

# Why the Middle East?

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In John's Gospel, we read about the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus. Most of what's focused on is how Jesus rescued her from sexual sin, and rightfully so. But have you ever stopped to think about why Samaria? Why that woman?

I spent the summer in the Middle East and met a friend who drew me back to this story over and over again. She was beautiful and kind, eclipsing all the generosity the region is known for. One evening, she invited two friends and me to *iftar*, the evening breaking of fast during Ramadan.

After eating we sat around playing with her toddler brother and chatting. I asked her what her greatest dream in life was, and the answer was more eye opening than I could have anticipated. She talked about traveling and getting her master's degree. Her eyes shone as she smiled and spoke of her dreams.

But then it was like a switch flipped. She said she would get married in the next few years, and children would bring happiness. My heart broke a little. Her eyes and face had faded back to normal as she spoke of marriage. She had these beautiful dreams for her life, but she was struggling to reconcile them with her identity as a Muslim and the duties that come with it. She could not find peace in who she was and what she desired out of life.

As I prepared for this mission trip, I constantly was asked, 'Why the Middle East?' Of course, it was easy to say, "Well, God said 'go,'" so I'm going." But at the end of the summer, my answer has changed a bit.

My conversation with my Muslim friend was not super-spiritual or gospel-oriented in its intention, but I realized the depth and reality of her lostness. She was made in the image of the Creator to worship and glorify God, and

her identity will never be at peace apart from him. The reality of the lostness of the Middle East was undeniable, and after looking at it straight in the face, there was no way I could ignore it.

When Jesus went to Samaria, he probably got the same kind of question: Why Samaria? Respectable people, especially Jews, never went to Samaria. But when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, he never let her sin define her. He looked full into the face of her sin and offered salvation. He understood that she, and all of Samaria, was lost, and the only remedy was himself.

So, why the Middle East? Why Muslims? Because they are lost. My friend was my woman at the well. She was the first time I truly understood the depth of lostness and the urgency for the gospel, for her and the Middle East. So that is why I went, and it is why I will return: They are lost.

*Madi is a University of Houston student who spent the summer serving in the Middle East with Go Now Missions. Her last name is withheld for security reasons.*