



Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies' Table Our Journey Through the Middle East

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Is it really possible to love one's enemies?

That's the question that sparked a fascinating and, at times, terrifying journey into the heart of the Middle East during the summer of 2008. It was a trip that began in Egypt, passed beneath the steel and glass high rises of Saudi Arabia, then wound through the bullet-pocked alleyways of Beirut and dusty streets of Damascus, before ending at the cradle of the world's three major religions: Jerusalem.

Tea with Hezbollah combines nail-biting narrative with the texture of rich historical background, as readers join novelist Ted Dekker and his co-author and Middle East expert, Carl Medearis, on a hair-raising journey. They are with them in every rocky cab ride, late-night border crossing, and back-room conversation as they sit down one-on-one with some of the most notorious leaders of the Arab world. These candid discussions with leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas, with muftis, sheikhs, and ayatollahs, with Osama bin Laden's brothers, reveal these men to be real people with emotions, fears, and hopes of their own. Along the way, Dekker and Medearis discover surprising answers and even more surprising questions that they could not have anticipated—questions that lead straight to the heart of Middle Eastern conflict.

Through powerful narrative *Tea With Hezbollah* will draw the West into a completely fresh understanding of those we call our enemies and the teaching that dares us to love them. A must read for all who see the looming threat rising in the Middle East.

Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies' Table Our Journey Through the Middle East Details

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From Reader Review Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies' Table Our Journey Through the Middle East for online ebook

John says

There's an interesting idea at the heart of this book: namely, the notion of two Americans traveling to the Middle East in order to have personal sit-down conversations with people Americans generally associate with "the enemy." Seems like a slam dunk, right? And yet, author Ted Dekker goes about this book entirely the wrong way, ensuring that readers will gain very few new insights from reading it.

The first problem is Dekker's writing style: it's all over the place. He doesn't seem to know what kind of book he's writing. Despite the book's focus being squarely on personal conversations had with Muslims, Dekker writes much of the book the way he would write a thriller--constantly emphasizing the potential danger he was putting himself in, and reminding us to the point of exhaustion how scared he generally felt throughout. We also get lots of background information on Dekker and his co-author, as well as a blow-by-blow account of how the idea for this book first originated. None of which gets us any closer to understanding our "enemies" in the Middle East. But, let's face it, this is a tour of the Middle East coming from a writer who spent his nights at The Hilton and The Mariotte and who bought (or at least seriously considered buying) a set of brand-new Tumi luggage for the trip. Wow, how adventurous!

Then there's the interviews themselves. In my opinion, they are something of a wasted opportunity. Many of the questions (What's your favorite joke? What's your favorite color?) are designed simply to "humanize" the supposed enemy. However, how many Americans really have trouble visualizing Arabs as human beings? And what real value do these questions have? In my opinion, virtually none.

The interviews (which should be the heart of the book) are generally very short, and most of the people Dekker interviews give the same general kinds of answers. Yes, most Muslims want peace. No, they don't generally hate all Americans and wish us dead. All well and good, but Dekker never seems to consider that his interviewees, who knew full well that Dekker was a best-selling author working on a book that could significantly affect people's perceptions of the Middle East, might sugarcoat their answers for him just a bit. Dekker doesn't address the bothersome fact that the Koran gives Muslims permission to lie to infidels if it serves to further Islam.

Personally, I'm very willing to believe that the people Dekker interviewed were being genuine, but that's still no excuse for what amounts to fundamentally sloppy journalism. In order to make this book of any real value, Dekker needed to ask some follow-up questions--as well as basic questions a bit more prying than "What's your favorite color?" or "What do you think of Jesus?" Yes, there are lots of misunderstandings and problems with communication between Muslims and Christians. But that alone is not enough to explain why so many Christians are being killed for their faith in Muslim countries. And, when hearing all these Muslims talk about how much they despise Bin Laden for his actions on 9-11, I still can't help but wonder why the Muslim community isn't doing a lot more to discourage terrorist acts. But, thanks to this book, I at least know now which colors they like.

Kata says

Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis travel through the Middle East in the summer of 2008. The book on the surface seems to be simply conversational, but the more I read (well actually listened - this was an Audible book for me) it became more than just conversations with some unique people. The book made me feel introspective. It also made me contemplate how Americans view others from various countries and how they view us. Perhaps the biggest question from this book is from the Bible whether it is possible to love one's

enemies, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Bible.

A bit into the book a parallel story begins, the story of Nicole. She is traveling abroad seeking her familial roots. Nicole's story is a bit distracting. I'm not sure her story contributes any real value to the book for me.

Would it be true to say there are moments in your life in which you truly care about how you are perceived and other moments when you could care less? Would you agree that some moments of perception are critical?

Dekker and Medearis asked various people from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem a variety of questions. Most of the questions were like something you might see on eHarmony. For instance:

What kind of music do you like?

What makes you laugh?

What movies do you like to watch?

What books do you read?

It was during each question and answer session with each interviewee that I had that moment of critical perception. I felt like I was trying to decipher every response in a psychological and sociological manner. I was intrigued by the responses and wondered how true to fact they were.

The book is a bit steeped in religion of various types. I'm not sure whether that would turn off some readers or not, but I enjoyed just listening to the conversations of this book. And I think for me that was the predominant tone and what I walked away with imprinted in my memory. The impression various people had of American and their answers to questions like, "what makes you laugh?"

Humanity has such similarities no matter where you live. I think that is the greatest lesson to pull from this novel. Maybe you are good Samaritan if you simply understand that?

At the very end of the novel, Dekker writes, "Along the way I'd reached into my most reliable source, my own imagination, to relive the parable of the Samaritan...or as you've come to know it, Nicole's story." Nicole wasn't real at all - just a fictional addition to the book to convey a story. I'm glad I didn't too caught up with her character and plot - after all it was reality I sought in this book, not fiction.

lisa elis says

I don't know why I took so long to read this considering that it was in the house for so long! We had it even before I knew who Ted Dekker was or how awesome his books are. But I finally have read the whole thing, and it was amazing!

First off, it's nonfiction. At least, I think most of it is. It tells about Ted Dekker and his friend Carl Medearis going to the Middle East. The book jacket asks this question, Is it really possible to love your enemies? and this is what they went to find out. I have always been a fan of real life adventure stories, especially missionary stories. So that is one point for this book.

I don't actually know all that much about the authors whose books I read, and that is another reason this was

fantastic. I got to know Ted Dekker a bit more, and see how he himself was a "protagonist" (fascinating). And now I can see one reason why the theme about loving ones enemies is so prevalent in some of his books.

The whole journey was so interesting. I got to see another culture and world through his eyes, and the fabulous thing is that that other world is so real! It exists here on our earth. I learned a lot. I was inspired. I love seeing new places, meeting new people through books -- and these were real places and people.

There was a story in here too, besides the journey of Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis. I am not entirely clear if it's true, or fiction, or based on real life. But it was amazing! It's about a girl named Nicole who goes to the Middle East to find her father whom she knows nothing about. And it's like a retelling of the Good Samaritan story! That was so remarkable! I LOVED it! And I was thinking when I finished, why don't we do Biblical retellings more often!?

The only negative thing I have to say was that I wasn't that fond of how the book alternates between the Ted's and Carl's journey and Nicole's story. It's a bit confusing. I think it would have been better if there had been two parts to the book, one for each of these adventures. I first read the true journey, and then went back and read Nicole's story.

But it was fabulous, guys! Inspiring! Go read it! I recommend 100%. Five stars!

Debbie says

Frankly, I think the authors missed the point of Jesus' teachings. It wasn't that, if we're failing to "love our enemies," we should look to the enemies for answers because they understand how to do it better than we do. But that's how they took the "good Samaritan" parable.

"Tea with Hezbollah" was a travelogue of the Middle East (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Israel) filled with mundane sight-seeing, historical information about the area, and interviews with influential Muslims and a few commoners. Americans who only know what the newspapers or TV news says about the area will learn new information, but I found most of it rather superficial. Dekker put his experience in writing fiction into making this book an easy and exciting read.

A short history was given for each area, but unfortunately I spotted a number of errors throughout these sections and some parts, like the first part of the tale of Baalbek, were highly speculative to the point of being unreliable. His conclusion in Saudi Arabia that women rule the country from behind the doors would probably make Qanta A. Ahmed (author of "In the Land of Invisible Women") laugh.

Most of the interviews were very short and superficial. Only one or two had any length or contained anything of importance--and I had a feeling that one of the ones with substance was kept mainly because it had all the exciting elements of a novel.

Since the authors felt that all war and conflict would disappear if we knew "the enemy" on a personal level, the following questions were the focus of the book's interview transcripts: "What kinds of things make you laugh? What is your favorite joke? What does your wife/children/grandchildren do that makes you laugh? Do you have any hobbies? What is your favorite movie? What about Britney Spears? What makes you sad? What would you say are American's greatest misconceptions of Muslims? And what are Muslims' greatest

misconceptions of America? When asked what his most important teaching was, Jesus answered that it was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. And to love your enemies. Are you familiar with this teaching?"

So a reader learns a lot about their personal tastes, a sentence or two per interview about what Muslims think about Americans, and a sentence or two about how Muslims view Jesus and Mary. You only get a glimpse of what the Qur'an teaches about Isa (Jesus) from these interviews since the focus was mainly on the similarities between the teachings of Jesus in the Bible and the teachings of Isa and Mohammad in the Qur'an.

Ted Dekker made a number of "all/none" generalities in the book, which I found odd for a book trying to move people past stereotypes.

I thought the authors were Christian, and the book description seemed to imply it was a Christian book. This wasn't the case. The authors constantly criticized Christianity. The authors stated their faith in God but referred to Jesus as a man, a great teacher, and lumped him in with Martin Luther King and Gandhi. They also stated that they don't like being called Christians, and Dekker seemed to view organized religion (including Christianity) as the cause of all war and conflict.

Basically, I don't recommend this book if you're looking for a deeper understanding of what it means to love your enemy. They never find an answer. If you desire a better understanding of the conflict in the Middle East, then there are better books on the subject.

This book was provided for review by the WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group.

peter says

When I first heard the basic concept for this book, I was curious and excited to read it...

Take two American evangelicals and send them to visit the Middle East. Provide them access to a truly remarkable network of contacts and give them a simple set of questions to ask. Stand back and watch the worldviews shift and rearrange.

Which is apparently what happened, and I'm glad. There are a number of ways it could have gone much worse.

Maybe I should just stop there, but having just finished the book, some things are fresh in my mind:

- The amped-up, "high-energy" writing style is inappropriate to the subject matter. This is a complicated topic and an incredible opportunity. But instead of getting to the point, the author spends much too much time talking about himself and his fears. Here's a sample:

"I am a writer cursed with powers of observation and even greater powers of imagination, and by this point a hundred or so scenarios were now so real to me that our driver became the kidnapper, whisking us away to a compound where we would spend the next ten years until the United States finally broke down and sent Rambo to free us."

Maybe he's trying to get me to identify with his feelings, but I just wanted him to get out of the way so I could listen to the people he was talking to. I felt like I was reading all the outtakes and missing the real story.

- In chapter 4 and woven throughout the rest of the book, a side story about a woman named Nicole is introduced, which quickly becomes the most interesting part of the narrative. We are supplied with names, dates, places, and events, and given to believe that she is a real person with an extraordinary story. Her life becomes a powerful example of the story of the Good Samaritan. Except that it's not true. In fact, she's entirely made up. On the *second to the last page of the book*, Dekker writes, "Along the way I'd reached into my most reliable source, my own imagination, to relive the parable of the Samaritan...or as you've come to know it, Nicole's story."

At this point, I almost threw the book across the room. Wasn't there one, *true* story to be found among all the conversations that could have served the purpose? And if it is truly impossible to find a Good Samaritan in the real world, why didn't we spend some time talking about *that*, instead of making up a complicated fiction to fill the space?

- I had other disagreements with the structure and style, but maybe I should just make my point: I have traveled in some of the same parts of the world and have had similar conversations. I have seen the complexity of the problems and felt some of the frustration that comes from trying to find answers. But I have also seen grace at work in some of these same dark places. I believe there is hope, but it only comes with great sacrifice and great love. And I believe that Dekker actually stumbled into it again and again throughout his journey.

But instead of realizing this, the book ended with a shrug, "Love is the only solution, and nobody does it well. Not Christians, not Muslims, not Jews, not me." It made me sad because it seemed to me that the author had, in fact, found what he was looking for and then tossed it away. The fact that he sat down face to face with people that our government calls terrorists and was treated with respect and hospitality is astounding and beautiful. I just wish that, after all that, we could have really listened to what they had to say.

[Note: This book was provided for review by the WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group.]

Catherine says

I appreciated the very different view of a place that is our so-called enemy. People are people no matter where you go and all are precious in God's eyes. We can't forget the people and just look at the government.

Becky Kauffman says

This book caused me to look beyond my preconceived ideas of the Arab/Muslim world to see them as real people with real joys, hurts, fears, and dreams just like anyone else. I was especially touched by the man from Bethlehem who seems to understand more than most people what it means to love your enemy in a very practical way. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants their thinking to be challenged.

Marie says

Great concept, but not a great book. The writing style is repetitive and circular. The most compelling part of the book is a side story that turns out to be fictional and very contrived. Most of the people the author interviewed are peace-loving, Mercedes-driving Arabs who enjoy American movies. The book succeeds in humanizing them, but often at the expense of other groups who then become the real bad guys (e.g. Zionists, Phalangists, George W. Bush). I did learn some things, and I agree with the spirit behind the book: seeing "the enemy" as real people who laugh and cry and love their children and may even love the same God, just using different traditions.

Elizabeth says

I really appreciated Dekker's quest – both to sit down with people frequently perceived as enemies and also to find out if anyone these days was taking seriously Jesus' commandment to love our enemies. But I was a little confused at the form that his preparation took -- he mentions over and over again the years of effort his friend made to set up interviews with key figures in the Islamic world. However he doesn't seem to have even done the most basic internet search on creative nonviolence. Since this is a subject that I myself googled for the first time a couple of months ago, I know that there is a whole movement of people actively taking seriously the loving, nonviolent strategies of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Which is the question he poses at least ten times in the book, "Is there anyone out there trying to follow the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King?" Um, yes. (Not to mention that if you are looking for non-famous people loving their enemies, you can find this readily enough if you listen to people's stories.)

Dekker also seems to have his sights set very low – in the last half of the book he is looking for one man to be the next Gandhi. He thinks at one point that he has found that man, somehow not seeing in the midst of that same man's stories that he is part of a movement that has gone on for decades involving people from all over the world.

Interwoven throughout the book is a sappy, highly-detailed fictional story about a woman named Nicole. Puzzlingly, Dekker presents her story as real. At the end of the book he says that he gave us clues so that we could see it was a "parable." Hmm – as Nicole's story got more and more stereotypical and cheesy I kept looking back at his intro to it to see if it was supposed to be fiction. But he really presents it as factual.

It is a little challenging to get through a book with sentences like, ". . . [Her] darker skin matched her volatile moods and highly verbal intelligence." What? Then there's the classic, "Then one day the floodgates opened. Literally, you might say. The door to his room flew open all the way and she walked in. She wanted to talk." Did I miss the actual, literal floodgates? Just like I missed the fact that half of the book was pure invention?

If his editor would have removed the fictional story and all of the times the author repeated himself – he reminds both himself and the reader over and over of his purpose in writing this book, as well as mentioning about one thousand times how scared he was – well, you would essentially be left with the interviews. Those interviews are interesting, though – and thankfully they are highlighted in gray so you can just flip to them.

Here is Dekker in an interview with a man affiliated with Hezbollah:

Ted: What would you say specifically to the mothers and fathers, to those in America who have lost sons and daughters in Iraq?

Ayatollah Fadlallah: I would tell them with all my love and condolences that you have lost your children in the wrong place. There is no reason or right for the Americans to occupy Iraq. The terrorists of bin Laden have killed thousands of American, but the Americans have killed tens of thousands of Arabs. In the 1940s the Arabs believed that America wanted to help their nations and they were peaceful. But that has changed. If an American asks, "Why do you hate us?" we would say, "Why should we love you with all your policies?" We love the American people but not the Administration.

And from a leader in Hamas: [W]e believe that America should free itself before freeing any other country. . . [T]he face of America is a bloody one.

So, if you know nothing at all about Middle East history, and/or you think that everyone that is Muslim is our enemy, this book might be a good read for you. If that's not the case for you, you might consider finding the book in your local library to read through the interviews.

Sammie says

No, I would not recommend the book *Tea With Hezbollah*. There are several reasons for this. First, I felt like the book was not interesting enough. Second, the ending was not satisfactory at all. Third, the characters were a huge disappointment; well, actually the author was a huge disappointment. Lastly, the plot was not well developed or suspenseful at all.

I felt like in the beginning, since the introduction is not supposed to be suspenseful in any way, the book did make me turn its pages. However, I think this was only because of curiosity. I wanted to see how this book would progress and how it would start out. However, throughout the middle-ish part of the book, it completely bored me. It became just another book that was assigned to me for school. I had high hopes for *Tea With Hezbollah* because I thought it touched upon a fascinating topic and not knowing much about the Muslim or Arab culture, I felt like I could learn a lot. But it was evident as I kept reading that the author or interviewer just kept asking the same questions, going through the same process, receiving the same responses (which was probably what he wanted) and it did not interest me at all. There was no big plot twist or shocker that kept me wanting to read this book.

I was not satisfied with the ending at all. Even though the middle part of the book was highly disappointing to me and anticlimactic, I thought that this book could redeem itself with an ending. Maybe the author would finally go out with a BANG and make the ending interesting enough. However, that was not the case at all. I felt like the author had finally reached the end of its journey, didn't know how to end the book, and just put in a deep conversation with his friend to finish this book. In fact, when I flipped over the last page and found the Glossary, I was extremely shocked. There was a feeling of abandonment (which might be a little stupid) because I wanted something to be resolved in any way. I felt like the ending was so abrupt that it kind of felt like I was flailing off a metaphorical cliff without anything to support me because it was just so sudden.

Maybe the author flies home and meets his kids and wife and tells his kids about his many adventures in the Middle East where he met very kind and generous people; I think that would have been a better ending than the one the author put in.

The characters were a huge disappointment to me. In the beginning, the book was humorous enough. I could tell that the author was trying to be funny and it was funny. At least, for a little bit. Then, the humor got a bit tiring. As I kept reading on, I could tell that the basis of all the humorous parts in the story was on the expense of the Arabs. The author would not stop talking about how scared he was going to Beirut, how he hoped that his plane would not crash because a missile, how he hoped that he wasn't going to be kidnapped by some terrorist group. It put a frown to my face and I thought that what the author was expressing was kind of contradicting. Here he was, writing a book about how friendly Arabs actually are and how Americans label them as terrorists for no good reason. But he was actually doing the same thing as those Americans! He was harbored this fear of stereotypical Arabs while trying to instruct others not to! In the beginning, his fear was understandable, of course. However, even as he met very kind and warm-hearted Arabs again and again, I felt like the author just refused to let go of that fear of Arabs. I'm very sad to say that in the middle-end part of the book, I pretty much hated the author. His friend, Carl, was another story. I thought it was admirable how Carl loved Arabs and had so much compassion for them that even actually getting kidnapped by them didn't faze him on his mission to teach others about what Arabs truly was like. I feel like if Carl had written this book, it would have been much more interesting.

This book reminded me of a straight line in terms of its suspense and that's a bad thing. Most books are supposed to have an introduction, a climax, and a resolution. This book, I felt like, didn't have any of that. In the beginning, there was a tiny bit of an introduction as the author talked about what his name was, what his profession was, and what he was going to do. But after that, there was no build-up at all. I felt like all the author did was express his fear of dying in Beirut, meet some wealthy and powerful as well as some poor ones, and ask them the same questions. Yes, maybe the fact that he asked the same questions was the point of the book. I actually really enjoyed reading the answers for one question "What makes you laugh", but I think it would have been interesting if the author switched the questions he asked at least a little bit. Did he really have to ask every single person what their favorite color was? Yes, it was effective in portraying them in a more human light, but couldn't he ask maybe more meaningful questions? I mean, I think it didn't really help the purpose of this story by being able to name a wealthy Arab businessman's favorite joke and color. One shining beacon of light in this darkness that was called Tea With Hezbollah, was the short story (?) about Nicole. I felt like as I was reading, the only thing in my mind was the story about Nicole. What would happen to her? What kinds of secrets did her past harbor? It was very interesting to read and I enjoyed her story much more than the other parts of this book. I felt like if her story was to be extended to a real novel, I would read it. However, of course, Nicole's story had to turn out to be made up. After becoming so invested in her story, which was the most interesting part of the book, I was very glad that this kind of extraordinary person existed! Then in the second to last page of the book, the author revealed that Nicole was made up. Of course. I felt like throwing this whole book across the room because I was so hopeful that this story was proof of the truth of Jesus' teachings. Why did the author even bother filling up this book with a story that wasn't real? Why couldn't he actually find someone who had an interesting, Good-Samaritan experience and then write about that story? Also, the ending of Nicole's story was highly disappointing to me as well. I felt like the "resolution" to Nicole's story really did not resolve her main conflict at all. The subject about her father was revealed a little bit and then kind of swept under the rug so that the kind Samaritan whose mother nursed Nicole back to health would be the main star of this story. I wanted to know a little bit more on what happened to Nicole's mother because that was what really fascinated me about her story.

One thing I can and will grudgingly applaud this book for is its theme. I thought it was fairly well developed and interesting. The author didn't stray from the theme about loving your enemies and always kept the main reason for his journey fresh in the readers' mind. He never failed to ask about Jesus' teachings to Arabs and I thought that was a huge eye-opener to me.

I never really despised Arabs or Muslims before reading this book. But that being said, I didn't really know

much about them at all except that they existed. I think this book did help me learn a lot about what they were like and how normal they were. I feel like the author might have tainted my view on Arabs just a little bit because he was always discussing his fear of them. However, I think the kindness and generosity of Arabs still shined through in this book and taught me a lot about how they really were. Overall, this book was a huge disappointment to me and I would not recommend anyone to read it.

Elizabeth says

This book is a bit dated as it was written before the Arab Spring, Syrian Civil War and rise of ISIS, however the same principles hold and this is a great read for anyone wanting a little look into the Middle East and the thoughts of people living there. I love the concept of interviewing people that could be considered enemies (though he does do a good disclaimer of how that is often perceived). And it is so good to be reminded in how controversial and in your face the parable of the Good Samaritan really is that Jesus shared and we are supposed to follow today. Enemy love...its one of the things that got Jesus killed and is so overlooked and hard to live out today.

I have been to many of the places he had: Al Azhar in Cairo, Egypt; the corniche of Beirut, Lebanon; Church of the Nativity, West Bank. I haven't made it to Syria or Saudi (but I have been to their neighbors of Turkey and Oman) and I would say I heard every conversation he had, though my contacts were just ordinary people not the high ranking ones he interviewed. I guess its true that he going to the top he got the views that are espoused and handed down and held.

TD states this is a travelogue and not a sweeping history, though he does good job of giving just the right amount of context and history. And I love travelogues and spiritual memoirs, so one set in the Middle East is really my cup of tea (pun intended).

Down sides-while it is good to hear an American's inter dialog and progression of thoughts, he comes off as whiny and wordy at times. We get it, its scary, move on. And I am glad I didn't read the reviews first because I would have hated the spoiler that the best part of the book is actually a parable (TD couldn't write a book without adding some of his normal fare, I guess).

It feels good to mark a book off my list that has been there a long time. Highly recommended.

Terri says

Author Ted Dekker goes with his friend Carl Mederias throught middle east hot spots talking to some very dangerous people trying to find common ground through the parable of the Good Samaritan. The book does show perceptions that are not commonly seen in the west. But it also shows through history how deep the wounds are in the Middle East and it leaves you wondering whether there really can be lasting peace. But the thing I found most interesting is how pretty much everyone agrees that love thy neighbor is great but it is always qualifed with a BUT. Thought provoking book.

Madisonw says

“Tea with Hezbollah” provided myself with mixed reviews, negative as well as positive. The overarching

plot is shown through the perspective of a man named Ted and his journey throughout the Middle East interviewing various characters who are deemed as a threat in the west and gives us different perspectives. As fascinating as it sounds to listen to the accounts of the Bin Laden brother and Hezbollah, the title is incredibly misleading. What I would describe this book as as a series of missed opportunities. Ted and his buddy Carl interview fascinating people whether it be cab drivers or even leaders of great parties and ask the same questions consistently. "What makes you laugh" and "do you believe in the story 'The Good Samaritan'". The reason I chose this book is because I wanted to read the transcripts/interviews with various people but they focus more on their own personal accounts than the actual way they advertised it. If you're going to read "Tea with Hezbollah" I would prefer the book actually be more about interviews rather than observations of areas they visited. The book is encircled around that one story about whether the arabs and the israelis believe that you must love your neighbors but the book itself was just so bland. For such a serious and sensitive topic, Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis don't seem to take the writing very seriously. They answer as well as experience serious topics (Ted being forced to hand over money towards a security guard because he's a caucasian tourist) yet the way it's approached is just so unlikeable. The tone/mood of the book is meant to be lighthearted and address serious areas of the world but serious and lighthearted often don't go hand in hand make that one of the books negative aspects. Ted himself starts of the book as going about how he says a specific word too much, very unnecessary as well as often stating about how frightened he was about venturing towards Beirut and other Middle Eastern areas. The story offered an incredible amount of history about this conflict but when Ted or Carl spoke about their own personal accounts and so on, it didn't tie into the book very well. From what I experienced from this book is that Ted is a cautious, impatient man (rushes through most of the interviews) and Carl is a bear looking guy with the attitude of loving arabs.

The only reason I would recommend this book is because of one fascinating story about a lady named Nicole who has a similar account towards the "Good Samaritan" story. In an obscure telling, has been living a bit of lie (no spoilers!) and tries to further investigate her family history. When riding her bike, she is struck down and is knocked almost unconscious only to reenact a scene of "The Good Samaritan" quite fascinating to learn her own life as well as an authentic account. That I would say is the only reason as to why I was captivated by the book most of the time and eagerly read it. I did quite like some of the ideas that Ted and Carl found such as when they get into a cab and the driver tells them that "the arabs aren't even human" strikes me as how open both sides are about their disdain towards the others. The questions that they ask towards the great leaders and people I assume are made so that we can view them as just regular normal people but in our heads, we already kind of know that. Most people set their work from their family apart and because you're seen as criminal towards the outside world, it doesn't mean that you don't have sons or a wife. Most people would not relate to Ted, Carl or any other people in the story as they don't exactly describe their personality but their viewpoints on the Arab-Israeli conflict so it's a bit hard to exactly connect with any of the characters. I'm sure a lot of us have not been in a situation where we're interviewing a deemed terrorist.

As a personal viewpoint, I learned more about perspective through the book. One part I found fascinating (but annoyingly brief) was when they interviewed the Bin Laden brothers. Well to do business men with a satisfied life and family but wanted nothing to do with their brothers, obviously understandable. Yet to read the disdain towards the terrorist who once played catch with them was interesting to see their viewpoints on topics. I found it oddly captivating to read the transcripts they had with the taxi drivers though as their opinions were the loudest and seemed the least artificial (less staged/more direct). One taxi driver believed that there was no way to love your enemies, one deemed the opposing party as not even human and another had the idea that it's possible as long as it's not the Israelis and another quoted "Great, great injustice in the world".. The perspectives which had the most direct ideas were the ones that weren't by politicians but were

more on the spot relaxed ones. When speaking with a man, he accounts about he wanted to take his father back to safer area in which the father responded, "Why should I abandon my country and all it's given me for a government that comes over here to invade my land, slaughter its innocent refugees and drops bombs". There are so many quotes that give you the insight towards the people. Ted and Carl should have focused more on their transcripts rather than having a chapter describing how they were mugged (interesting but unneeded). Another quote that was given was by a man named Sami, a large role in the book who speaks "It is a dangerous thing to speak about peace when everyone around you wants violence. Or to speak of love when there is so much hate" which I personally deem as the epitome of this whole book. The higher end people (Hezbollah fighters) they interview as more cautious about what they say and often people speak of hatred towards the other side.

The novel is centered around "our journey through the Middle East" and because of how recent the story is, it relates to what's currently happening in terms of views. Some people believe that this conflict will never be resolved, others believe that it can, and some just have strong distaste for the other side, all views that are currently held in the modern world. The book is a bit in depth in terms of history about the current situation but because of my own personal humanities class and how much we've covered, it didn't foster and deeper understanding of the Middle East historically, just gave me more opinions of other people. "Tea with Hezbollah" was an interesting blend of hatred and fascination but if you're focused more on viewpoints rather than factual information, this is the book to read.

Debra says

Very interesting take on the Middle East. Traveling to the Middle East in response to an off-handed remark about the good Samaritan from the Bible story, 2 men travel to discover if any of the traits of the good Samaritan still exist. Meeting and speaking with some very interesting people, both high level terrorists and regular working class, the response to similarly posed questions leaves distinct impressions of most Muslims wanting to be a peace with the people of the world, just not their governments. This is very much in contrast to the printed statements concerning both Christians and Jews. Methinks there is a dissembling here on the part of some of the interviewed.

Ty Melgren says

This is supposedly an attempt to live out or at least better understand Jesus' insane and probably impossible instruction to love your enemies as much as you love yourself, but it's really just a hokey Christian mystery writer travelling around being nervous about Muslims and asking scholars, cabdrivers, and clerics condescending questions like "Do you know any good jokes?" and "What's your favorite color?" Since he's doing these pointless interviews instead of having actual conversations with people, he can't find any examples of "enemies" who have learned to "love" each other, so he decides to invent a convoluted orientalist love story that he intersperses throughout the book but doesn't admit is fictional until the last few pages. By far the best part of this book is a brief appearance by Sami Awad, who is probably a little embarrassed to be in here.

<http://tymelgren.com/books/february2014.html>
