

MAZHAR HAS HELPED ME SORT OUT WHO I AM

by Nabil

Nabil's life has many parallels to that of Mazhar. He came to Christ as a young man in the Arabian Peninsula and eventually also married a Westerner. He has been involved in the publishing industry and now works with an NGO based in Europe. He came to know Mazhar several years ago when he edited some projects for him and he currently serves on the board of Mazhar's publishing company.

For many years I questioned my personal identity, especially at the beginning of my faith journey as a Christian. I struggled to understand how someone can still be the same person after knowing Christ as he was before, even though he has gone through such radical changes. Particularly, I have struggled to maintain my identity both as an Arab and as a Christian, and to function in the way I was brought up, with my background, education, family values and, most importantly, my political views. My relationship with Mazhar helped me to understand where I stand and to see my faith from a different perspective, all of which has brought about a change in my approach to these identity crises.

Mazhar's approach has been to seek to walk on the dividing line between Christianity and Islam. His own testimony and life experiences have formed his views:

- His dramatic conversion
- His early experiences with Christians, both Arab and Western
- His search to find his own authentic expression of faith in Christ, while still

honouring and remaining true to all that is good in his own culture

Together, these moved him to a position where he retains and affirms as much of his Arab culture as he can and is as sympathetic as possible to his people, recognising the importance of their culture. Mazhar exemplifies a godly desire to be as close as possible to the Muslim people whom he loves. He consistently models this balanced approach to his identity and cultural heritage.

Mazhar illustrates his perspective with good examples of how we can believe in Christ without being insensitive, and in his novels he seeks to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians. Building on the common Middle Eastern heritage that the Christian faith shares with Islam, he demonstrates the importance of removing Western cultural and religious trappings that Muslims erroneously associate with Christ, and encourages all to follow the Christ who first walked the Middle Eastern road. These values have had a great influence on me and have given me the assurance that I am, after all, still Nabil.