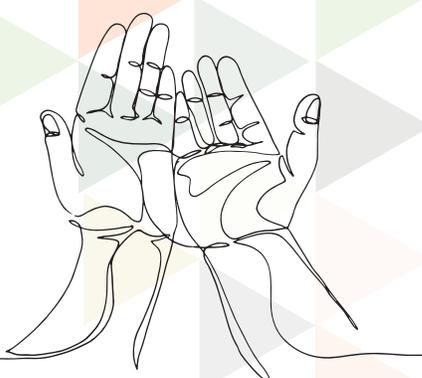


Jihadist's Passion Turned to Jesus and His Word



Youssef, a native of the Middle East, followed his father into Islam from an early age. His father's passionate example as a devout Muslim inspired Youssef to walk in the same path. Even as a young boy he responded to the call to prayer five times a day, he fastidiously fasted during Ramadan,* and he passionately embraced the other Pillars of Islam.*

As a young man he was one of the leading Jihadists* in his community, urging people to not even talk to unbelievers, and calling anyone who was not like him a *Kafir*, which means an infidel or unbeliever—one who rejects Allah and the tenets of Islam, denying his dominion and authority. In Youssef's zeal for Allah, he decided to emigrate to Northern Europe, believing he could convince everyone to follow what he believed and convert all of them to Islam.

But the True God of the Bible was working in Youssef's life in unanticipated ways.

In an effort to learn the language of his new country, he sought out and was assigned a translator from his home country to teach him. He found the man to be very kind and caring, and after some time, they became friends.

As their relationship grew, the new friend told Youssef that while they came from the same country, unlike Youssef, he was not a Muslim. Youssef was shaken deeply by this revelation—so much so that he virtually could not sleep for nights on end after hearing the news. It also drove him to keep pleading with God to lead him to the truth. On the fourth sleepless night, Youssef shares that he had a vision of Jesus, who shared the truth that Youssef was so deeply longing to discover. He felt compelled to confess his need for Christ and profess faith in Him. **Amazing, yes?**

These events happened just as Youssef was about to marry a woman from his old hometown. He decided to proceed with the wedding without disclosing his experience of the vision of Jesus or telling his bride-to-be about his conversion.

After the wedding, he told his wife what had happened. She too was shaken deeply and made a commitment in her heart to search all the Koran to find a way to bring him back. But she was also conflicted that ISIS members, who claim to be devoted followers of Islam, were at the same time killing their own people in her beloved Middle Eastern country. Not knowing where else to turn, she did as Youssef had done: she began pleading with God to reveal the truth. **In time, God did just that!**

Today they have three children and the whole family loves Jesus and is growing to love His Word in their CBS studies. Youssef's previous passion for Allah, Islam, and the Koran has been refocused on Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible—so much so that Youssef is applying to attend a small Bible school.

Their passion for Jesus has also drawn them to reach out to their family back home. They recently shared with fellow CBS leaders that much healing—physical, emotional and spiritual—is

*Understanding Islam

معرفة الاسلام (fahum al'islam)

*Ramadan — the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and the holy month of fasting. It begins and ends with the appearance of the new moon (approximately 30 days). It is less a period of atonement than it is a time for Muslims to practice self-restraint. While fasting from food and sexual activity during the day is expected during Ramadan, it is more broadly interpreted as the obligation to refrain from all forms of immoral behavior, including impure or unkind thoughts.

*Pillars of Islam — the five duties incumbent on every Muslim: *shahādah*, the Muslim profession of faith; *ṣalāt*, or prayer, performed in a prescribed manner five times each day; *zakāt*, the alms tax levied to benefit the poor and the needy; *ṣawm*, fasting during the month of Ramadan; and *hajj*, the major pilgrimage to Mecca, if financial and physical conditions permit.

*Jihad — (Arabic: "struggle" or "effort") a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning of the term jihad depends on context; while not always the interpretation, it has often been translated in the West as "holy war." Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong.

taking place. One example Youssef gave is that through praying for his father, who was very ill, God graciously granted healing. Youssef's family now knows that Jesus indeed can heal, and that this new faith journey Youssef is on is good.

It is a journey from radicalism to restoration, with CBS helping to guide them along the path.

Another Dream and Another Call to Action

Miriam was born into a Muslim family and was taught from her early childhood how to fear God in everything. She grew up believing that she had to work hard to have God's approval and to receive the blessing of marriage and a family of her own.

For many years she lived her life in this way until she met Jesus, who opened her eyes to see Him and her heart to receive His love for her. All by herself in secret, she began to discover the truths of God's Word and sought to know Him more. As she did so, her eyes were opened to see the many family members and neighbors who also needed to meet this loving God. So she started asking Him what she should do.

Miriam told Abdel (pseudonym), our Middle East/North Africa Regional Director, that God came to her in a dream—giving her a promise that 5,000 people in her city also will come to faith, enter His kingdom, and follow Him.

Part of the vision was that, in some way, she would be a "mom" to all of them, caring for their needs and leading them closer to the Savior and to each other. So she began to invite people to her small home and act on what God told her in the dream. And people are responding! There are 70 people in her church now—60 percent of them are younger than 20 years old. **She views these new Christ followers as simply the first-fruits, and she is specifically asking for 4,930 more people to become part of God's family.**

Recently, a CBSI training was held very near to Miriam's home. Abdel and other CBSI leaders were helping new believers read and understand the Word through CBS studies.

During this gathering Abdel witnessed four new baptisms, bringing the total number baptized in the town to 13. This simple act of faith is no small thing in Islamic contexts, as it often leads to total ostracism of those who follow Jesus through the waters of baptism. In fact, because these followers made this commitment, they were kicked out of their homes by their very own families. **Pray for them, please!**

In spite of this oppression, the number of believers is growing. Abdel, Miriam and the other Christ followers in the town are praying for 27 more CBS study groups to come out of the last training. They reach out without fear of what will happen. Their heart for their people and commitment to care for their own is an inspiring example of the Body of Christ.

So please let me encourage you to take time to prayerfully and carefully reflect on what you just read, and as you do so, may God's Spirit prompt you to pray and give as He leads you. With the rapid growth of the MENA Region, our need for resources for translation, training, travel costs, and associated expenses is likewise rapidly growing. Our MENA family needs you.

Other Notable Developments In MENA

In early May, **the first major MENA Conference and workshop gathered about 40 leaders** from the region and the European Union in a Middle Eastern country. Senior CBSI leaders from Europe and the USA were also in attendance. In addition to spending significant time praying for God's direction and protection, Children & Youth Ministry training was held, as were talks on the history of CBS, our Five Essentials, and Relational Networking Leading to Collaboration. Some leaders from the host country attended—a strategic country with a long reputation of being highly resistant to the Gospel. This prompted an immediate response from them to hold another, larger gathering for training as soon as possible.

In June, **a major Children & Youth Ministry training event is taking place in Egypt.** It will involve 200 workers and servant leaders. The potential impact for the spreading of CBSI C&Y throughout Egypt is absolutely huge. These are challenging and, at times, dangerous days for believers in Egypt, so please pray for their protection—as well as for the training and its ongoing impact.

With gratitude,



Keith Spartzak, International Director

To partner with us financially, you may donate online at www.communitybiblestudy.org/giving, or by mail to Community Bible Study/790 Stout Road/Colorado Springs, CO 80921.