

What I Learned Meeting With Families of 21 Beheaded Christians

I just came back from Egypt.

I had the chance to personally meet with the families of the 21 men who were beheaded by ISIS for their Christian faith. We met at a local church instead of their homes for safety reasons. It is difficult to put in words how glorious and eye-opening the experience was. I think it will take me weeks if not months to capture it all, but here is how it happened and  what I learned from it.

Back in February, I was online scrolling through my Facebook feed. Squeezed in between articles on The Kardashians and bunny BuzzFeed videos, I noticed the story of the 21 Christian men who were beheaded by ISIS because of their faith in Jesus.

My heart sank and I was struck by the news for several reasons. Some of the thoughts that raced through my head were:

- How painful must this be to the mothers, fathers, brothers, wives, sons and daughters of those young men?
- How come this is “just another story” and is less important than celebrity-related news?
- Why are we, in the West, so ignorant and lack compassion toward injustices in other parts in the world?
- What can I actually do to make a difference? (We all know complaining about it online doesn’t actually make a difference and neither does blaming political parties)

I was stuck with the last question; I just couldn’t move on without having an answer. What can I *actually* do to make a difference?

Being an Egyptian myself, I made some phone calls and found a way to reach those families of the beheaded men through local churches. Those families didn't just lose their loved ones in a very barbaric way, but they also lost their main, if not their only, source of income. Keep in mind that in third-world countries, there is no social security income, food stamps, paying jobs for women in villages, free health care or public schools.

Once I knew those families could be reached, I decided to create an online campaign to raise money for the families. I skipped work that day and I created the campaign with a video.

After getting an incredible amount of public support and many generous donors, \$38,155 was raised. I decided that raising the money wasn't enough and I wanted to be there to personally meet the families. A couple of friends decided to join me; they took off work, paid for the trip out of their own pockets and joined me on this journey.

I went thinking that I was making a huge difference to the lives of the people. Thanks to the donors, I was making a huge difference. However, what I didn't know is that those families were possibly making a greater difference in my life than I was in theirs. After having the chance to chat with them, I was once again in shock at what I heard: 

- They have *forgiven* those evil men of ISIS who brutally murdered their loved ones.
- They have *hope* in what's to come despite the circumstances.
- They have *faith* and confidence that their loved ones are in heaven.
- They had such an unbelievable level of *gratefulness* for what we were doing.

This has put things in perspective for me. How many times have I had unforgiveness over small mistakes done by those who love

me? How many times have I been easily offended over posts on social media? How many times have I doubted God's goodness over small unanswered prayers? How many times have I been so ungrateful when things didn't go my way? and how many times have I had no hope over small problems I was facing? I am so thankful for this trip, and I believe every person in the West should consider taking the time to go to a third-world nation and spend time with the poor. There are valuable lessons about faith, gratefulness and hope that money can never buy.

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