

# From Bandung to Baghdad: A Journey to the Inside

by Jamie Winship

What I'm going to tell you about our approach to sharing the faith with Muslims, anybody can do. You can do it here, in the Middle East, or anywhere. Workers on the field don't do it because they don't believe that God still speaks to us, and they don't believe that the Word of God is what it says it is—living and active, sharper than a sword. We're always trying to prove it, instead of letting it be what it is.

On the other hand, sometimes, just reading the Bible doesn't work. There has to be some kind of human interaction with it. We were in Baghdad, Iraq, running classes. A graduate student came up to my wife and said, "I need someone to teach me something about a book I have read." My wife said, "OK." The student pulled the book out of her purse—it was a New Testament—and said, "I've read this thing so many times, but I don't understand anything that it says." So my wife worked through it, and that student was the first Muslim whom we saw come to Christ in Iraq on that trip. In six months we had 10 study groups going in Iraq, both Sunni and Shia.

This is an edited transcription of a talk given at the 2008 ISFM conference. Some names have been changed.

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*Jamie Winship graduated with a degree in Criminal Justice and served as a criminal investigator. After a distinguished career in law enforcement, he earned an MA in English and began his teaching career at the University of South Carolina in 1989. While an instructor he became intrigued by the possibility of going to a conflict area to work in a non-western university setting. For many years, Jamie and his wife Donna have worked in such contexts in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Jamie is the author of many articles and has won several writing awards.*

## *Beginnings*

After I graduated from college, I started working in the police department. I had no interest in missions even though I had had a great time in college student ministries. When I graduated I went straight into the Police Academy, and got married the day I graduated from the Academy. When I came to Christ, I thought, "I'm going to heaven, I don't care about anyone else." But when I went into the police department, my attitude changed because then I started to deal with the parts of humanity that a lot of people never see. I saw how hopeless those people were, and how no one really cared. We call them the night people. The day people are out, then they go to sleep and out come the night people. So, I started working with these night people. It was all human desperation, lostness and tragedy. It was in those years of my working in the police department as a detective that God began to really teach me something about lost people. One lesson I learned was this: sometimes the person that we think

is our enemy, who we are ready to destroy, is our best friend.

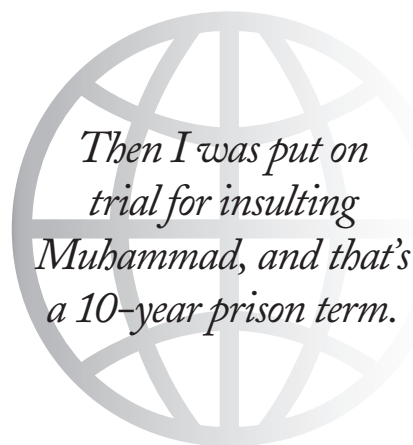
The Muslim world turned out to be very similar to that. After I left the police department, I went to graduate school. My wife and I were both education professionals, so during our first term on the field, right after seminary, I was hired by the Indonesian government to teach at the University, and my wife worked for the New Zealand government. Our missionary strategy was this: get a group of Muslims together, tell them that the Qur'an is from hell, that their prophet is not a prophet, that he's really a pedophile, and that he's deceived by Satan. After that we would invite them to come to church with us.

It didn't work. I gave them tons of books on what's wrong with the Qur'an. They would give me double the books back on what's wrong with the Bible. We'd have 70 students in our house, talking about Jesus. They loved all that, then we would get into some sort of polemics, invite them to the Indonesian national church that was there, and they'd never come back again.

Then I was put on trial for insulting Muhammad, and that's a 10-year prison term. It was miraculous what happened at the trial, but at the end when I came out, the Muslim man who basically saved my life came up to me and said, "I know what you are trying to do. And I know you think this is what God wants you to do and I understand that. But you better find another way to say it. Because every time you open your mouth, you offend us. I believe what you are saying, but you better find a different way to say it. Because it's going to get you in trouble and no one is going to listen to what you say."

It really struck me. We had not seen any fruit in three years. We were in our third year, nothing was happening, we were just making people mad and got threatened all the time. What do you write in prayer letters after three years of nothing? "We're planting seeds," or something like that? We were not

seeing any impact. We started to say, "Lord, what is this? Are these people too hard? Are we doing something wrong? And if we are, what is it?" We love God, we pray all the time, there is just nothing happening. We felt like if people were going to send us money to go to the field, we'd better do something in return. When I was a cop, my captain would say, "I want 25 felony arrests by the end of this month." You learn how to do it without getting killed. If I came back at the end of the month with no arrests, or only three, and complained to my captain that



it was hard, he'd say, "I know. You're fired." There's no job where you can fail to have any results. And we work for the God of the Universe.

It was really frustrating. The breaker was when my wife had a birthday party for one of the girls at the University. The girl's father was the head of the community. After the party the girl was crying, "No one ever celebrated my birth like you. No one. Not even my own family." She said, "Donna, I love you, and I love your marriage, and I love the way you talk to your kids. And I love the way you talk about Jesus. But I have a question. Can I have Jesus and be a Muslim?" And you know what I said? "No." That's how I was trained. When you're in a crisis you do what you are trained to do. You don't think that much about it.

My wife and I were almost at the end, and I told her friend "No" at her birthday party. We were all so heart-

broken, so we left the field after four years and came back to the States. We said, "God, if you are not going to do anything out there, if it's going to just be us out there taking money from people and not doing anything, we'd rather have cable, we'd rather be in air conditioning. What's the point of this? Show us what we are doing wrong." We really besought this.

### *A Paradigm Shift*

We went back to Indonesia, on a different island. We were both teaching: Donna was the assistant principal at an international school, I was head of the language department. We were teaching all kinds of students—European, Muslim, American and some MKs. In the one class I was teaching I had two MKs. One was Australian and the other American. In the hall I heard the two girls talking. "Where's your dad this week?" "Oh, he's out on the Islands." "What's he doing up there?" "Oh, they had another village come to Christ." Now these are two words I'd never heard together: 'another' and 'village.' I was happy to see one *person* come to Christ. And they were talking about another *village*. In my meetings with Muslims I didn't have ongoing dialogues with people because I would offend them so quickly that they would leave and not come back. I didn't know what they meant and they didn't know what I meant. Now, we were in a new place, and I said to this high school girl, "Can I meet your dad?" I knew if a guy was seeing that much fruit, he had to be a heretic. Isn't that true? A missionary that bears a lot of fruit is doing something wrong. He is never mentioning Jesus, or something. It has to be!

That girl's father turned out to be Nick S., who is one of the best I have ever known in Muslim work. We invited him and his wife to our house, and I said to him, "I've been on the field, this is my fifth year. We've seen maybe four people come to Christ. They are fringe Muslims that we can't use for anything because they are already outside of Islam. I heard your daughter saying

‘another village,’ so could you teach me what you do?” Now, my motivation for asking him to teach me was so I could see that what he was doing was wrong, or syncretistic, or whatever, so I could go back to being content that we weren’t seeing anything happen. And he caused me great stress, because he thought winning Muslims was fun. He said, “Well, I can tell you the secret. Do you have any Muslim friends?” And I said, “Not really.” He said, “Here’s the secret: make a Muslim friend.” Because, see, I just argued with them. You need a Muslim friend to get the thing going. That would be a good beginning. So he said, “Go find a rich Muslim. Make sure he loves Islam more than anything else. Make sure he has been on the Hajj at least once. Find that guy, tell him you want to study the holy books with him and another American guy. Invite him, and I will lead it.” So I said, “OK.”

Do you know why he told me those characteristics? Why a rich guy? Influence. And it would be a guy who doesn’t need anything or want anything from me. The Muslims that we are working with in the Middle East are all wealthy professionals. They love Islam and are very successful. All of our guys who have come to Christ are hospital administrators, doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants—that’s who we work with.

So I went and found a guy who was the president of a large multinational corporation in Southeast Asia. He made a little bit more money than me, had graduated from a well-known American university, been on the Hajj, and was a fanatic Muslim. His name was Husni. I invited him to do the study, and he said, “Sure, I’ll come.” He actually wanted to come, which was kind of shocking. So we started to meet with him in a 5-star-hotel lobby because this guy was a rich guy, and we wanted a place where he would feel comfortable. Nick met me there an hour before our first study. We prayed together for Husni, and Nick said, “Here’s what’s going to happen. We’re

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going to spend at least four hours with him, and at the end of the four hours, he’s going to agree that the Bible isn’t corrupted, he’s going to be willing to consider that Jesus did in fact die on the Cross and is divine, and a couple other things.” And I thought, “Yeah, right. This has got to be total syncretism here.”

So Husni comes, and Nick opens up the Qur’an. I had never done that, the Qur’an was a book from Satan to me. And he opens it up and starts. I’d never heard anything so Christ-centered as what he did from the Qur’an. It was different from what I had ever heard before. But when he started, it was on Jesus, Jesus plus nothing. Husni and I were both sitting there stunned. At the end of the four hours, Husni did not want to leave, he wanted to keep going.

Over the course of a year and a half, he came to faith. He would come every week, we never had to call him. I’d never seen anyone this hungry. And he was such a heavy-duty Muslim. Nick was teaching back and forth from the Qur’an and the Bible. One night Husni didn’t show up. His driver drove up to the hotel and came in with two presents for Nick and two presents for me. One was a beautiful shirt with gold buttons that they wear in Mecca, and the other was a Cuban cigar. What does this mean? And Nick said, “He’s in the kingdom. He’s in.” I said, “When did it happen?!” And he said, “Jamie, it’s been happening all along. We’ve been walking towards it all along. You’ve got to get it out of your head that is has to be ‘Tuesday at 7:30 it happened.’ This is kingdom. We’re walking him into the kingdom. And he’s decided he is going. And he is telling us.”

All along, I observed Husni’s life changing. He came in one night and said, “I wrote a letter to my extended

family in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. I haven’t been the best family member that I could be. I’m going to help this brother, and I’m going to fly all of them here once a year so we can be together.” The Spirit was changing him. Another week he came in and asked, “How do you date your wife?” We were not asking him to tell us anything, we were just studying the Bible, but he confessed that he had a mistress and said, “I got rid of her last week. How do you date your wife? What do you do?” So we started a date night. It was about the third date night that his wife came to want Christ. She was thinking, “I don’t know what this is, but I’m taking it. This is awesome.” Their marriage got really good, and we never talked about marriage again.

The most amazing thing of all happened when Husni invited us to a cookout at his house. He had also invited every employee that was under him, from the people that clean the bathrooms to his executive staff. We were all in his house, all the janitors and cleaners who had never sat in chairs before. Of course, his executive committee were sitting over on the side, they were so disgusted. (Doesn’t that remind you of the Bible?) Husni was cooking goats on the spit, and he was serving the people. His executives were shocked and grossed out. So Husni got up and made a speech. He said, “I know I am a really good boss, but I can be better. Here’s what I am going to do. I am starting an educational program for all of you guys. I am sending all of your kids to school, we’re paying for it. And a training program for you, to make you come up through the company.” He pointed at one guy, who cleaned the bathrooms, and said, “My goal is for you to come through the training program, to come up and take his job.” And he pointed at the VP. He did this on his own.



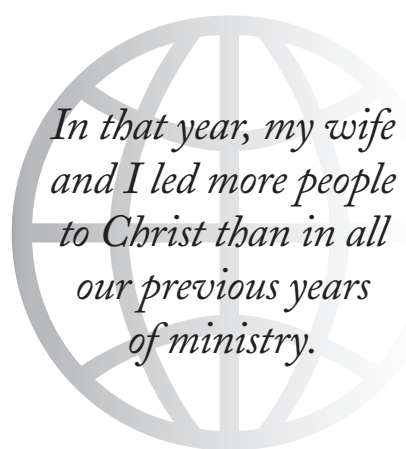
After Husni gave us the cigars, he soon told us that he had resigned from his position. He said, "I don't need all of this." He went to another Middle Eastern country to reach Muslims for Christ. We had never talked about missions. That's how the Spirit of God works if we get out of his way.

### *Bearing Fruit in the Middle East*

After we had learned this Insider paradigm from Nick, we started trying it, but I still wasn't bearing any fruit. So I was talking with Jack C., who was one of the guys that worked in Indonesia, and he said, "Here's your problem. There's not a technique to do this. Now you've got the tool, but the problem is, you keep telling God what he can do and what he can't do. Stop telling him that, ask him what he wants to do and do whatever he says." Now that was a huge theological shift for me. So we started to change, and in that year, my wife and I led more people to Christ than in all our previous years of ministry. I'm not talking only about Muslims. We had a French community group. You don't have to be an American to become a follower of Christ. It was an amazing four years of learning the insider methodology, and how to talk to them as Muslims in a way they could hear and understand.

In the Middle Eastern country where we are right now, in six months we had several key leaders come to Christ, both men and women. (Usually what happens is, you get a lot of women and no men. So we asked the women on our team to hold off until we could get a big group of men together and then let them loose to go get the women.) We had key guys come to faith really quick. We prayed through that strategy. We had a guy come to the kingdom who went the same day and got his best friend, who also came to Christ, went out and got his cousin. These guys went right through their families in about a week. They would share the gospel with a laptop reciting in Arabic what the Qur'an says about Jesus. Our first guy, Ali, who is now getting his Ph.D. in the United States,

had a government lawyer call me who told me he had dreams about Jesus. He asked me to meet with him, and I agreed. I didn't know him. I wanted to see how our Muslim guy shared his faith. Ali and I met the lawyer at a big two-story Starbucks, really crowded, where we got a table against the wall. (I knew there was secret police in there, and you've got to watch out for those guys.) When the lawyer came in, I asked him if he wanted to meet a Muslim who had gone on this journey already. So I introduced them and asked Ali to explain it to the lawyer. So



Ali opened up his briefcase, took out a chart and taped it on the wall in the Starbucks. It was a chart of his spiritual journey. And he had this little pointer. I tried to duck down, but someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around. It was a woman, and she said, "I can't see the chart, can you move over?" So I learned that these guys really aren't afraid, because of the way they are sharing their faith as Muslims—Muslims that are following Jesus.

I heard Ralph Winter say one time, "When a Muslim or anyone comes to Christ, the first thing you tell them to do is tell their father." We really took that to heart. When our guys come to faith, we say, "Go tell your father or mother." So they go home, and this is what we teach them to say: "Father, you know, I understand now what you have been trying to teach me through the Holy Book. I understand that you were trying to teach me into all the

Holy Books. And I have read them. And now I understand who Jesus, or Isa, is, and I have embraced the sacrifice of Allah, and I so appreciate you teaching me to look for that. You are a great father." You know what the fathers do? They say, "That's good. What do you mean that's what I taught you?" And they share the Good News with their families. It is all done with respect, because that's how we view the Qur'an. It's a pointer to the gospel.

Here are three examples of the kind of things we can do.

### *Bringing Down the Dividing Wall*

Once we got invited to speak to 250 graduate students from different Palestinian universities about life. Some of the Palestinian guys that came to Christ started to talk in their neighborhoods, and they saw that the people there were really depressed, they were basically in concentration camps. So we agreed to come and talk to them.

Palestine is a very depressing and very hostile place. We all gathered in a conference room, and I started out asking, "How many of you have talked to an American before?" None of them had. So I invited them to ask me any question, which was a stupid thing to do. They asked questions I just couldn't answer, questions like this: "OK, you are a Christian country, right? You believe in Jesus, right?" "Yes." "We revere Jesus. Why do you unconditionally support a political state that are atheists and spit on the name of Jesus and say Mary was a liar who got pregnant? Why do you support them so unconditionally?" I don't know how you would answer that question, but my answer was, "I don't know. I've never thought about it, really." Most Americans don't think like that. So the Palestinians asked all of their questions, and then I asked them a couple of questions. "What would be good news to you guys? What would be really good news?" They are living behind a 30-foot wall. Their kids are growing up behind a 30-foot wall that they can't get out of. "We don't care

about Israel anymore, we're sick of the fighting. We will take Israeli rule, just get us out of these walled concentration camps." They can't move. So, they said, the really good news for them would be freedom, to get that wall out of there. I said, "What is your strategy for doing that? Every battle you have fought, you have lost. So let's strap bombs on each other and blow each other up—is that accurate? That's not a very good strategy. I can tell you how to get rid of that wall, guaranteed. Want to hear?" I opened up my Bible and read Ephesians 2 out loud to them, which says,

Remember that at one time you were separated from Christ, excluded, utterly estranged and outlawed from the rights of Israel as a nation. But now in Christ Jesus you who once so far away through the blood of Christ have been brought near for he himself is our peace. He has made us both Jew and Gentile and destroyed the hostile dividing wall between us. By abolishing in his flesh the enmity caused by the law with its decrees and ordinances. He annulled it, that he from the two might create in himself one new man out of two so making peace. (Eph. 2:12-15)

"So," I said, "It seems to me that if you want that wall gone it has something to do with knowing Christ. Anyone that wants to talk about that, we will be here all week." Guess how many came to talk about that? All of them. Some came to Christ.

### *Kingdom Circles TV*

Another time, a short-termer working with us shared the kingdom circles with a shop owner. The shop owner wanted to hear more, so the short-termer brought him to us, and we did a study with him. He turned out to be a sheikh who had a weekly television show on Islam. In the end, right before my wife and I left, we gave him a Bible (we only give them a Bible if they ask for it). When we came back next week, he had read 18 chapters of Matthew and all of Revelation and was asking me to explain Revelation

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to him. I said it is the last book of the Bible for a reason, and we needed to start at the front. I told him we can dialogue for our entire lives, and be best friends, but without Christ we can never be one. He didn't get it, so I showed him Cornelius. He said, "This man is a Muslim!" And I said, "He is, you're right. But he needs Peter." People always ask me, when a Muslim comes to faith, what do they give up? They have prayer, do they give that up? No. They give, do they give that up? No. They follow the law, do they give that up? No. There's nothing they give up. Instead, everything they do becomes not a form of duty, but an act of worship. Peter and Cornelius are not best friends dialoguing; Peter has given Cornelius something he was longing for and they are one in Christ.

Then we started talking about the Passover, and the sheikh said, "Oh, I see what you mean: the Passover is so that the blood of Jesus needs to be painted over our heart, right?" (You can't tell a Muslim what to say. They have to say it the way they say it, because that's what they are going to say to their friends.) And then he added, "We need to make pamphlets so I can tell other Muslims about this. And you need to tell the Christians about this!" So, he did the kingdom circles on his television show and said he came up with it. Later, when we met with him for our study, he said that he embraced the sacrifice from Allah, and we prayed. The following week he was on his television show, talking about the mark of the blood on your heart.

### *Proposal Writing in the Kingdom of God*

One more example is from another Middle Eastern country, where the government approached our company with a request. (We have a for-profit

company license by the country's government. So when people ask us what we are doing there, we just tell them we are there to make as much money as we can. They say, "Oh, OK. That's fine," and never ask us again.) The government told us, "We have done a year-long process of selecting the top 26 college graduates in this country. We are putting them through a year-long training program, and we would like you to come do a section for them." This is how good our reputation is. I got elected as the one to do that section. The program was run by the country's government in conjunction with the local government, and the director was a local Muslim. He told me these guys all had really bad attitudes because they knew they were going to be the best in the country, and he wished me good luck talking to them. The second thing he warned me about was, because this was run by the government, we could not talk about politics or religion.

There's no way I was going to be in a room for two days with the top 26 graduates in the country and not talk about my relationship with God. On the first day, right at the beginning, I asked them their names (so I could tell how many Muslims, Armenians, or Christians there were in the group), their degree and their passion in life. There were two Christians out of 26. Everyone's passion was the same thing—money. So I said to them, "Wow, I really learned something about you guys. You're all selfish." It got really quiet. "Is money all you think about? I'm in here to teach proposal writing. I've read a thousand proposals in my career. When I pick up one that has no passion in it, I throw it in the trash. Money is not a passion, that's just selfishness. Passion means to suffer. Passion goes out towards other people, selfishness comes in. I'm in a

room with 26 selfish people and I have to teach you how to write a good proposal? I can't do it. The only way you can write a good proposal is if you are filled with passion about something in life." I drew a big circle on the board. "The only place that I know where a person can really gain passion is inside the Kingdom of God. So now I know we have two things we need to accomplish in the next two days. One, how do you get into the Kingdom of God. And secondly, what are the mechanics for a decent proposal because you have to be able to write a proposal." So I did the kingdom circles, and while I was doing it, the executive director came in the room. I was explaining proposal writing in the kingdom as he was staring at the diagram.

We went through two full days with these students. They were all engineers, because that's what you are if you score the highest in the country. I got to find out who they really were. We had people who wanted to be dancers and people that wanted

to work with pets and handicapped people. They started to really share. And when they wrote their proposals, they wrote about these things in life that they really cared about.

There was one guy who would interrupt me all the time through the training. But God always gave me the right thing to say to him. I would tell stories, and this guy would start crying because it was really moving to him. And the executive director would come in and out all the time. In the last hour he asked the students, "I want to hear what you think of these last two days." And they all said, "It was life-changing. The most inspiring thing I have ever heard." The guy who had cried started crying again.

At the end of the training I taught the two Christians how to share their faith with Muslims. When I was talking to the Christian girls I asked them what they thought I was doing. They said evangelism. "It's not like what we would do, but that's what you're doing, right?" And I said, "Yeah. Do you see

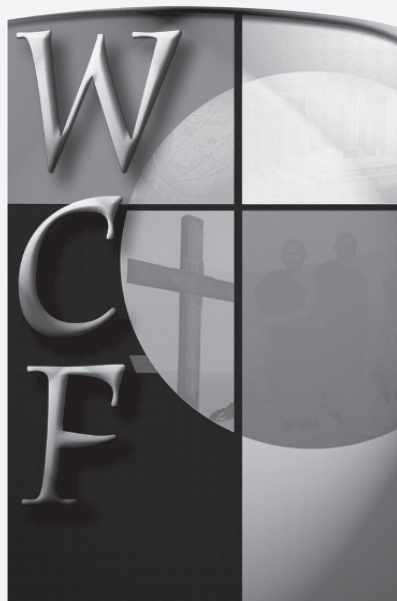
anyone mad at me?" "No." "Do you see anyone who wants to kill me?" "No." "This is how you should share your faith with Muslims."

Later on the students were dismissed from the class, and the guy who kept giving me a hard time said, "You know, I had a job interview at noon today. But I couldn't go because it's so important what you are saying. I really appreciate it, I really do."

As the executive director was walking me out to my car, he said, "We need to sign you guys up right away to do another course. I'll contact your company, and as long as you don't talk about religion, we're good."

The reason these things happen is because our team and others believe that God still speaks, and his word still cuts. Thank you. **UJM**

## World Christian Foundations



General Editor Ralph D. Winter

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