

# INVITING OTHERS ON THE JOURNEY



Nine men had been sitting in the small room without electricity on a hot September day for more than two hours. It felt like they were studying the Bible in a sauna. Opening a window or a door to let in a breath of air was too risky since a passerby might overhear their discussion. Still, no one wanted to cut the time short—especially not Rashid.

Rashid and the other men had each traveled several hours to gather for more than four hours a day for five days and learn new ways to grow in intimacy with Christ and connection with His body. They were studying the Sermon on the Mount and the book of James together. Rashid had been a disciple of Christ for nearly five years and he had been actively sharing his faith for most of that time. Now he felt this gathering was equipping him both practically and spiritually to strengthen his fellowship with other disciples in the area where he lived to the north.

That day, however, as the heat grew more oppressive,<sup>1</sup> Rashid's mind began to wander in spite of himself. He thought about the joy he'd felt each time one of his friends had turned to faith in Christ. Still, his joy was far from complete as not one of the other nine members of his own household had come to faith yet. Nearing 50 and living in the daily dangers of Yemen's prolonged conflict—alongside the added risk of participating actively in discipleship activities—Rashid wondered how much time he had left to reach them. In that moment, it was not the words of the teacher or even the Scripture passage that gripped him. Instead, it was the youngest member of the group gathered that day who captured his attention—a Yemeni boy not yet 18. "He's my son's age!" Rashid thought, as faith leaped in his heart. "And he's here studying and learning with us—and more focused than I am in this heat! There's hope for my son, too!"

When it came time to close in prayer, Rashid asked the group to intercede with him for the Holy Spirit to draw the members of his household towards faith in Christ, and they did so gladly. Weeks later as Rashid sat among a group of disciples near his home, he would keep thinking about the boy who'd been present on that hot September day. His brothers' prayers from that day remained with him, too, giving him hope that one day his whole household would share his faith. In the meantime, Rashid would keep sharing with them, trusting that God was working to produce fruit from the seeds he had been sowing among his loved ones all along.

As we enter 2023, pray that God will continue to strengthen the connections between Yemeni disciple-makers like Rashid as they proclaim Christ's promise of peace in a country that has been split into many parts by nearly eight years of conflict. "In the midst of the destruction, new Yemens are emerging," explains one analyst, "waiting for sufficient political will from either local or international actors to acknowledge it."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, some analysts are already acknowledging a Houthi victory in Yemen. Despite the lapse in October of a six-month truce in the nation's conflict of more than seven years, the Saudi-led coalition has shown little stomach for remobilizing its military intervention in the country to pre-truce levels.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the Houthis control 80 percent of Yemen's population and have been fortifying their military capacity, including by increasingly recruiting children to build up their forces during the truce, as well as by strengthening relations with Iran. In November, the US Navy said that it had seized more than 70 tons of Iranian rocket and missile fuel on a ship bound for Yemen. For the majority of Yemenis who live under Houthi rule, this bodes of a future with few personal liberties or basic human rights. The lull in fighting has already given the Houthis increasing bandwidth to enforce limits on freedom of speech, opinion, and mobility while also imposing their sectarian ideas on society.<sup>4</sup>

In December, our brothers and sisters in Yemen facing these bleak realities celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ into circumstances not so far from their own. Over 2,000 years ago, God took on the flesh of an infant in a far-flung outpost of an imperial police-state. On top of this foreign tyranny, His people were further oppressed by local religious elites wielding an ancient legal code to repress broken men and women with brutal punishments and social exclusion. As an adult, He would continue to identify with the marginalized and His first followers would later write stories of a man who spent His time among the poor and the outcast, among tax collectors and prostitutes, and other sorts of sinners. He shared His table not with those who measured up and reflected well on Him, but with those who didn't. These He taught not with a complex, systematic theology—but with intriguing stories holding deep truths that called them to a radical way of life. A way of life built not on fear or power—but on love. A way of life built not on guilt or shame—but on grace and truth. A way of life built not on privilege and status—but on justice and mercy. May His love and grace and Truth flood our hearts anew in 2023 and may we consider together with our brothers and sisters in Yemen who else we might invite to journey alongside us in the Way He called us to live.

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1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR1VdQKaVSo>

2 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/12/18/republic-of-fear-a-return-to-yemen-after-11-years>

3 <https://fpif.org/facing-houthi-victory-in-yemen-us-changes-tactics/>

4 <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/yemen-in-limbo-no-war-yet-still-no-peace/>