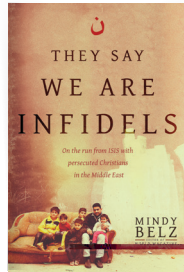


MEET AUTHORS...



MINDY BELZ

Author of
*They Say We
Are Infidels*



Sharon: Mindy, the theme of this newsletter is unity among the believers. You've spent a good part of the last ten years among our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, and you write about it in your upcoming book, *They Say We Are Infidels*.

How did your book come about?

Mindy: It's the product of thirteen years' worth of reporting in Iraq, starting with the first trip I made there before the war. For that, I crossed the Tigris in a motorboat to avoid Saddam Hussein's spies, who watched reporters constantly. Once I discovered the diversity of Iraq, and the vibrant Christian community there, I kept going again and again to chronicle their survival. It was a blessing that I stayed away from official channels from the outset, because that is how I came to see the people of Iraq in a fresh way, to see them as more than pawns in the Sunni-Shia strife we've always heard about.

As an international reporter and editor, you've covered wars and uprisings in many countries. Why did you choose to make Middle Eastern Christians the subject of your first book? What do these men and women have to teach us?

Mindy: This is the one that just wouldn't leave me alone. Every time a fresh hardship arose for the Christians, in particular, they found (and continue to find) ways to draw closer to one

another, closer to God. That's a story you never get tired of telling.

What advice can you offer your fellow authors who also might be writing about emotionally charged events—in their own lives, or in the lives of others?

Mindy: Well, it doesn't come together overnight. I probably started thinking about this book in 2005. A decade ago. But it's important to do the homework, and I didn't know enough to write this book then. I don't know enough now! Writing, especially about a different culture, you have to recognize you are an apprentice to the process, to work hard and pray a lot. And there is a remarkable group of close friends, family, and colleagues in this work around the world, who pray for my work. I know that sustained everything. Writing about one thing means giving up a lot of other things (showers, for instance, sometimes), and the job of a reporter and then a magazine editor were my first priorities. Not to mention family: In the decade of reporting on Iraq, my four children graduated high school, then college, and two got married.

How does your book help readers move to action to help the broader Christian community?

Mindy: I hope it humanizes Middle East Christians and the rich culture they are part of. I hope it takes away the caricature everyone in that part of the world lives under, that they are all suicide bombers and terrorists, fighters and malcontents. I dream that it will arouse our leaders in the West to the important human dimensions to all geopolitical decisions, and to take seriously the plight of Middle East Christians—not only for their sake, but also for the sake of what these Christians have contributed to Muslim life and to all cultures everywhere.



You have been trained as a journalist. How was writing a book different from writing magazine articles?

Mindy: I began this process confident the book format would allow me to tell stories that didn't fit the format of a 2,500-word article. I quickly found that 100,000 words wouldn't be enough! The process of writing, then rewriting, deciding what to add and what (and often who) to take out, was a huge challenge. Staying true to the stories of real people throughout, checking facts and sequences and quotes across time zones and language barriers all proved challenging. Plus I began by writing about events that happened twelve years ago. I found I could trust my memory more—and sometimes less—than I ought. And that's where willing subjects came in, and I became so grateful for the Iraqis' and Syrians' willingness to be part of this story, and to allow me to pester and question them again and again.

All authors want their books to give readers something valuable. What is it that you want readers to come away with after reading *They Say We Are Infidels*?

Mindy: I want readers to come away feeling that they know someone, or many someones, in the Middle East. I want readers to feel a personal connection to their story, because they've come to identify with a mom, a breadwinner, a family trying to pull together.

Can you connect the reference in the Scripture I cite above about clothing ourselves “with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” and how we Christians in the West can love our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East? How can we love in a way that binds us together though we are worlds apart?

Mindy: Think it's just what I said above :). Love comes when we build relationships, and when we come to care about what happens to someone, whether they are next door or nine time zones away.

On a lighter note . . . I imagine you've met with notable world leaders in your work. Among those and the other people in your world, who would you choose as your guests at a dinner party? And what would you serve to them?

Mindy: That's a fascinating question. So much of my work has been focused on street-level reporting centered on the “average” people who are the cast in *They Say We Are Infidels*. And I'd prefer having dinner any day with a group of them, all with fascinating stories and piercing insights. World leaders, I imagine, have scripted answers for everything, though in Iraq I have great respect for Kurdish leader Barhim Salih and Yazidi member of parliament Vian Dakhil. Having folks like them sit down with American political leaders in an election year would be eye opening. The menu would have to be Middle Eastern: lamb kebab and biryani with grilled eggplant, but perhaps American ice cream and apple pie for dessert.

What do you read for pleasure? Any favorite authors?

Mindy: I have a strange reading life, and for the last year it's been consumed with books about the Middle East and the early church. And I take pleasure in those books! I do recommend *The First Thousand Years* by Robert Louis Wilken, a very accessible history of the early church that has a surprise on every page. And I think a really important book for



American Christians is *A Wind in the House of Islam* by David Garrison, about how God is drawing Muslims to Christian faith. I am currently enjoying *The Supper of the Lamb* by Robert Farrar Capon. I actually enjoy reading books about gardening, food, and cooking, and I do like fiction but I don't have much time for it; the real world is too absorbing.

Finally, what has God been teaching you lately?

Mindy: My work and this book give me the privilege of having my perspective stretched at all hours of the day. And that includes my perspective of God, who made the world and called a people to be his own because he takes pleasure in just those things. So on the darkest day we can see our struggles and frustrations in the light of his joy and delight. Jesus despised the cross “for the joy set before him,” and that joy includes you and me. I want to see God’s joy set before me in such a way that all “crosses” in this life fade.

Thank you, Mindy
