will. I honestly cannot convert people, but I am compelled to tell them the message that reached through history and touched my heart. Closeness to the holy God is an exquisite banquet, that we cannot keep to ourselves. We will not eat and let others starve. So yes, I have told friends about this exquisite banquet. God's forgiveness available through

Jesus the Messiah, an abundant life, independent of outward circumstances, the promise of life in heaven with the creator who made me. I'm grateful to the person who invited me to the banquet. My life has absolutely been changed for the better because of it. I have had the privilege of seeing other people's lives changed. And I have held the hands of Muslims who have endured rejection, prison and torture because they found life with Jesus worth this cost.

Will we missionaries to Muslims go home because of these recent, brutal murders? Taken in its historical context, this violent reaction to the message of Jesus is nothing new. I've heard about a fellow who was thrown into prison and warned by the local religious officials to keep his mouth shut about Jesus. The Apostle Peter's response? "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." 🌐



Closeness to the holy God is an exquisite banquet that we cannot keep to ourselves.

job skills or capital to start a small business, would I want someone to help me learn and loan me a little money until I could get my feet on the ground? If I had no clean water to drink, would I hope for some help to drill a well near home?

Jesus also tells me, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded." I grew up in small-town America. Loving parents. Plenty of food on the table. Top-notch education. An enjoyable career. Entertainment. ... Solid middle America. But when I compare my life to the rest of the world, I see how exceptionally wealthy I