

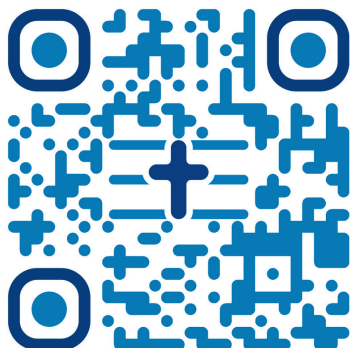


For such a time as this

INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM OUTREACH

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For such a time as this

This handbook exists because God has called us “for such a time as this” (Esth. 4:14b). He wants us to represent Christ to the Muslims He brings into our lives. But how do we do that? Perhaps you are searching for guidance because God has stirred your heart on behalf of your Muslim friends and neighbors. This handbook will answer your questions and provide what you need to be a skilled and winsome witness of the gospel to Muslims. These are extraordinary times, and our Lord has a plan to reach many through the witness of faithful Christians like you.

The board, staff, and growing network of volunteers who belong to the International Muslim Outreach movement recognize that God is doing something new in our day. Christians have unprecedented contact with the adherents and ideas of other religions. Three decades ago, most U.S. Christians did not encounter Muslims. By 2021, over half of all U.S. citizens reported knowing a Muslim personally.¹ Emigration has changed the ethnic and religious composition of what has commonly been called “the Western World,” and Islam is now a part of the religious landscape of the Americas and Europe as it had already been in Africa and Asia for centuries.

Muslims are not only interacting with Christians in person; today the internet provides the means for Muslims and Christians to exchange ideas and develop connections digitally in ways that would have been unthinkable to previous generations. Peruse the comments section of any video or article on a religious topic related to Islam, and you will undoubtedly encounter a vigorous discussion between Muslims and Christians.

¹ Mohamed, Besheer. “Muslims Are a Growing Presence in U.S., but Still Face Negative Views from the Public.” Pew Research Center, 1 Sept. 2021, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/.

While the internet is providing the means for Muslims and Christians to interact online, it is also popularizing the latest scholarship on key religious texts. Muslim writings, including the Hadith (stories of what Muhammad said and did which form the basis for Islamic law), Tafsir (Qur'anic commentary), and Sira (biographies of Muhammad) used to be accessible only to those fluent in Arabic. Today, these texts can be accessed online, in multiple languages and searchable formats. This new exposure to historic Islamic documents is leaving many Muslims with unanswered questions about the coherence of their religious tradition. God is exposing Muslims to sources of information that reveal to them the wonder of the gospel and the moral and logical shortcomings of Islamic thought.

While access to primary sources and religious materials is expanding, people are also moving in unprecedented numbers. God is relocating Muslims around the world so that they can encounter Christian believers. You and I live in a strategic era, full of opportunity for gospel sharing and watching our Lord work in the hearts of those who do not know Him.

The following pages are provided to equip Christians like you to share Christ with Muslims confidently and humbly. As you access the information here, know that our team has prayed for you. We have prayed that God would strengthen you “with power through His Spirit in your inner being” (Eph. 3:16b) and that He would grant you the knowledge, encouragement, and inspiration you need to reach Muslims for Christ. God is able, and He will do it.

In Christ,



Executive Director

July 30th, 2024

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Section I: The Reach of Islam Today

The Recent Growth of Islam

Islam is a rapidly expanding religious movement that has greater geographical, political, and social reach today than at any other point in its history. Consider the following data related to global Muslim population growth:

1. In 2020, Muslims numbered 1.9 billion, comprising 24.9% of the world's population, while Christians numbered 2.4 billion and 31.1% of the world's population.²
2. Adherents of Islam are expected to increase their numbers by 70% through 2060, while in the same period, Christians are expected to increase their numbers by 34%.
3. Based primarily on birth rate projections, the number of Muslims in 2060 is expected to be 3.0 billion, while Christians are expected to number 3.1 billion.
4. "Babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births by 2035."
5. Muslims have more children per woman than any other religious group, with an average of 2.9 children per woman, compared to an average of 2.6 children per Christian woman.⁴
6. Muslims and Hindus are the youngest religious populations, with a global median age of 24 years, while Christians have a global median age of 30 years.

2 "Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, Pew Research Center, 21 Dec. 2022, www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/.

3 "The Changing Global Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, Pew Research Center, 5 Apr. 2017, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/.

4 Nos. 3-6, Ibid.

From these statistics and projections, we might conclude that Islam will dominate the global religious landscape within 50 years. However, spiritual awakening can reverse such trends. Just as Christianity grew explosively around the Mediterranean Sea in the first two centuries of its existence, in Africa in the nineteenth century, and in China in the twentieth century, it can grow again. Therefore, we urge believers to be willing to share Christ with the Muslims they encounter and to pray that God starts gospel movements among Muslim people. If we who have accepted the gospel are faithful to pray for Muslims and speak of our Lord to them, there is no telling what the size of religious bodies might be fifty years hence. Contrary to the projections of the statisticians, God can bring about a future in which the darkness of Islam is retreating before the light of Christ in every corner of the globe.

Muslim Population Distribution

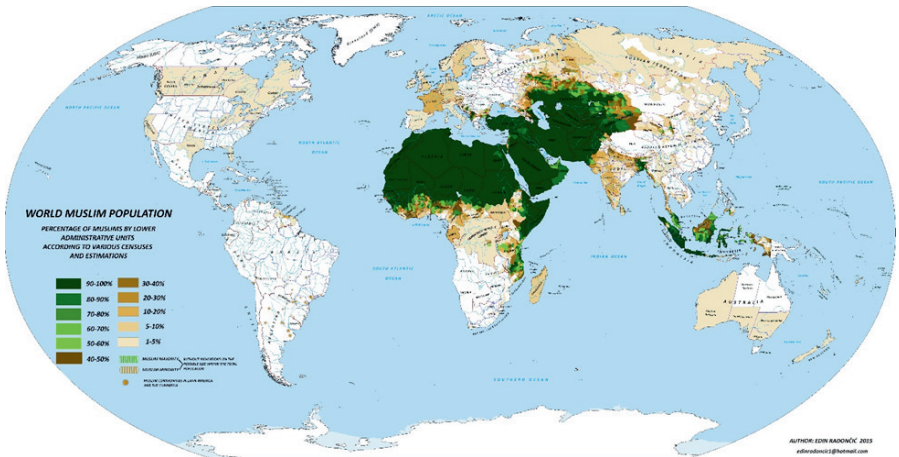


Figure 1. Map by Edin Radoncic 2015

Muslim Population Distribution

Muslim-majority countries occupy a swath of land running across Africa through the Middle East into central Asia. The countries with the highest Muslim populations are as follows:

Pakistan: 240.8 million
 Indonesia: 236 million
 India: 200 million
 Bangladesh: 150.8 million
 Nigeria: 97 million
 Egypt: 90 million
 Turkey: 84.4 million
 Iran: 82.5 million
 China: 50 million
 Algeria: 43.7 million⁵

Through emigration, however, Muslim populations are growing in practically every part of the globe. Consider the number of mosques (Muslim worship spaces) reported within 5 miles of various city centers by the website www.salatomic.com:

London: 75+
 Cape Town: 63
 New York: 56
 Berlin: 49
 Toronto: 49
 Paris: 43
 Oslo: 22
 Tokyo: 7⁶

⁵ "Muslim Population by Country 2024." World Population Review, worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.

⁶ "Your Guide to Mosques & Islamic Schools." Salatomic, Halalfire Media, www.salatomic.com/. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.

Take a moment to access www.salatomic.com, input your address in the website search bar, and see how many mosques are within ten miles of your home. You might be surprised by what you discover.

God is relocating Muslims around the world. He is making it easier for us to share with them our lives and the news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Listen to what the apostle Paul told the Athenians:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

(Act 17:26-27a ESV)

In other words, God has placed each living person in just the place where He knows they are most likely to encounter the truth. If that place is your neighborhood, or a place of business you frequent, at your university, or at the hospital you have visited, could it be that God deliberately put Muslims near you because you are the “light of the world” (Matt 5:14)? Could you be one whom God is inviting to befriend, serve, love, and share truth with the Muslims you encounter?

Muslim Ethnic Groups

Jesus commanded believers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18), with “nations” in the earliest New Testament manuscripts translated to English from the Greek word *ethnei*, from which we derive in English the word “ethnic.” Paraphrased, Jesus instructed his followers to influence people from every ethnic group to accept Him as Lord and Savior and to obey His commands.

Britannica.com defines “ethnic group” as “a social group or category of the population that, in a larger society, is set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality, or culture.”⁷ Interestingly, the Britannica listing of “race, language, nationality, or culture” sounds similar to the apostle John’s description of a vision he saw of people worshipping God in heaven “from every tribe and people and language and nation” (Revelation 5:9). God intends that no major subsection of humanity – no “ethnic group” – is without representatives who are saved through faith in Jesus Christ and subsequently live with Him in eternity.

Although not properly cited throughout, the Wikipedia article entitled “List of contemporary ethnic groups” attempts to categorize ethnic groups by their religious affiliations.⁸

7 “Ethnic Group.” Edited by Elizabeth Prine Pauls, Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 5 Jan. 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-group.

8 “List of Contemporary Ethnic Groups.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 18 Jan. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_contemporary_ethnic_groups#References.

Of the 1,035 groups included, 221 are listed with Islam as the majority, predominant, or only religion. Joshua Project, a highly respected Christian missions resource website, breaks down ethnic groups into subclasses called “people groups,” defined as “the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”⁹ Out of a total of 17,281 people groups worldwide, 4,031 are Muslim. Even more significantly, Joshua Project classifies 3,642 of the Islamic people groups as unreached by the gospel, comprising by far the largest number of unreached people groups within any religion.¹⁰

When we study the beliefs of ethnic groups, we see that almost a fourth of them are majority Muslim and that Muslims are less reached by the gospel than are members of other religions. Through Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations,” God is calling His church to work diligently until the Muslims among us can see that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

9 “People Group Profiles, Lists, Resources and Maps.” Joshua Project, Frontier Ventures, joshuaproject.net/people_groups. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.

10 “Global Dashboard.” Joshua Project, Frontier Ventures, joshuaproject.net/people_groups/dashboard. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.

Section 2: Our Strategy

Overview of Apologetical Approaches

Christians have tried various strategies to reach Muslims. We will focus on four popular strategies here. The first strategy exposes certain factual, logical, or moral weaknesses in the Islamic narrative. By using this “critical” approach some Christians hope their Muslim friends will see that Islam is nonsensical and, in their search for a more sensible worldview, discover Christianity. The second approach is the “no-offense” method, whereby a Christian earns the trust of a Muslim friend before broaching any sensitive religious topic, and then only shares such information as they think their Muslim contact is “ready” to hear. This approach holds that, through prayer and example, God will draw Muslims toward faith in Christ. Other Christians use a “gospel only” approach, standing on the promise that the gospel is itself the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16b). They rely on an unadulterated proclamation of the gospel without trying to make the message more palatable to the hearer. Finally, some try to use Islamic texts and ideas to prove the reliability of the Christian message – an “insider” approach – figuring that Muslims are more likely to accept the message of the Bible if they can be convinced that it harmonizes with the teachings of Islam.

The Critical Approach

The critical approach focuses on exposing to Muslims the factual, logical, or moral weaknesses of the Islamic faith. This strategy can sometimes be effective. There are Muslims who appreciate the validation of the misgivings they were beginning to feel about the Islamic worldview, and they find it easier to trust someone who plainly and without dissembling presents to them the problems of Islam and the merits of Christianity. Nevertheless, the critical approach carries with it certain risks.

The first risk run by any Christian who questions the factual, logical, or moral consistency of Islam is that her Muslim friend will be so offended that the relationship allowing the communication of the gospel will abruptly end. I once showed a Muslim ESL student a hadith (a story about Muhammad from respected Islamic sources) in which Muhammad was described as marrying his wife Aisha when she was six years old. The student was so astonished and offended that she never spoke to me again, and warned other Muslims that I was attacking Islam. And this was because I had shown her an Islamic text! Looking back, I wish I had instead introduced her to Bible stories that drew her attention to Jesus.

Another risk associated with criticizing the origins of Islam or Islamic historical sources is that you might shake your Muslim friend's confidence not only in Islam but in any religion at all. It is not uncommon for a Muslim, when confronted with problems in his worldview, to feel betrayed by the religious authorities he has depended on since childhood, and to desire to avoid being taken in again by anyone claiming religious knowledge. A former Muslim in this predicament is as likely to embrace atheism or agnosticism as he is the biblical witness.

A final risk associated with exposing the weaknesses in the Islamic worldview is that you may find yourself less prepared to tackle the subject than you think. We should remember that many Muslims are native Arabic speakers and therefore have direct access to the meaning of their authoritative religious texts. The Christian who peruses the internet for "contradictions" in Islamic history or theology and throws them out during a conversation with a Muslim friend might be shocked to find that the Muslims have already thought through the issues raised and have cogent responses to challenges. In such a case, the strategy has backfired, and Islam often comes out looking like the winner, at least in the eyes of those who witness the exchange of ideas.

The No-Offense Approach

Some Muslims seem to respond to a more sensitive apologetic approach that emphasizes friendship and kindness and waits until a Muslim seems open and eager to discuss a particular topic before bringing it up – the no-offense approach. Proponents of this approach point to the many long-term, committed friendships that have formed between Muslims and Christians when the Christian involved has refused to discuss topics that might repel Muslims. Often the Christian performs great acts of service and hospitality, presumably making the gospel attractive both by their actions and by their respect for their Muslim friend’s religious sensitivities.

While it is true that the no-offense approach sometimes results in a great amount of trust between a Muslim and a Christian and may provide opportunities for deep spiritual conversation, it also poses some risks. For example, it often becomes more difficult as a relationship develops, not easier, to broach important topics because the relationship has been built on a tacit agreement never to offend. It feels somehow manipulative, like a “carrot and stick” operation, to lure someone with kindness into a relationship (the “carrot”), and then to spring an unexpected and unwanted conversation on them about Jesus (the “stick”). As a result, a Christian may find that they spend hundreds of hours serving, pleasing, and “loving” their Muslim contact without really knowing if their friend is interested in the claims of Christianity. Such relationships often end with the lost person having less than enough information to follow Christ even if they wanted to do so!

Besides making witnessing difficult in the long run, the no-offense approach may give a Muslim the impression that their Christian friend who is showing them so much attention and concern doesn't really believe in Christianity and might even be interested in Islam. It is dreadfully disappointing to realize, after hoping that your generous behavior has made the gospel irresistible, that your Muslim friend thinks with triumphant delight that the time and attention you have devoted to them simply means they are succeeding in making a convert to their point of view!



The Gospel-Only Approach

It is generally true that Muslims raised in Muslim-majority countries tend to feel respect for a person who is both monotheistic and willing to declare their faith to others with boldness and simplicity. They will often respond to a straightforward presentation of the gospel with questions or challenges, and the resulting discussion can offer many opportunities to share insights and information that make the gospel more attractive. The gospel-only approach is helpful to Muslims who are genuine seekers because it gives them, rapidly and without confusing embellishment, the information that they need to follow Christ.

I have observed another curious benefit to the gospel-only approach: It can give the bold Christian who uses it a reputation that opens additional opportunities to promote the Christian message. Recently, for example, a certain Muslim man asked how to contact a particular Christian who happened to be an IMO Ambassador. The Muslim man had dreamed of Jesus and wanted to ask about Christian beliefs. He explained that all the Muslims in the area knew that this IMO Ambassador was willing to tell Muslims the gospel anywhere – even in the grocery store! Because the Ambassador has such a bold reputation, he was known as a resource for Muslim seekers.

Despite these advantages, the Gospel-only approach has its downsides. One of those downsides is that Muslims have been trained to resist certain Christian ideas that often feature prominently in the gospel presentations most used by Western evangelicals. When a Muslim hears one of these ideas, or “tripwires,” they will often interrupt the gospel presentation with a complex objection for which few Christians are usually prepared. Often the conversation then devolves into a quarrel over seemingly irrelevant details, and the Christian wonders how the conversation so rapidly became unproductive.

A further downside to the gospel-only approach is that unadorned gospel proclamation can seem to Muslims as a competitive challenge, where victory is defined as dominating the conversation. By boldly declaring religious ideas, the Christian seems to be setting aside the social rules governing conversation with others, and the Muslim, thinking they are taking the cue from the Christian, begins to interrupt stridently with their religious viewpoint. The interaction can then become unpleasant for both parties and unattractive to witnesses.

The Islam-Friendly Approach

The final apologetic tactic we should note is to appropriate Islamic texts and ideas as supportive of the Christian worldview – the Islam-friendly approach. This strategy has immediate appeal to anyone who has experienced the predictable resistance that Muslims are trained to give to Christian ideas. It takes advantage of the high view of Jesus expressed by the Qur'an and portions of the Hadith to suggest that believing in Jesus as the Christ figure of the Bible is not so offensive to Islamic sensibilities as one may think, and that a Muslim can choose to become a Christ-follower without breaking with Islam itself. Some proponents of this method would go so far as to encourage Muslims who trust in Christ to continue identifying as Muslim, attending mosque prayers, reading the Qur'an, and even acknowledging Muhammad as a prophet.

The appeal of the Islam-friendly approach should be obvious. First and foremost, in its extreme application, it practically eliminates the threat of persecution: A person who still calls themselves a Muslim, says the Muslim creed, and attends mosque prayers can hardly be called an apostate from Islam! Especially for a Muslim who may have already been drawn to Christ, the line of thinking in this approach has a special appeal. Perhaps they can be saved by Jesus from damnation without risking ostracism, dishonor to their family, or martyrdom.

An additional advantage of this approach is that it avoids most of the arguments with which Muslims have been trained to resist Christian proselytization. Instead, it shifts attention from biblical witness to the Qur'anic text, taking advantage of the fact that most Muslims feel even less confident explaining the meaning of the Qur'an than they do attacking the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, or the authority of the Bible.

Despite its attraction, however, the Islam-friendly approach has some dangerous aspects. Most questionable is the practice of validating the Qur'an and the Hadith. Both of those Islamic sources deny key doctrines that are revealed in the Bible, such as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the seriousness and pervasiveness of human sin, and the atonement. Both have plunged millions of people into spiritual darkness, inoculating them against both the gospel and the kind of critical thinking that leads to truth and ultimately to faith in the God who is. By using portions of the Qur'an and the actions and words of Muhammad to prove the uniqueness of Christ we may appear to endorse Islam as a whole – even bits that we would be horrified to acknowledge if we truly understood them as they have been traditionally viewed.

Endorsing spiritual darkness is not the only danger in the Islam-friendly approach. Using the Qur'an to support Christian doctrine implies that the Qur'an is coherent – that the proclamations of Muhammad as they were captured and preserved by the Muslim community have meanings friendly to the biblical worldview that are specific and clear enough to overcome the objections of moderately reasonable and

linguistically capable skeptics. By simple testing on the streets and in the coffee shops of Amman, Jordan, I found that the opposite is the case. Minimally educated Arabs who hear interpretations of Qur'anic texts supporting the uniqueness of Christ or the reliability of the Bible invariably will scoff and knowingly declare an opposing interpretation unfriendly to Christianity to be the correct one. This may explain why missionaries who tout dramatic numbers of converts using "Islam-friendly" approaches to apologetics do so mostly among Muslim people groups whose primary language is other than Arabic.

To summarize, apologetic strategies have strengths and weaknesses. The critical, accommodating, gospel-only, and Islam-friendly approaches have unique advantages, yet each can produce disappointing results.

A Holistic Approach

The following is an outreach strategy that is gospel-focused, empowered by the Spirit, and heavily reliant on friendship to build trust and provide opportunities for discussion of important ideas. We do not presume to suggest that this approach is foolproof or even superior. Only God can convert the human heart. However, we promote this “holistic” approach to reaching Muslims because we have tested it and found it somewhat effective across a broad spectrum of personalities, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and circumstances. We also prefer this approach because it does not require specialized knowledge. A Christian will find little that is surprising in it, but instead will be encouraged to apply what they most likely already knew but perhaps had never bothered to translate into action.

The holistic approach relies most heavily on five components:

1. Prayer
2. Friendship
3. Gospel sharing
4. Bible sharing
5. Church visits

Prayer

The first and most important step in the holistic approach is prayer. We firmly believe that spontaneous fervent prayers backed up by daily prayers combined with group prayers and even church-wide or organization-wide prayers move God to act on behalf of lost people. This is why in IMO we have a Special Prayer Team who lift to God the specific requests of IMO Ambassadors promptly and fervently. We also begin and end meetings with prayer, hold quarterly “Prayer Rallies,” share prayer requests among board and staff members, hold occasional prayer walks, and strive to be faithful in private prayer.

There are three reasons we believe that prayer is essential as a foundation for disciple-making among Muslims: First, because prayer directly appeals to God, who is responsible for conversions; second, because prayer obtains God's help in our battle against spiritual forces; and third, because prayer makes us more productive by drawing us closer to Christ. The experience of thousands of Christian workers over centuries has confirmed these findings again and again. Prayer is a vital first, middle, and last step in winning Muslims for Christ.

Prayer Moves God to Save People

Prayer is important because it appeals directly to God, the only being capable of saving a person from hell. While it is true that God allows his people to participate in world evangelization, not a single lost person can approach God without the grace of God directly acting to bring them to Himself. As Jesus stated, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44 ESV) and later, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (John 6:65 ESV).

This begs the question, if God is the one who saves from hell, why should we as people participate in evangelizing at all? What is our role, other than standing back and allowing God to work? In IMO we have mulled over this question, and we have settled on the following simple answer: Our God, in His wisdom, has invited His people to participate in His saving work among the nations. We now have the privilege of “front-row seats” to witness God’s glorious saving activities. Rather than discouraging us from doing any evangelism because we cannot convert people through our skill or strength, we now can forge ahead joyfully because the results depend on a God who loves us and has wonderful plans for us. Furthermore, we can be relieved that the results of evangelism don’t depend on us but on God. The pressure is off! We can diligently spread the Good News and relax about our “effectiveness” or the “results.” The results are not in our hands.

At the same time, that God alone can save should give us humility. Even if we see many come to Christ through our work, we should be careful not to give others the impression that it was because of our special skills that people were saved – a temptation to be sure. A more accurate description of what happened in that case would be that people were saved despite our participation! The great evangelist was God all along. Rather than be proud, we should be grateful that we were allowed to see His love at work in human lives.

At this point, the discerning reader wonders if we are not contradicting ourselves by producing an Ambassador's Handbook. By publishing a "how to" in winning Muslims for Christ, aren't we implying that human activity at least partly determines the outcome of evangelistic efforts?

The answer is yes, but not in the ways one might think. Human activity in evangelism is effective in proportion to how greatly it pleases God – not how skillfully it pleases people. That is why the holistic approach involves prayer, love, gospel, scripture, and the body of Christ. We know from the Bible that these things are pleasing to God, and we believe that when God is pleased with an evangelist, the activities of that evangelist tend to have good effects eternally. In contrast, when the actions or thoughts of an evangelist fail to please God, that evangelist will also fail to produce the kind of good that lasts into eternity. In other words, you and I must learn first and foremost how to work well in cooperation with, in love with, and under the direction of our Heavenly Father. There is simply no other way to do anything worthwhile, especially in the matter of winning souls.

Another caution is advisable here. While pleasing God is the primary means by which we determine our effectiveness as evangelists, that effectiveness may not be humanly discernible. Just because a missionary sees no conversions during their lifetime, we are not able to conclude that God is not pleased with them. It may be that their effectiveness will only come to light a century later, two centuries later, or on the Day of Judgment. Visible conversion rates are not yet another standard by which God wants us to judge each other, or even ourselves.

This point is especially important when seeking to share Christ with Muslims. Muslims are notoriously cautious in evaluating the Christian message. You may find yourself witnessing to your Muslim friend over years before you sense that they are moving toward God. Furthermore, it is often the case that the Christian who pours themselves into the life of a beloved Muslim friend is not the one who leads them to a decision for Christ. Your Muslim friend may decide to follow Christ after meeting a stranger for five minutes at a party or hearing a sermon on the internet! It just happens that way sometimes.

All of this is for the best. Can you imagine how insufferable we are when we begin to think we are favored over others, or that we know the secret to success in winning people for Christ? I have been proud too many times to count, over very little, and I think of it with shame. When I am proud, not only do I fail to give God the glory due to Him, but I run the risk of discouraging someone else who may have compared their lack of results with my supposed “success.” Ironically, the fact that I am proud also means I am probably not

effective in any meaningful or eternal way. May God have mercy on us. May He grant us grace to keep our mental attention away from ourselves and firmly on Christ.

All of this means that prayer is central to the holistic approach. We recognize that God is the one who grants fruitfulness to us and salvation to the lost. We come before Him and ask humbly for His grace and help as we evangelize, and in His kind mercy, He answers us and blesses our efforts.



Prayer Defeats our Spiritual Enemies

As we can see, prayer is crucial to evangelizing Muslim people because it moves God to save them. However, there is another important reason that we should pray: Prayer invokes the help of God in our battle against our spiritual enemies. The apostle Paul put it this way:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12 ESV)

He then listed “spiritual armor” that a Christian should put on to fight in this war against darkness, and he concluded with these words:

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph 6:18-20 ESV).

Paul was calling the Ephesians to respond to the opposition of unseen beings and to fight the spiritual war we are in, by praying – for ourselves, others, and those proclaiming the gospel.

Mave and I have observed that witnessing to Muslims invites opposition from unseen spirits. For example, any time that we are about to participate in an important ministry event involving Christian witness to Muslims, we have noticed a tendency to get irritated with one another for trivial reasons. Too many times to count, one of us (usually Mave!) realizes that we are being pressured by our spiritual enemies and calls a time-out for prayer. This prayer then clears the air, brings reconciliation, and gives us the courage to proceed. Invariably, when we pray, we see that God is working in mighty ways through us in our interactions with Muslims.

Spiritual war manifests itself in other ways. You will notice, for example, that when you are sharing the gospel in conversation, distractions arise. A phone will ring, people will enter the room, or an item will drop out of someone's hands. I firmly believe that many of these strangely timed events are physical manifestations of a desperate spiritual battle between two sides: Satan and his angels on one side, who want to keep humans in bondage, and God's Spirit working through people and angels on the other side to save people from evil. Once Mave and I were visiting a Muslim couple who were parents of a two-year-old girl. When the parents began to ask questions about Christianity, the girl began to roar and curse and cause a scene. We knew the devil was trying to obstruct our witness to lost people. We responded by praying in our minds and asking God to overcome the devil's scheme. Although the visit was brief and a bit chaotic, I felt that our prayers had an effect and opened the way for useful sharing.

These are just a few small examples of the myriad ways demonic attacks can harass the Christian who seeks to serve God through evangelism. On our IMO staff, we have experienced dramatic problems with our health, finances, morale, marriages, children, technology, cars, and homes. Our spiritual enemies have instigated these problems to divert us from our God-given mission. In each case, however, prayer has proven to be a singularly effective and appropriate response. Prayer calls on the power of the living God, a power that dwarfs all others. When He acts, the matter is concluded His way. There is no exception to this rule. Prayer wins the spiritual war.

Prayer Connects us to Christ

The third reason we should pray is because in prayer we draw closer to Christ, and closeness to Christ brings evangelistic fruitfulness.

Jesus said to his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5 ESV) With this straightforward statement, Jesus was giving every Christian the determining factor for producing good in this life (bearing fruit), including the good of seeing lost people saved. If we abide in Christ – that is, if we are aware of, listening to, obeying, loving, and trusting Jesus, we thrive, and that thriving includes doing good things that bring eternally good results. If we draw ourselves away from Christ by ignoring Him, disobeying Him, or allowing our hearts to love the things of this world more than we love Him, we fail to thrive, and we fail to do good things that bring eternally good results. Abiding in Christ is a profoundly simple formula for true success.

Heartfelt prayer is an efficient method by which we can abide in Christ. Prayer keeps us close to Christ in two ways: first, by reminding us of the mediation of Christ; and second, by increasing our dependence on Christ. In a sense, prayer (and worship) are themselves the purest form of abiding since they both represent activities in which we can be entirely attentive to Him even though He is usually invisible to the human eye.

Prayer draws our minds to Christ because as we pray, we become aware that Jesus Christ is authorizing and sustaining our interaction with God the Father. Christ authorized prayer when He taught us the “Lord’s Prayer” and because we pray to God our Heavenly Father in Jesus’ name. Christ further authorized prayer by atoning for our sins on the cross. His death tore the veil separating the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem, signifying that sinful people can now come directly to God by faith in Christ. Prayer is thus woven throughout with the understanding that communication with God the Father is a grace made possible by Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t only authorize our prayers, he sustains them. The Bible tells us that He is at the right hand of God the Father, praying for us. That means that when we pray, our voice is not the only one heard by God the Father, but within His own being God the Father hears God the Son expressing his love and desires for us. Besides that, God the Spirit is groaning in fervent prayers for us that go beyond human words. Prayer is a team effort – and our fellow teammates are persons of the Trinity. This means that in prayer we are joining Jesus Christ himself in an active interaction with God the Father. Could there be any better way than that to abide in Him?

Besides reminding us of the mediation of Christ, prayer also increases our dependence on Christ. In prayer, we cease other mental activities to talk to God. This is a kind of surrender, since during prayer we can no longer struggle mentally to solve problems or make plans. Instead, by praying we are recognizing that we need God. This reinforces

our awareness that we are dependent on God not just for a few problems or immediate needs, but for everything. In turn, this encourages us to trust Him and depend on Him.

In my experience, this second aspect of prayer is crucial in spiritual conversations with Muslims (and other lost people). If I discuss a spiritual topic with a Muslim friend but never pray silently in my mind during the discussion, I find that the outcome of the discussion is often not encouraging. I leave the scene with a sense of unease, and the Muslim I have interacted with is left unchanged. I believe this unfortunate outcome occurs because I am relying on whatever intelligence, experience, and strength I possess to persuade a person about spiritual things.

If, on the other hand, I use mental space to pray for words, boldness, wisdom, and grace in communication, the interaction I am experiencing becomes imbued with life. My heart becomes warmed with love for others. I hear the words of other speakers more easily. I find I answer difficult questions with otherworldly power. Joy enters my heart, and the deception and scheming of the devil begin to appear dim and dull in the presence of the light of Christ. Why does all this happen when I pray? I am convinced that this is because I am abiding through prayer in Christ, and the life of Christ is beginning to flow from me to others, just as the nutrients in a vine stem flow out to the connected branches. I believe Christians can attest to the transformational power of active prayer during interactions with other people.

In conclusion, prayer is the most important part of the IMO approach to sharing Christ with Muslims. Prayer calls on God who has the power to save. It solicits His help in our spiritual battle, and it draws us into fellowship with Christ. For these reasons, we at IMO are determined to permeate everything we do with prayer, and we invite you to join us in this practice.¹¹



¹¹ For example, if you have a gift for intercessory prayer, you can join our Special Prayer Team through our website at www.imuslimoutreach.com/get-involved.

Friendship

Most Muslims come from people groups concentrated in the southern part of the Asian continent and the northern part of the African continent. At the risk of oversimplifying complex cultural norms, I observe that the societies of these areas are organized tribally, meaning that their populations tend to depend on communities defined by kinship for personal safety and economic support. As a result, they regard people either as “insiders” – that is, fellow members of their trusted group, to whom they owe certain forms of social deference and various kinds of material or personal assistance when needed – or “outsiders,” people whose group is competing with theirs for scarce resources and who should be handled with conflict-avoidance strategies based on a perceived code of universally acknowledged values.

We need to recognize here that Islam, a movement born among tribes, has turned its adherents into a sort of “super-tribe.” Hence the success of the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries: Islam unified the heretofore disputatious peoples of the Arabian Peninsula against all non-Muslims. Furthermore, Islam teaches new converts the tribal code, allowing less tribally minded ethnic groups, once subsumed into Islam, to adopt a tribal worldview. What this means for you today is that your Muslim friend may have two layers of resistance to trust-building with you: One based on kinship and the other based on religion.

My wife and I lived in Jordan for some years. At one point a young woman from the US stayed with our family for six months to help us care for our children. This woman has

blue eyes and lighter hair, noticeably different than that of most Jordanians. As a result, when she went out in public, even though she dressed modestly, even by Jordanian standards, she was known to be a foreigner and she attracted the attention of boys or young men, who sometimes made her feel uncomfortable with their whistling, catcalling, and embarrassing comments.

When Mave and I learned what was happening to our guest, we inquired with Jordanian friends about how to protect her from harassment. They told us simply that she should declare to any who offended her, “indak ‘ukht” which in Arabic means, “You have a sister.” We passed this mystifying advice on to her, and she memorized the phrase.

Before long, our guest went out to do some shopping, and when she came home, she reported that, as usual, a group of young boys had approached her, making unkind comments. She had turned to them and boldly declared (in Arabic), “You have a sister!” and to her astonishment, the boys ran away. We marveled at the power of a few simple words.

Over time I was able to understand the logic behind the phrase we had been taught. Our guest’s difficulties stemmed from the fact that she was known to be from a tribe different than that of the young men who harassed her, a tribe perhaps so remote that its members would not be able to protect her. These boys were therefore indulging in some aggressive behavior without fear of reprisal. When, however, this foreign-looking woman spoke sharply to them in Arabic, she immediately identified herself as a possible member of the Arab complex of tribes. Further, the meaning of the

phrase, “You have a sister” was well-known to them: It was the observation that the boys also had extended families and that the women of those families could become the targets of retributive justice. It was a declaration of tribal protection with an indirect threat of damage to their tribe’s reputation. The risk the young boys then suddenly realized they were taking was to incur the wrath of the older men in their family network who would be publicly humiliated should the affair be known. No wonder they ran!

The point here is that, especially if your Muslim friend is a first-generation immigrant from a Muslim-majority country, they likely still view the world through a tribal lens, in which everyone is assessed based on blood relationship and/or religion. You may be, because of your ethnicity and beliefs, an “outsider” from the perspective of your Muslim contact, and this poses several difficulties.

The first problem with being an outsider is that a Muslim will initially regard you as a member of a competing tribe. Thus, your viewpoints and way of life are likely already rejected as inferior. Your Muslim contact has already erected mental barriers against any ideas you might have. Another drawback is that Muslims naturally avoid discussing sensitive topics (like leaving Islam) that could threaten their standing within their primary social group. Finally, if you are seen as an outsider, you can assume that members of your Muslim contact’s family and religious community are carefully watching them for signs of disloyalty. Any progress you make in convincing your friend to consider Christ may unravel once those family and community members begin questioning and pressuring them.

So how does one avoid these difficulties? Is it possible to become an “insider” to one’s Muslim contact? The answer is a resounding, “Yes.” You may become an "insider" in the mind of a Muslim contact through genuine friendship -- the process by which they begin to trust that you care about them and are committed to their well-being. In such cases, discussions of spiritual topics can become deep, sincere, and even fruitful.

But how is such a friendship to be cultivated? At IMO we believe strongly that such a friendship is best cultivated through developing what we call an “Ambassador Mindset,” with four key elements: Love, Gentleness, Patience, and lots of Hospitality.

Love in Friendship

The Bible tells us that without love our words are just a “clanging cymbal.” All of us know this to be true. None of us enjoys being smiled at and told nice things when we know the speaker doesn’t mean what they say and might even wish us harm. We don’t listen to such speakers with receptivity; instead, we watch them warily for threatening signs and quickly seek to leave their presence.

Love is an essential ingredient in building friendship with a Muslim person. We must genuinely regard our Muslim contact with affection, holding them in high esteem as beloved by God and made in His image. Our love must be the kind that comes from God; it mustn’t be dependent on whether they listen to us, answer our text messages, or show up on time. We do not love people only if they please us. We love them no matter what they do because this kind of love is a commitment, not just a feeling. It is the settled decision that, regardless of the outcome, we will esteem that person for their humanity and pursue their well-being.

Developing this godly love, in my experience, requires time and spiritual vigilance. At first encounter, a person is just another human body. We take in physical details one by one. Some of the details might seem strange to us at first because they are the trappings of a different culture: Their clothing, accents or expressive gestures seem strange to us. Soon, however, we speak with them, and suddenly we are sharing bits of their mental world. Over time we learn about their family, their history, and their opinions. We begin to get a sense of their values – what they delight in, and what they

fear. There comes a point where we know this person quite well, including strengths and talents but also weaknesses and perhaps even sins. As we acquire these insights, we begin to know them more deeply. It is at this juncture that we have an opportunity to love with understanding, the way God loves us, failings and all. With this kind of attitude in our hearts, we will find that our Muslim friends, despite their inclination to categorize us as outsiders, will sometimes invite us to share some of their private thoughts and feelings. In this case, we have transitioned from being an outsider to being an insider in their world.

Such a transforming love requires a kind of spiritual vigilance. I find that my attitude toward others, and especially toward people who do not share my worldview, can quickly become sour, especially if I am tired or stressed. I believe this is due to my flesh, which has selfish and unholy tendencies. However, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, and I find that through prayer and meditation on this matter of love, I can experience interactions with my Muslim friends that are nothing short of miraculous in their sweetness, joy, and delightful outcomes.

Gentleness in Friendship

The second characteristic of the Ambassador Mindset is gentleness. Gentleness is mildness of manner. Gentleness accelerates the process of human bonding and amplifies the message we are trying to deliver to our Muslim contacts. Gentleness deepens the impact of our lives and words on our Muslim friends.

To understand the importance of gentleness in relating to our Muslim contacts we first need to understand the role of shame in human relationships. People in general are slow to trust others because sin has separated us not only from God but from other human beings. The first recorded effect of sin in Genesis is shame – the desire to withdraw from others to hide our imperfections from them. After disobeying God, Adam and Eve “realized they were naked” and sought to hide their nakedness from each other.¹² Shortly after that, they hid from God. They were afraid of being exposed and open to examination. They were ashamed.

This sense of shame has stayed with humankind from the beginning, and it hampers our attempts to trust others and to have friends. Most of us can think of times we approached other people, hoping that those people would esteem us and include us in their lives, only to have those same people publicly point out our imperfections or even mock us. Most likely we then used some sort of coping strategy to handle the ensuing sense of humiliation and the concomitant fear of further exposure. We laughed it off, recoiled, retaliated, or stubbornly denied the hurt. Likely,

¹² cf. Genesis 3:6-7.

we did not pursue time with those people further. Shame dealt a blow to friendship, as it does all over the world in countless scenarios every day.

We all know what it is to feel shame, and we have all experienced the way that shame robs us of the trust needed for healthy, encouraging relationships with others. However, for those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ, much of the shame brought by sin has been mitigated by the cross. While being tortured and killed, Jesus suffered every possible indignity, including the nakedness that was one of the first sources of human shame. His public humiliation was a communication to us that we who have believed in Him will no longer have to suffer degradation before God. Instead, we will be restored to dignity – even to honor (!) – first in the eyes of God, and then in the eyes of others. As Paul puts it, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Co 5:21 ESV).*

All this gives Christians a profound sense of security. We need not fear shame, because the ultimate arbiter of value, the Creator of all things, has deemed us honorable. He has removed our contemptible acts and thoughts from before His Majesty and clothed us with the innocence and dignity of His Son. True, we will face various threats to our honor and safety in this life – some of them terrible, perhaps even unimaginable – but because we know that we will be restored in the end, we can patiently endure every trial. Glory awaits us.

Our Muslim contacts do not enjoy the comfort of such a bright future. Christ's death is useless to them because they neither believe that He is the Son of God nor that He died for our sins. Instead, they live each moment of every day with human shame, all the while suffering its decaying effect on their human relationships. In addition, as a backdrop to everything they do, they carry the weight of their disgrace before God. True, Islam tries to cover these pains through ornate rituals, but in doing so it exacerbates the problem. Not only are Muslims stricken because of their God-given conscience, but they are frustrated because they cannot live up to the demands of a hopelessly complicated cultus.

All this is to say that it is vital that we be gentle with our Muslim contacts so that we do not needlessly trigger their shame-response and evoke in them the impulse to avoid us. Unfortunately, this lesson has been a hard one for me personally to learn. Growing up as an American I was taught that shame is itself shameful (ironic!) Flaws are to be exposed, not denied. Trained as a Marine, I developed a bold, forthright manner with people. These tendencies are not all bad, but they meant that I had to learn the hard way that although Muslims are often brash, fun-loving, expressive, and warm, they also tend to run from certain kinds of exposure. They need reassuring signals from others that, in each relationship, their friend will look the other way over certain personal failings, or even cooperate in explaining flaws away. They need to know that you honor them, even though they might have some dishonorable characteristics. Gentleness sends these signals and gives your Muslim contact room to get to know you.

The Apostle Paul must have been aware of this dynamic when he explained how we are to share Christ with others:

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.... (1Pe 3:15-16 ESV)

When we are gentle and respectful, even people who are against our message will find themselves trusting and appreciating us. They will sense that we are for them, perhaps as no stranger has ever been. In an unexpected twist, attacking our honor will suddenly seem to them to be truly shameful. They will wonder what worldview produces such a pleasing demeanor in its adherents, and they will be drawn to inquire further.

Patience in Friendship

The third characteristic of the Ambassador Mindset is patience. Patience is a willingness to persevere toward a goal despite discouraging circumstances. Patience enables an Ambassador to keep loving and witnessing to a Muslim friend even though the process of a Muslim coming to Christ can take years and can involve many apparent setbacks.

A few years ago, I was at a picnic with friends, and an IMO Ambassador handed me his phone. “Salma has some news for you,” he said. I took the phone with surprise: Salma was a Muslim woman who had attended a Bible study with us for a short time before expressing her strong opposition to Christianity. She had stopped attending our Bible study, but her mother had occasionally interacted with us for years, and during that time Salma had done everything she could to keep her mother from converting. They then both moved out of state. Why would she want to talk to me?

Imagine my shock when with a beaming Salma joyfully shared how she and her mother had joined a church in their new city and had been baptized. They were children of God, and she could not contain her delight. I was happy for her, but also a bit dazed. How had this change occurred?

Since that phone call, I have had time to reflect on Salma’s story and draw a conclusion. I believe that a key ingredient in her case, aside from our prayers, Bible study, the gospel, and invitations to church, was the Ambassador who had handed me the phone. He, along with his wife, kept visiting,

calling, and texting Salma and her mother throughout their time in our city and afterward. They had joined me in visiting them in their apartment (a visit that was singularly uncomfortable due to Salma's vocal attacks on Christian ideas). But after I gave up on Salma, he and his wife kept treating Salma and her mother as friends. When Salma and her mother finally accepted Christ and wanted to share their overflowing joy, whom did they call? The Ambassador. He had been there for them through thick and thin, and they wanted him to be the first to know that his perseverance had paid off.

In the case of Salma, my friend's patience allowed him and his wife to keep communicating with and praying for Salma even after she had ostensibly rejected the gospel. This kept Salma in contact with the ideas and the influence of God's people until that time when she and her mother were ready to surrender to Christ. This illustrates the fact that we should not give up on our Muslim friends easily. As God leads, and with His help, we should keep offering our friendship, prayers, kindness, and love to our Muslim contacts through the ups and downs of their pilgrimage to Christ.

Lots of Hospitality in Friendship

Islam emerged among a Semitic people - the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, and through the years it has transmitted the elements common among Semitic cultures to its followers – the foods, forms of marriage, inheritance laws, status of treaties, etc. Prominent among Islamic values inherited from Semitic cultures is hospitality; the practice of feeding and housing guests in one's home. This particular emphasis continues to the present day in Islamic countries.

As any visitor to the Middle East or South Asia will tell you, the people of those regions put a great deal of focus and energy into meeting the physical and social needs of visitors. It is generally considered honorable to invite someone who is a stranger to the area to one's home for a meal and to go to great lengths to feed them with as sumptuous a feast as possible, including multiple choices of drink, fruit, and sweets. Excellence in hospitality exalts the host as a person worthy of esteem.

The expectations placed on a host in Middle Eastern cultures have remained largely unchanged for at least four thousand years, as can be seen by reading the story of Abraham and his guests in Genesis 18. These expectations include four elements: An invitation; a special place; abundant food; and the separation of the sexes. By observing these principles, any person can make a Muslim feel welcomed and well-served, even in the Western context.

1. An Invitation

He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on--since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."

(Gen 18:2-5 ESV)

Abraham sees strangers and reacts immediately by inviting them into his space to rest and be refreshed and fed. This would not be the normal US reaction to strangers. (Check out the panicked submissions in the NextDoor App to see how Americans view strangers wandering about their neighborhoods!) Very often, the Western reaction to newcomers is fearful, suspicious, and wary. When seeing an unrecognized face on our street, we are more likely to reach for a telephone than a teapot. However, if we are to build friendships with Muslims, we must develop Abraham's open-hearted view of people who are yet unknown to us. We should use welcoming words and facial expressions, rather than sullen silence, to dissipate the natural uncertainty that comes with meeting someone new; and what more powerful way to express welcome is there, than to invite a person over for a meal in one's own home, with one's own beloved family?

Notice that Abraham takes the initiative. The strangers have only walked by: He rushes over to them. They have

expressed no need: He sees their need and offers to satisfy it. They have not revealed their status, and yet Abraham assumes that they are worthy of great respect. Who is not pleased to be welcomed in this way? If you want to be friends with Muslims, take the initiative to smile at them, warmly greet them, speak with them, and invite them to your home. Don't wait for the magic moment for the invitation either. Use an open hand. Your Muslim friend may respond at first hesitantly (especially if they have grown accustomed to Western ways), but invariably they will relax and with great relief enjoy your generous words and actions. Even if they refuse your invitations, you have made an indelible impression on them as a person of honor. Don't worry; you can't see it, but your efforts have promoted you – and by extension, your Lord – in their sight.

2. A Special Place

In many Arabic-speaking countries, most homes have a room identified with an Arabic phrase which we would translate literally into English as “The Room for Receiving.” This room is designed for welcoming guests and has the best furniture that the family can afford. It is kept free of dust and clear of clutter. It is often ornately decorated. This is the room in which the family receives new and/or important visitors. Abraham has his version of a “Room for Receiving,” which is described as “under the tree” (vv. 4 & 8). One imagines that Abraham lives in a hot, dry place, with little protection from the punishing heat. Most of us know how welcoming the cool shelter of a shade tree can be on a sunny day. Abraham has chosen the most restful, comfortable surroundings that he can find for his guests to relax in while he and Sarah serve them.

In the same way, the environment into which you invite your guests is something to keep in mind when entertaining a Muslim friend. It might be thoughtful to prepare a place in your home that is comfortable, quiet, and free of clutter, where you can serve drinks and snacks and enjoy quiet conversation. By paying attention to the surroundings you provide for your friends, you will communicate to them that you want them to feel welcomed and honored. Your efforts will not go unnoticed.

3. Abundant Food

Abraham does not say to his visitors, “If you are hungry, help yourselves, there is some food in that box over there,” as someone might do in the US, with a wave of the hand to the refrigerator. Instead, Abraham makes food appear, and it is his best food (a calf!) and it is provided in quantities that exceed the physical capacities of his guests (three seahs of flour = four quarts = a lot of bread). He is providing both spontaneously and generously.

To translate this practice to our times, consider doing the following: First, provide food and drink without being asked. Second, make your quantities generous. Third, add a special touch to the food so that it is particularly pleasing. Finally, serve pre-dinner snacks or post-dinner desserts using a tray or some other nice way to present what you have, and if there is a meal at a table, set it nicely. Do you have to do all this to make your Muslim friend feel welcome? Not necessarily, but when you do try, it is appreciated, and you have added another reason to their list to trust you and to consider your way of life and your message.

What about Islamic Food Restrictions?

Muslims hold to dietary laws. Foods that they are allowed to eat are called “halal” foods. All else is forbidden (“haram.”) Specifically, Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol or eat pork, shellfish, or meat that is not slaughtered and prayed over in a certain way.

We recommend not serving pork or alcohol to Muslim guests, but also not worrying about buying halal chicken, beef, or lamb. In my view, going to the trouble to purchase meat over which Islamic prayers have been uttered seems to be an endorsement of the practice. I would rather leave the matter unmentioned, and let my guests make their own decisions. Sometimes Muslim guests ask about the food, but not always. Usually, this approach works nicely. The guests eat heartily, and no one is offended. If there is a guest who is fastidious about the Islamic requirements, it is wise to have a vegetable alternative to the main dish so that their plate does not remain empty.

4. The Separation of the Sexes.

When I was eighteen and living in Jordan, I traveled to a suburb of Amman to make my first visit to an Arab home for dinner. I was welcomed into the house and shown into their visitor’s room. When I went through the doorway of the room, I startled a young woman dressed in a black abaya (cloth covering the body). She rose, screamed, and rushed away. The visit continued normally after that, but I did not see the young girl again nor did my host show any sign that he knew that I had encountered her. I left their home a bit puzzled.

What I didn't know was how carefully Jordanian and other Arab cultures prevent members of different families who are of the opposite sex from interacting – or even being alone in the same room in a house. In fact, in more traditional Arab homes, a young woman who allows herself to be caught alone with a man from outside the family is regarded as having brought great dishonor upon her tribe – dishonor which can only be wiped away by her death. Hence the phrase “honor killing,” which refers to the practice of fathers killing unmarried daughters who are accused of having interacted inappropriately with any man outside of the family.

Notice from the Genesis 18 passage that Abraham observes the separation of the sexes. Sarah remains in the tent, not even visible to their guests. This practice is an ancient Eastern one.

Islamic cultures are modernizing and changing, and the separation of the sexes is not as rigidly predictable as it once was. However, there is still a wide range of viewpoints and practices among Muslims on the topic, and it is good for the Christian who is getting to know a Muslim family to be aware of this dynamic.

In general, it is wise when interacting with Muslims not to touch or offer a handshake or hug to members of the opposite sex (but you can accept such cheerfully and briefly when it is offered to you). In addition, one should minimize conversation with any member of the opposite sex, instead spending most of your social energy getting to know and share Christ with those who are of your sex. As you

demonstrate modesty and wisdom in this way, your Muslim friends will come to trust you and respect you as a person of honor.

It is also good to be aware that, if you are too friendly with members of the opposite sex who are of a Muslim background, they may misinterpret your friendliness as romantic interest. This can introduce devastating complications in your relationships which eliminate the effectiveness of your Christian witness, or worse. If you have not crucified your flesh in this area of your life, do so. Once you are resolved to walk righteously before the Lord, share your decision with Christian friends who can help keep you accountable.



The Gospel

The third element of an apologetic approach is clear communication of the gospel. By “gospel” we mean the good news that people can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, who lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again from the dead. The gospel comprises the historical facts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and their theological implications: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 ESV).

We recommend that any Christian seeking to share Christ with a Muslim contact should share the gospel message with that person early and often, for the following reasons:

1. A Muslim may be ready to accept the gospel immediately. We cannot know where in their spiritual pilgrimage they are, and we should not assume that they will not understand and receive the good news.
2. A Muslim may not have much time left to live. None of us knows the number of our days. I have personally shared the gospel on two occasions with men who passed away shortly afterward. I am grateful that I was not negligent in evangelizing them.
3. Who else is going to share the gospel with your Muslim contact, aside from you? You may be the person chosen by God to carry this important message to your Muslim friend.

4. There is power in the mere communication of the gospel sufficient to transform people. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

5. As a follower of Christ, your faith in Him is the most important aspect of your life. By sharing the gospel with your Muslim friend, you are allowing them to know what is most important to you.

6. A discussion of the gospel will allow your Muslim contact to reveal if they have questions about the Christian faith.

Although any communication of the good news lovingly presented is helpful to your Muslim contact, it is useful to know how to avoid triggering unnecessary questions and challenges. For this we recommend a way of telling the gospel called ANY-3.¹³

13 Ministrybackpack. (n.d.).

<https://www.ministrybackpack.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/any-3-overview.pdf>

A shortened version of ANY-3 is provided here:

Any-3: Short Version¹⁴

You say:	And your Muslim friend will likely say:
1. Are you a very religious person?	Yes, somewhat <i>or</i> Not very religious, but I try.
2. Most religions are alike, aren't they - we all want to go to heaven, but we all have a problem - sin. In your religion, how are you making sure that you go to heaven?	(List of good works, or good intentions, or repentance)
3. On Judgment Day, will you go to heaven?	I don't know.
4. What I believe is different. I know that I am going to heaven because I know that my sins are forgiven. It is not because I am a good person, although I do try. I know my sins are forgiven, because God Himself has made a way for our sins to be forgiven.	(listening)
5. God sent Jesus. He was perfect and did miracles. He also told his closest friends that He had to die and be raised again to life. Do you know why He said that He had to die?	No, I do not know why He said that.
6. The Taurat ¹⁵ tells us that Adam and Eve sinned against God and were thrown out of the garden. Then God killed an animal and used its skin to make them some clothes. The animal was a sacrifice that covered the shame of sin.	(listening)

14 The account above is adapted from Any-3: Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime by Mike Shipman (2013-01-01), available at www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com/bookstore. Used by permission of WIGTake Resources.

15 (Pronounced "toe-rat").

You say:	And your Muslim friend will likely say:
7. From then on the prophets offered sacrifices to pay for sin. Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and others did this. In fact, the Bible teaches that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood.	(listening)
8. In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." A lamb is an animal used for sacrifice.	(listening)
9. That is why Jesus said that He must die. By dying on a cross Jesus became the sacrifice which paid for your sins and mine. Three days later God raised Jesus from the dead, showing that the sacrifice was accepted.	(listening)
10. According to the Bible, if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, God forgives our sins and we go to heaven after we die.	(listening)
11. Does this make sense to you?	Yes or No
12. Do you believe this?	Yes or No
13. I have enjoyed this conversation. Let's meet again sometime to talk. (If desired, exchange cell numbers).	Well, I am busy..or Yes, let's do that.

The Bible

A 2017 study of Muslim converts to Christianity in the US context discovered that they attributed their conversions most commonly to three factors: Experience with a local church, the input of a Christian friend, and exposure to the Bible.¹⁶ In this handbook, we have already discussed the importance of friendship. In this section, we will discuss the Bible, and in the next section, the role of the local church in winning your Muslim friend to Christ.

Some years ago, I had the pleasure of getting to know an Iranian professor of Biochemistry who had come to the United States with his wife to do advanced research at a US University. He happened to attend a Bible study covering the sermon on the mount that we were holding for ESL students at a local church. There was one moment when we had just read out loud Matthew 7:12 (ESV): *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.”* My professor friend, who did not often comment as we studied the Bible, was quiet for a moment, and then said, “This is the most important statement in all of religion.” Several weeks later, in the same Bible study, he prayed to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior.

In my experience, and from anecdotal evidence gleaned in discussions with missionaries and evangelists, the Bible often has a powerful effect on Muslim people. For this

16 Kronk, R., Daniels, G., Chapman, M., & Watson, J. (2017). Fruitful practices in ministry to the North American Muslim ... Fruitful Practice Research. <http://www.fruitfulpractice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Fruitful-Practice-Diaspora-Report.pdf>

reason, we recommend that a Christian who is sharing the gospel with a Muslim friend look for opportunities to read the Bible with them or tell them Bible stories.

Any Bible passages are appropriate with Muslims, but four Bible passages that I have found to be especially meaningful are the following:

1. **The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7.** Muslims reading the teachings of Christ are struck by the power and truth they find in his words. I believe that in hearing the Sermon on the Mount, Muslims realize they are encountering moral instruction far superior to anything that Muhammad had to offer.
2. **The Gospel of Matthew.** Written as it was for a Semitic people (the Jews), the gospel of Matthew resonates with many Muslims culturally.
3. **The story of Abraham almost sacrificing Isaac – Genesis 22.** For some reason, this story does not fail to fascinate Muslims. The Qur'an mentions Abraham almost sacrificing one of his sons (whom Muslims now teach was Ishmael, not Isaac), but the details provided are tantalizingly sparse. I once read this passage out loud at a Muslim student group meeting at a private university. One of the students in attendance so enjoyed the story that he asked in front of the group if they could read the Bible at all their meetings. This did not make the group leadership happy, and I was not welcomed to the Muslim student group again.
4. **Prophecy of the Cross – Psalm 22.** This is a suitable passage to read together with a Muslim friend when you are in a quiet and private place where you can focus on the text.

The Local Church

As previously noted, experience with a local church is one of the top three factors leading Muslims to Christ in the US context. For this reason, we encourage Christians who are interacting with Muslims to seek opportunities to invite their Muslim friends to church. As you do, consider the following:

1. Let prayer guide you. Pray for your Muslim friend and for appropriate timing in making your invitation. God knows best how to arrange such an offer so that it is a natural outgrowth of your friendship and seems good to them.
2. If appropriate, offer transportation to and from church. This simplifies logistics and takes away one more obstacle from a step that is daunting to them for many reasons. Even if you cannot provide transportation, be at the church before they arrive so that you may welcome and sit with them.
3. Stay relaxed in attitude. They should feel free to say “no” without worrying that they are offending you.
4. If they agree to come, inform your church leadership. It is honoring to most Muslims to be welcomed by someone in authority. One Muslim background believer noted how powerful it was to her that the head pastor of the (large) first church she visited singled her out for a warm personal greeting when she showed up for the first time.
5. Your Muslim friend may not show up. Do not be surprised or disappointed at this. No-shows are common! Remember that Muslims are captive to a

spiritual enemy who is working hard to scare them into avoiding everything that might lead them to freedom and truth. The devil's efforts to discourage them (and you) will be intense. If your Muslim friend doesn't keep their appointment with you, cheerfully continue to be their friend, and be reassured that another opportunity to share your church community with them will develop in God's perfect time.

Section 3: Islam

In this section, we will seek to describe the religion of Islam. We will cover the following topics:

1. Islam Broadly Defined
2. A Brief History of Islam to the Present Day
3. Key Islamic Doctrines
4. Key Islamic Practices
5. Primary Islamic Holy Days

When interacting with Muslims and discussing religious topics with them it is helpful to know some of their religious beliefs and practices in advance. To that end, the discussion of Islam on the following pages will equip you with enough information to be confident and persuasive as you share Christ with your Muslim friend. Our focus is not here on the factual, logical, or moral weaknesses of the Islamic narrative, but on what Muslims believe and how they act on those beliefs.

Islam Broadly Defined

The word “Islam” is a noun and refers to the religion. It is analogous to the word “Christianity.” The Arabic word “Islam” literally means “submission.”

“Muslim” can be an adjective or a noun. It is analogous to the word “Christian.” As an adjective, it can describe those things or ideas that belong to the religion: For example, a building, an educational program, or a region can be described as “Muslim.” The word might also be a noun referring to people. A “Muslim” is a follower of Islam. The Arabic word “Muslim” literally means “one who submits.”

“Islamic” is always an adjective and means “related to Islam.”

The Religion of Islam is reverence for three things: A person named Muhammad, a book called the Qur’an, and a tradition known as the Hadith.

Muhammad

Muslims believe that Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 AD. When Muhammad was 40 years old, he began to claim to have visions of a spiritual being that identified itself as the angel Gabriel. This spiritual being purportedly began to give him verses of a new scripture which he was to memorize and pass on to others for the guidance of humankind. These “revelations” or “visions” would continue until he died in 632 AD.

A small group of relatives and friends believed in Muhammad’s visions and accepted him as a prophet of God. However, other members of the Meccan community doubted him and opposed his movement almost immediately. In 622 AD he left Mecca with his band of followers and made his way to Medina, another city some 200 miles away. Muslims mark 622 AD as the beginning of the Muslim calendar (the Hijri calendar).

In Medina, Muhammad changed his approach. The revelations he claimed to be receiving became less theological and more legalistic and militaristic. He and his followers began to raid trade caravans and overcome opponents through warfare and intrigue. They had several significant battles with forces from Mecca, some of which ended in victory for Muhammad. In the end, Muhammad and his growing band of devotees prevailed, and he returned to Mecca in triumph in 630. When Muhammad died in 632, most of the tribes of the Arabian peninsula were following Islam.

Muhammad's impact on his followers was profound. To this day, Muslims base their moral and religious outlook exclusively on the sayings and deeds of Muhammad and those religious figures who derive their authority from him. Muslims recognize no human source for information about the supernatural other than Muhammad.

For example, Muslims believe, based on Muhammad's claims, that the Bible no longer exists in its original form, but that it became corrupted at some point before the formation of the Qur'an.¹⁷ Many of the figures in the Bible (including Jesus) were prophets of Islam, and to some of these individuals, God gave "revelation" in the form of a holy book. Over time each holy book was changed, and whenever this happened, God sent another prophet with another holy book to take its place. Finally, Muslims assert, God chose to call a prophet from the descendants of Ishmael – Muhammad – and ensured that his holy book – the Qur'an – would be the final, incorruptible revelation.

Another interesting twist in the story of Muhammad would have a long-lasting impact on the Muslim world. Although Muhammad had 13 wives, he had no surviving male child. This meant that, once Muhammad died, the Muslim community had to decide who should take his place as the military and political leader of Muslims. After that a rift appeared in the Muslim community between two groups: One of these groups, later called "Sunnis," held that prominent members of the Muslim community should select a leader through the traditional Arab consensus system.

¹⁷ Most Muslims insist on this point despite verses in the Qur'an that imply the trustworthiness of the Bible as it was at the time of Muhammad.

They chose Abu Bakr to succeed Muhammad. The other group, later called “Shi’ites,” insisted that the leader of the Muslim world should be a family member of Muhammad. These selected Muhammad’s nephew and son-in-law Ali as the leader of the Muslims. Sunnis and Shi’ites would ultimately become bitterly – and violently – opposed to each other, and this conflict continues to divide Muslims to the present day.



The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the written collection of the "revelations" Muhammad claimed to have received (in Arabic) between 610 and 632 from the angel Gabriel. The word "Qur'an" derives from a three-letter Arabic root meaning "read" or "recite," and may be a cognate of the Syriac Christian liturgical term "qaryana," meaning "reading."¹⁸

Desert tribes in the sixth and seventh centuries were largely illiterate, so the appearance of a long book of religious poetry among them is an anomaly. Indeed, according to Muslim tradition, the Qur'an was passed down orally at first, with some portions recorded on palm leaves, bones, or scraps of wood. As the story goes, it was not until after the death of Muhammad when memorizers of the Qur'an began to die off in battle that the Muslim community recognized the need to collect the revelations of Muhammad into a single volume. At that point, the Qur'an was made into a book.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 Chapters, called "Suras," predominantly ordered from longest to shortest. Each Sura has a title, usually a word (or letters!) taken randomly from the text of that Sura, often without any apparent relationship between the chosen title and any themes that appear in the Sura itself. Many of the Sura titles are obscure words and their meanings are debated. The list of Suras is as follows:

18 Ringgren, H., & Sinai, N. (2024, May 29). Qur'ân'. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Quran>. Accessed May 25th, 2024.

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
1	Al-Fatiha	The Opening
2	Al-Baqarah	The Cow
3	Al Imran	The Family of Imran
4	An-Nisa	The Women
5	Al-Ma'idah	The Table
6	Al-An'am	The Cattle
7	Al-A'raf	The Heights
8	Al-Anfal	The Spoils
9	At-Tawbah	The Repentance
10	Yunus	Jonah
11	Hud	Hud
12	Yusuf	Joseph
13	Ar-Ra'd	The Thunder
14	Ibrahim	Abraham
15	Al-Hijr	The Rock
16	An-Nahl	The Bees
17	Al-Isra	The Night Journey
18	Al-Kahf	The Cave

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
19	Maryam	Mary
20	Ta-Ha	Ta-Ha
21	Al-Anbiya	The Prophets
22	Al-Hajj	The Pilgrimage
23	Al-Mu'minun	The Believers
24	An-Nur	The Light
25	Al-Furqan	The Criterion
26	Ash-Shu'ara	The Poets
27	An-Naml	The Ants
28	Al-Qasas	The Narration
29	Al-Ankabut	The Spider
30	Ar-Rum	The Romans
31	Luqman	Luqman
32	As-Sajdah	The Prostration
33	Al-Ahzab	The Parties
34	Saba	Sheba
35	Fatir	Originator
36	Ya Sin	Ya Sin

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
37	As-Saffat	The Ranks
38	Sad	Sad
39	Az-Zumar	The Throngs
40	Ghafir	Forgiver
41	Fussilat	Detailed
42	Ash-Shura	The Consultation
43	Az-Zukhruf	The Decorations
44	Ad-Dukhan	The Smoke
45	Al-Jathiya	The Kneeling
46	Al-Ahqaf	The Dunes
47	Muhammad	Muhammad
48	Al-Fath	The Victory
49	Al-Hujurat	The Chambers
50	Qaf	Qaf
51	Adh-Dhariyat	The Spreaders
52	At-Tur	The Mount
53	An-Najm	The Star
54	Al-Qamar	The Moon

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
55	Ar-Rahman	The Gracious
56	Al-Waqi'ah	The Inevitable
57	Al-Hadid	The Iron
58	Al-Mujadila	The Disputing Woman
59	Al-Hashr	The Gathering
60	Al-Mumtahanah	The Examined Woman
61	As-Saff	The Row
62	Al-Jumu'ah	Friday
63	Al-Munafiqun	The Hypocrites
64	At-Taghabun	The Loss and Gain
65	At-Talaq	The Divorce
66	At-Tahrim	The Prohibition
67	Al-Mulk	The Dominion
68	Al-Qalam	The Pen
69	Al-Haqqah	The Reality
70	Al-Ma'arij	The Ways of Ascent
71	Nuh	Noah
72	Al-Jinn	The Demon

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
73	Al-Muzammil	The Enwrapped
74	Al-Mudaththir	The Enrobed
75	Al-Qiyamah	The Resurrection
76	Al-Insan	The Person
77	Al-Mursalat	Those Sent Forth
78	An-Naba'	The News
79	An-Nazi'at	The Snatchers
80	'Abasa	He Frowned
81	At-Takwir	The Rolling
82	Al-Infitar	The Shattering
83	Al-Mutaffifin	The Defrauders
84	Al-Inshiqaq	The Rupture
85	Al-Buruj	The Constellations
86	At-Tariq	The Night Visitor
87	Al-A'la	The Most High
88	Al-Ghashiyah	The Calamity
89	Al-Fajir	The Dawn
90	Al-Balad	The City

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
91	Ash-Shams	The Sun
92	Al-Layl	The Night
93	Ad-Dhuha	The Forenoon
94	Ash-Sharh	The Opening
95	At-Tin	The Fig
96	Al-Alaq	The Clot
97	Al-Qadr	The Decree
98	Al-Bayyinah	The Evidence
99	Az-Zalzalah	The Earthquake
100	Al-Adiyat	The Racers
101	Al-Qari'ah	The Shocker
102	At-Takathur	The Abundance
103	Al-Asr	The Time
104	Al-Humazah	The Slanderer
105	Al-Fil	The Elephant
106	Quraysh	Quraysh
107	Al-Ma'un	The Assistance
108	Al-Kawthar	The Abundance

Number	Arabic Title	English Title
109	Al-Kafirun	The Disbelievers
110	Al-Nasr	The Victory
111	Al-Masad	The Thorns
112	Al-Ikhlās	The Devotion
113	Al-Falaq	The Daybreak
114	An-Nas	The People

Muslims believe that the Qur'an comes from God. To prove this, they often make the following claims:

1. No human can write a chapter as beautiful as any chapter of the Qur'an. This claim is based on two Qur'anic verses; namely, Sura 2, Verse 23: And if you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like these, and call your witnesses apart from God, if you are truthful; and Sura 52, Verses 33 to 34: Or do they say, "He made it up?" Rather, they do not believe. So let them produce a discourse like it, if they are truthful. (www.clearquran.com)

In response to this challenge, a Christian may gently point out that the relative beauty of any work is untestable because mere human beings do not have the authority to define for others what is objectively beautiful – only God can do that. The Christian may then suggest that their Muslim friend read the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7 and see what they think of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ.

2. All copies of the Qur'an are almost identical, and exist in seven alternative "readings," which contain only a few inconsequential differences in spelling. In response to this claim, the Christian can simply commend their Muslim friend for caring deeply about the identification of Holy Scriptures. The Christian can then suggest that they meet to read from the Qur'an and the Bible.

As background information, it is helpful for the Christian to know that there are many versions of the Qur'an which persist despite efforts by Islamic religious authorities to suppress them and that there are differences between all the ancient Qur'anic sources. However, rather than simply attacking the documentary evidence of the Qur'an, it is best to offer your Muslim friend the Bible as a better alternative. You might say something like the following:

"I respect your desire to honor God and to believe in His revelation. The Bible was revealed over a period of 1500 years to 40 authors, and yet its message of hope is clear and unified. Would you study the Bible with me sometime?"

In response, your Muslim friend may insist that you study the Qur'an and the Bible together. Accept such an invitation with enthusiasm. The Bible will shine when compared with the dark incoherence of Islam's "holy" book.

3. The Qur'an makes scientific observations which have proven to be true and which Muhammad himself could not possibly have known. Below is a sample list of Qur'anic "scientific insights" as listed on an Islamic website:¹⁹

- The Role of Water in Sustaining Biological Life
- The Big Bang
- The Future Collapse of the Universe
- Details of the Development of a Human Embryo
- The Atmosphere's Role in Protecting Life
- Iron in Meteorites
- The Fact that Seas do Not Mix when in Contact
- The Fact that Heavenly Bodies Move in Orbits
- The Fact that Mountains Have Roots
- The Expansion of Space
- Pain Receptors in Skin
- Underwater Waves
- The role of Brain's Frontal Lobe

In my experience, a Muslim who touts a Qur'anic scientific insight to a Christian friend is unlikely to have researched the matter in any detail. They are often parroting a chapter title from a book they have seen or a headline from an online article that they came across and may not even be able to quote or find the Qur'anic references involved. Therefore, in response it is often perfectly adequate to listen politely, ask a question or two, and move on to different topics.

Alternatively, you can propose that you both research the matter together in depth. In this case, you will probably find that your Muslim friend rapidly loses interest in the topic as weaknesses in the claims become apparent.

19 See <https://themuslimvibe.com/faith-islam/13-scientific-facts-in-the-holy-quran>

The Hadith

Despite the reverence that Muslims have for the Qur'an, most of them find it hopelessly inscrutable. They commonly declare to non-Muslims that their book is clear and unambiguous in its meaning, but when asked to interpret specific verses they invariably turn to religious authorities for exegesis. Perhaps it is for this reason that much of Islamic religious practice comes directly from secondary written works and not the Qur'an itself.

The most voluminous and influential body of religious instructional material in Sunni Islam and to a lesser extent in Shi'ite Islam is called Hadith (translated as "Report" in English). The word "Hadith" refers either to the collections of stories of what Muhammad said and did or the individual stories themselves. The assumption of Hadith is that Muhammad's words and example display the will of God for all Muslims.

Individual Hadith usually appear with two sections; a story, and a list of names of those who passed the story down from the time of Muhammad to the time of the Hadith's publication. The collections of Hadith which exist today date from 200 years after the death of Muhammad at the earliest. Of these, a collection entitled Sahih al-Bukhari is the most highly respected among Sunni Muslims. Also revered are Sahih Muslim, Sunan al-Nasa'i, Sunan Abi Dawud, Sunan al-Tirmidhi and Sunan Ibn Majah.²⁰ These Hadith are online and searchable at www.sunnah.com.

20 "The Six Authentic Books of Hadith." Ask Our Imam, www.askourimam.com/2016/04/06/the-six-authentic-books-of-hadith/. Accessed 17 June 2024.

Hadith are fertile ground for a devastating critique of Muhammad and Islam on moral, logical, and scientific grounds. However, we do not recommend launching into criticism of Hadith with your Muslim friend for two reasons: First, because Muslims have developed a rather complex classification system for evaluating the relative reliability of each Hadith based on the individuals listed in its chain of transmission (they will bring up this classification system and claim uncertainty about the authority of a Hadith if that Hadith is embarrassing to them); and second, as mentioned elsewhere in this handbook, we recommend focusing on the Bible as offering truth and hope rather than on the weaknesses of the Islamic narrative. Criticism of Islam may lead Muslims to lose faith in their religion, but it will not necessarily lead them to Christ. If you must critique a Hadith to your Muslim friend, do it in a gentle and respectful spirit of inquiry, and provide in the same conversation a much better alternative; namely, the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ as related to us in the Bible.

A Brief History of Islam to the Present Day

By unifying many of the tribes of the Arabian desert under one religious banner, Muhammad created a new community with a powerful fighting force and an insatiable drive for control of the world. After their prophet's death, Muslims would impose hegemony over an ever-expanding portion of the globe. The table below summarizes (admittedly with absurdly simplistic generalization) the phases of that expansion from 632 until the present time:²¹ It tells the remarkable story of a tiny movement started by a desert trader becoming the second largest religion in the world.

Dates (AD)	Label	Area of Increased Influence or Control	Method of Expansion
632-633	Ridda Wars	Arabia	The subjugation of remaining tribes
633-661	Rashidun Caliphs	Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Persia	Military conquest
661-750	Umayyad Caliphs	North Africa, Spain, South Asia, India	Military conquest
		West Africa	Trade, Sufi preaching
750-1258	Abbassid Dynasty	Central Asia	Military conquest
909-1171	Fatimid Dynasty	Egypt	Military conquest
1206-1411	Mongol Empire	Central and Eastern	Military conquest
		Eurasia East Asia	Trade, Sufi preaching
1453-1924	Ottoman Empire	Turkey, Eastern Europe	Military conquest
1924-present	Islamic Resurgence	Worldwide	Revolution, reformation, and emigration

21 For a classic overview see Zeghal, M., & Waldman, M. (2024, April 30). Islamic World. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamic-world>.

Interestingly, the latest phase in Islamic history has seen the expansion of Islam by means other than overt conquest. We have already discussed the effect that higher birth rates among Muslims are having on the world population. In addition, the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and its unifying effect on Muslim Arab states, and the rise of modern Islamic nations have all contributed to the growth and standardization of the Islamic religion across the world. Particularly significant to Christians is the emigration of Muslims to countries formerly dominated by the Christian faith, where they are being exposed to Christian ideas and culture as never before. We live in a strategic time, and our response, if faithful, will help to shape our era in history for the glory of God and the fulfillment of His plan for all nations.

Key Islamic Doctrines

According to the Hadith and many Muslim websites, every Muslim must accept at least six basic doctrines²² (In reality, however, the doctrines which Muslims must accept number in the hundreds, if not thousands):

1. **Monotheism.** Muslims believe that God is a simple unity, with no composite parts, persons, or characteristics. Any other view of God is labeled shirk (polytheism) and is considered an unforgivable sin.
2. **Angels.** Muslims believe that God created angels as his servants.
3. **Prophets.** Muslims believe that certain people throughout history have been set aside by God as his messengers to communicate Islam to people. Prominent figures from the Bible are regarded as Islamic prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, Jonah, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Muhammad was sent as the final prophet.
4. **Revealed Books.** Muslims believe that God gave messages to some of his prophets that they recorded in books. Each of these books taught Islam. Books mentioned in the Qur'an include the Torat of Moses, the Zabbur of David, and the Injil of Jesus. All prophetic books that appeared before the Qur'an eventually became corrupted. The Qur'an was sent to Muhammad as the final, comprehensive, and incorruptible book.

²² Islamweb. "The Articles of Faith." Islamweb, islamweb.net/en/article/134429/the-articles-of-faith. Accessed 24 June 2024.

5. The Day of Judgment. The Day of Judgment is a day lasting the equivalent of 50,000 earth years. It occurs after the resurrection of people, and on it all human beings stand before God. On that day, those who refused to follow Islam or who failed to pay Zakat (Islamic alms) will suffer dreadful tortures, while good Muslims will have a pleasant experience.²³

6. Predestination. Muslims believe that God has foreordained everything.



23 "Is the Day of Reckoning One Day? - Islam Question & Answer." RSS, islamqa.info/en/answers/34719/is-the-day-of-reckoning-one-day. Accessed 19 June 2024.

Key Islamic “Good Deeds”

Based on Hadith, Muslims identify five practices, or “pillars,” which they believe will most likely earn for the individual who performs them entrance into paradise after death.²⁴

1. **The Creed (Shahada).** The creed of Islam is one compound statement: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His prophet.” This creedal statement is included in all prayers and is an integral part of the “call to prayer” that sounds from the minarets of mosques all over the world at prayer times throughout the day. To become a Muslim, one must simply recite the creed in front of Muslim witnesses.

2. **Prayer (Salat).** Most Muslims believe that God requires five ritual prayers per day. These five prayer sessions differ from each other in exact details, but they all contain similar components: Arabic words to recite, standing portions, kneeling portions, and prostrations. Prayers may be performed at home, at a mosque, or anywhere in the company of other Muslims, so long as certain requirements are met, including the requirement to face Mecca. Sometimes a Muslim will request permission to pray while visiting your home. We recommend that you politely decline, explaining that, on your property, only true prayers to God are allowed.

3. **Alms (Zakat).** Muslims are required to give a portion of their wealth, amounting to roughly 2.5%, to Muslim charities.²⁵

24 Belief - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad, sunnah.com/bukhari/2#! Accessed 24 June 2024.

25 “Zakat Calculator #currentyear# to Find Your Payable Zakat Amount.” IslamicFinder, www.islamicfinder.org/zakat-calculator/. Accessed 24 June 2024.

4. Fasting (Sawm). Muslims are expected to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, or sexual relations from sunup to sundown during Ramadan, the ninth month in their lunar calendar. Each day of Ramadan they break their fast with certain foods and prayers. Muslims believe that it was in Ramadan that God began to reveal the Qur'an to Muhammad, and some believe that the angel Gabriel would spend one night that month (one of the last ten nights, on an odd-numbered night, they do not know for certain which one) coaching Muhammad in reciting the entire Qur'an. That night Muslims revere as Laylat al-Qadr, "Night of Decree" or "Night of Power," when Muslims who stay awake praying are more likely to see their prayers answered and will be forgiven for all previous sins.²⁶ Otherwise, Muslims who avoid major sins during Ramadan will have all their sins since the previous Ramadan forgiven.²⁷

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj). Muslims are expected to travel to Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad, at least once in their lives, if they can afford to do so. If they successfully complete the pilgrimage without sexual or relational sin, the pilgrim receives forgiveness for all sins up to that point in their lives. During a Hajj the pilgrim performs certain complex rituals. These include:

- Ritual prayers
- Ritual cleansings

26 Al-Munajjid, M. S. (Ed.). (2024, January 1). Virtues of Laylatul Qadr - Islam Question & Answer. RSS. <https://islamqa.info/en/articles/70/virtues-of-laylatul-qadr>.

27 Al-Munajjid, M. S. (Ed.). (2010, November 8). Virtues of ramadan - islam question & answer. RSS. <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/13480/virtues-of-ramadan>.

- Circumambulating a black cubic structure called the Ka'aba a certain number of times in a certain direction. Muslims believe that Abraham built the Ka'aba around a meteorite, a black stone which pilgrims are expected to kiss.
- Running between two hills near the Ka'aba, reenacting Hagar's search for water for herself and her son Ishmael.
- Spending two nights at a place called Mina.
- Spending time praying at a place called Arafah.
- Spending a night at a place called Muzdalifah and praying there.
- Walking through a valley called Wadi Mahsar.
- Throwing pebbles at a rock which represents Satan.
- Slaughtering an animal.
- Shaving or cutting one's hair.²⁸

28 "Description of Hajj - Islam Question & Answer." Edited by Muhammad Saalih Al-Munajjid, RSS, Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, 10 Mar. 2011, islamqa.info/en/answers/31822/description-of-hajj.

Islamic Holy Days

Muslims observe two major feasts each year:

Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

On feast days Muslims are taught to do the following:

1. Perform ritual ablutions
2. Wear new clothes
3. Put on perfume
4. Say “Allahu Akbar” (God is greater)
5. Visit other Muslims
6. Verbally bless other Muslims
7. Enjoy excellent food and drink
8. Give gifts to family members and friends²⁹

Eid al-Fitr, or “Feast of the Breaking of the Fast” occurs at the end of the Ramadan fast. Celebrations include congregational prayers, charitable giving (Zakat), perhaps a sermon, and visits to family and friends. Most Muslim countries have unique traditional foods that they serve during this feast.

Eid al-Adha, or “Feast of the Sacrifice” occurs during Dhu Al-Hijja, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar. This feast is intended to commemorate the near sacrifice of Abraham’s son and God’s provision of an animal to die in his place.³⁰ Celebrations include congregational prayers, a sermon, the ritual sacrifice of animals, and the distribution of the meat of the sacrifice to family, friends, and the poor.

29 Al-Munajjid, M. S. (Ed.). (2015b, September 20). How to celebrate eid? - Islam question & answer. RSS. <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/148039/how-to-celebrate-eid>.

30 The Qur’an relates the story of Abraham’s sacrifice in vague outline in Sura 37 vv. 101-108. Although the son almost sacrificed is not named there, most Muslims believe that it was Ishmael.

We do not recommend congratulating Muslims on their Holy Days or paying them special Eid visits unless invited to do so, since the narrative behind their celebrations undermines the truth about God and corrupts human society.

Nevertheless, such occasions are suitable times to share with your Muslim friend Bible stories covering the same themes (i.e., for fasting, the story of Jesus in the wilderness, Matthew 4:1-11, or for Abraham and Isaac and the substitutionary sacrifice, Genesis 22:1-14). In my experience, Muslims appreciate hearing the Bible stories read to them and often seem to want to know more, even if they don't openly admit it in a public setting.

Section 4: Tripwires

A “Tripwire” is an idea or practice that, when brought to the attention of a Muslim, inspires them to resist the gospel message. In this section we will cover theological and political tripwires and provide methods for avoiding, defusing, or deflecting them.

Theological Tripwires

Muslims around the world are similarly trained to resist the Christian gospel. Whether in Nairobi or in New York, Muslims tend to counter presentations of the gospel with the following objections:

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is untenable.
2. Saying that Jesus is the Son of God implies that God had sexual relations with Mary.
3. A human being cannot be God.
4. It is not just for one person to suffer for the sins of another.
5. The Bible has been corrupted and is therefore unreliable.

On the following pages we will explain each of these objections in turn and provide efficient answers to them.

Please note that we recommend presenting answers to objections using a technique called “bridging.” In bridging one responds to a challenge first by sincerely pointing out something true or commendable in the challenger’s perspective or approach. Bridging is counterintuitive: It feels at first as if one is giving up ground, strengthening the reputation of the opponent, and reducing one’s own persuasive power, but in most cases the exact opposite occurs. Instead of giving up ground, bridging establishes common ground. Instead of strengthening the reputation of the opponent, bridging tends to enhance your reputation as reasonable and insightful; and instead of reducing your persuasive power, bridging causes onlookers, including your opponent, to listen more carefully and less defensively to your claims.

1. The Doctrine of the Trinity is Untenable.

A gentleman who heard me speak recently confided in me that, after he shared the gospel with a Muslim doctor, the doctor told him, “Explain to me the Trinity, and I will become a Christian.” The gentleman found himself unable to explain the Trinity to his doctor friend, and so no further progress was made in convincing the Muslim doctor to follow Christ.

That we find ourselves unable to explain the Trinity should come as no surprise. Comprehending the doctrine of the Trinity requires careful thought and study of Scripture, and even after such investigation, one’s understanding of the matter is necessarily limited because the object of inquiry is divine and therefore beyond human comprehension. However, we should take heart. God has revealed Himself to us in creation and in the Bible. The picture of Himself He delivers to us by these means may be incomplete, but it is a divine grace, and therefore, true, knowable, and expressible using human language.

A quick review of the doctrine of the Trinity is appropriate here. The doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one being – that there is only one God – but that He exists as three persons; namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The persons of the Trinity share the essence of God and are therefore each fully God, but they are distinct from each other in several aspects, including will, thought, role, and position.

Objections to the doctrine of the Trinity can come in several forms. Some Muslims will point out that the word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible. To answer this objection, simply agree with them and quietly wait for their next comment. Your silence, in most cases, will allow them time to realize that this objection has no bearing on whether the concept of the Trinity is true. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, but the concept does.

Others will ask, “Don’t you believe in three gods – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?” (Or, as some Muslims think, based on verses in the Qur’an, the Father, the Son, and Mary the Mother.) In response to this, you can explain the doctrine of the Trinity; namely, that Christians believe in one God consisting of three persons.

Yet other Muslims will flatly state that the doctrine of the Trinity is incoherent because nothing can be both three and one at the same time. We have found that the most efficient answer to this latter objection is to ask one’s Muslim friend, “Do you have a body? Do you have a soul? Do you have a spirit? Are you three human beings, or one human being?” Most Muslims believe in a triune human nature, so this simple illustration seems to convince most Muslims that it is not impossible for a being to be both three and one at the same time.

Sometimes Muslims question the practical functions of the Trinity. How can it be, they ask, that the persons of the Trinity cooperate with each other? When there are entities with equal power, don’t they vie for control? Here the Christian has an opportunity to contrast the beauty of the

triune God against the desperate poverty of Muhammad's radically unitarian theology. Because Muhammad's god is a singularity, he remains eternally alone until he creates entities other than himself. He does not love anything until he creates something to love. Consequently, all that can be said of the nature of Muhammad's god with any confidence is that he is powerful – able to create, to predetermine, to control, and to destroy. However, from what Muhammad claims about God, it cannot be known if He is intrinsically loving. He has no record of loving others prior to creation.

By contrast, the true God is an eternal community of love within Himself. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity exist in perfect harmony, that is, without rancor or competition, because from all time they love one another: They esteem one another, enjoy one another, and seek the happiness of one other. Creation, furthermore, is an expression of the love of God. Not keeping the joy of community to Himself, God creates beings with whom He can share the eternal interactions of mutual esteem, joy, and pleasure that exist in His being.

Furthermore, the witness of the Bible is that the love of God is neither trivial nor passing. Described again and again by the biblical writers as “steadfast,” the love of God perseveres to save people from the consequences of their sins. The climax of the biblical story, the cross of Christ, reveals the depth and quality of the love of God in a way that transcends description. God's love is unimaginably strong, very mysterious, and profoundly joyful.

Miraculously, the full and eternal experience of that love is offered to us if we but put our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord

and Savior. In this way the doctrine of the Trinity inspires great hope.

2. Saying that Jesus is the Son of God Implies that God had Sexual Relations with Mary.

According to Muslim reasoning, and based on verses in the Qur'an, calling Jesus "Son" of God implies that God the Father had sexual relations with Mary. The most effective response to this challenge is to ask, "What is God capable of?" to which the Muslim will reply "Anything." "Then," you may respond, "He is capable of arranging that His Son is born of a woman without a sexual act." You may then share with your Muslim friend Luke 1:35, which describes the Holy Spirit "overshadowing" Mary and causing her to bear the Christ child.

3. A Human Being Cannot Be God.

Muslims reject the doctrine of the incarnation for two reasons: First, because it seems to diminish God's majesty by assigning to him a human body with biological functions; and second, because it implies the contradiction that God is spatially both limited and unlimited at the same time.

To answer the objection that the doctrine of the incarnation diminishes God's majesty, you may explain to your Muslim friend that Christians believe in a God who is free to conceal His majestic glory if He so chooses, and that the incarnation concealed, but did not diminish, the majesty and glory of the Son of God. A helpful analogy is that of a perfectly cut one carat diamond: If I put the diamond onto a satin pillow in a

glass case, it remains a one carat diamond. If I put the diamond into a rough wooden box in straw, it is still a one carat diamond. In both cases, the nature of the diamond itself has not changed, even if its environment has changed. In the same way, God can conceal his glorious being in humble circumstances without giving up His divinity.

The most effective answer to the objection that the doctrine of the incarnation is self-contradictory is to share with your Muslim friend that Christians believe in a God who is so powerful that He can multi-task. For example, He can walk incarnate on the face of the earth while He sustains the universe.

4. It is not just for one person to suffer for the sins of another.

One way to answer this question efficiently is to point out that human sin causes the sinner to incur a debt to divine justice. Like all debts, a third party may pay it, but only if that third party is not also indebted to divine justice. Jesus Christ was the sinless lamb of God who paid the debt for our sin.

5. The Bible has been corrupted and is therefore unreliable.

A helpful answer to this objection is to state the following: “The Bible is miraculous because, although it was written over 1500 years by 40 authors, it has a unified message. Let me share with you a Bible story...”

If your Muslim friend points out an apparent contradiction in the Bible, we recommend welcoming the criticism and expressing your heartfelt interest in the topic. Get all the details that you can from your Muslim friend on the supposed contradiction, and then pledge to research the matter, setting a time to meet again to continue the dialogue. In this way you will be indirectly getting your Muslim friend involved in Bible study with you. If you do your homework carefully, both of you will grow in your knowledge of and confidence in God's written word.³¹

31 Online resources to help research "contradictions" in the Bible abound. A good example is <https://reformedwiki.com/contradictions-bible>.

Political Tripwires

From its inception, Islam and its adherents have focused on obtaining political control of the world. Their logic is simple: Since God owns the world, and all people belong to him, all people should be Muslims and should live in Muslim societies. Non-Muslim lands, therefore, have come to be known in Islamic law as “Dar al-Harb,” or “The House of War,” while Muslim lands are called “Dar al-Islam” or, “The House of Islam.” Accordingly, it is the duty of Muslims to work hard to make non-Muslim societies Muslim, whether by armed struggle, political action, proselytization, or population growth. Thus, Muslims pay careful attention to politics, talk a lot about politics, and have strong political opinions.

For this reason, several political issues serve as tripwires, potentially causing a rift between a Christian and their Muslim friend if not handled carefully. Among such sensitive topics are the following: the nation of Israel, military action by non-Muslim nations in Muslim lands, and the perceived mistreatment of Muslims living in non-Muslim lands, stemming from a supposed bias against Islam Muslims call “Islamophobia.”

Our recommendation, if any of these subjects comes up, is to avoid giving an opinion or encouraging further discussion of them. However, addressing them can become unavoidable, especially if a Muslim friend asks a direct question, such as, “Did you hear about how the Israeli army killed that poor Palestinian teenager last week and left her to die in the street? What do you think of that?”

In such a case, we recommend an answer, such as the following, that avoids taking a controversial position but gets at the root of the most important issue and refocuses attention on spiritual matters: “The reason that tragedies like these happen all over the world is that there is a problem with the human heart. If we could solve the problem in the human heart, we could solve all these problems and bring peace. God gives us the solution to the problem of the human heart in the Bible.” You then have an opportunity, if there is further interest in the solution, to explain the gospel, along with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer.

This Handbook has been provided to equip you to share the gospel confidently and humbly with your Muslim contacts. As you meditate on and apply what you have learned here, we are confident that God will speak through you to Muslim people, and that they will be transformed through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You may at this point want to get more personally involved in the ministry of IMO. To do so, go to our website at: www.imuslimoutreach.com/get-involved to see the options and select your next step. We are grateful to you, and glad to be connected. Together, by God’s grace, we will reach Muslims for Christ, and one day, standing with them, and for all eternity, give praise and glory to our Holy God.

Country Profiles

By the. Rev. Duane Alexander Miller, PhD

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a land-locked country in Asia. It shares borders with Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and a short border with China. In terms of territory, it is slightly larger than France and a bit smaller than the state of Texas.

Throughout history Afghanistan has been known as the graveyard of empires because great political powers have failed to colonize and/or govern it. In the last three centuries this would include the British Empire, the Soviet Union (1979–1989), and the United States of America (2001–2021).

Afghanistan is one of the most Islamic countries in the world, with over 99% of the population being Muslim. The government of the country rules according to a strict version of the Shari'a, which is understood in Islam as the civil and religious law (there is no separation in Islam) revealed for all times y Allah through Muhammad. Since these laws are divinely revealed and eternal, they are not subject to change or alteration or contextualization.

Afghanistan has one of the most fertile populations in the world. The population is estimated at around 43 million, or some four million more than Canada or the state of California. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of the Afghan woman is 4.4, one of the highest fertility rates in the world outside of Sub-Saharan Africa and about twice the world average.

Afghanistan has various ethnic groups and languages, none of which have substantial numbers of Christians of any church or denomination. The largest ethnic group is the Pashtun at about 42% , the Tajiks at about 27%, with the Hazaras and Uzbeks at about 9% each. The main languages are Pashto and Dari, a near relate of Farsi—the language of Iran. Other tribal or local languages exist.

Christians in Afghanistan generally must keep their faith a secret and meetings with other Christians are risky. The government does enforce orthodox shari'a law, meaning that apostates from Islam must be executed. Despite being rich in natural resources like minerals, Afghanistan's economy remains poor. This is due to a combination of factors including a lack of education for women, tribalism, lack of security, and difficult terrain which makes transportation challenging.

When you talk with your Afghan friends here are some questions you might ask:

1. Ask to see photos of the part of the country they come from. Some of natural scenes are quite stunning.
2. Ask if they had friends from the other ethnic groups growing up. How were they similar or different?
3. If you have developed a trusting and respectful relationship, you may want to ask about shari'a. If shari'a is Allah's law and Afghanistan is following shari'a so closely, why is the country not more prosperous and just?
4. Impress your friend with some trivia: did they know that the city of Kandahar is named after its founder, Alexander (Iskandar) the Great?

India

India is the most populous country in the world, with an estimated 1.45 billion people as of 2024. People often think of India as a Hindu country, which in a way is true. On the other hand, Hinduism is more a family of religious traditions than a single religion. According to the latest census in 2011 (the 2021 census was postponed due to the COVID epidemic), some 80% are Hindus, 14% are Muslims, and 2.3% are Christian. It is likely that since 2011 the percentage of Muslims has increased due to higher fertility. If we estimate that the country is 15% Muslim, that means around 218 million Muslims live in India, which is higher than the entire population of Brazil. Islam arrived through Arab traders visiting the southeastern coasts of the country, and later spread through commerce and military conquest. There are historical mosques from as early as the seventh century, the same century when Islam was born.

Many people in the West have heard about Kashmir. After Partition in 1947 (the separation of India and Pakistan) Kashmir decided to side with India, even though it was a Muslim majority region. Since then, many people in the Muslim majority (some 60%) have desired and sometimes fought for independence from India. India is a birthplace of many religious traditions and religions. Ahmadi Islam was born there in 1889 when Mirza Ghulam Ahmad proclaimed himself the promised mahdi-messiah figure of Islam. This group is generally considered heretical by other Muslims and is severely persecuted in Pakistan, but not India. Sectarian violence and tension are major social concerns in India, and at times mosques have been destroyed by Hindu nationalists. Despite occasional

tensions and even violence, a large majority of Indians (91%) say they have religious freedom.

India is a large and extremely diverse country. Here are some questions you can ask your Indian Muslim friend (or Hindu or Sikh or Jain or Buddhist, for that matter):

1. What region are you from? How is that region different from neighboring regions?
2. Ask your friend if they knew any Christians growing up or if there were any churches in their town.
3. Tell them that Christianity arrived in India all the way back in the 1st Century, with the mission of the Apostle Thomas. Ask them if they knew that Christianity had been in India that long. Can they call Christianity a “western religion” after learning that?
4. India has enormous potential but also faces some very substantial challenges: ask how you can pray for peace and justice there.

Iran

Historically the country of Iran was known as Persia, a country/empire that has a significant presence in the Bible. The book of Esther takes place in the Persian Empire, and it was the Persian Emperor Cyrus who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuilt the city, its walls, and its temple. In Acts 2 we read that there were Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost from Elam and Parthia, which today correspond to regions in Iran.

The population is ~89 million. Iran is not an Arabic or Semitic society, though there is an Arab minority in the country. Most Iranians consider themselves Persian, though there are numerous ethnic minorities in the country, such as Azeri, Kurd, Lur, Arabs, and Turkmen. There are also ethnic Christian minorities in the country (Armenian, Assyrian), though they are dwindling because of emigration.

Technically the religion is overwhelmingly Shi'a Islam (90-95%). Shi'a Islam and Sunni Islam split early in the history of Islam over the question of who the successor (caliph) of Muhammad was. The much larger Sunni tradition held that any Muslim recognized by the elders could be caliph, while the Shi'a Muslims held that it had to be a descendent of Muhammad. Iran is the largest country in the world that is majority Shi'a Muslim. Other countries with large portions of Shi'a are Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. There are also Sunni Muslims (5-10%) and small numbers of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Many Muslims are in fact secular or non-religious but keep their views to themselves.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran took place in 1979. It began with widespread protests and unrest against the Pahlavi monarchy, led by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, starting in January 1978. The revolution gained momentum throughout 1978, driven by a coalition of various groups, including religious leaders, students, and intellectuals, with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerging as its central figure. The Shah fled Iran and Khomeini returned from exile in Paris on February 1, 1979. The monarchy was officially overthrown on February 11, 1979, marking the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A national referendum in March 1979 solidified the transition to an Islamic government.

Iran is of special interest to Christians today because of the large number of converts from Islam living in the country, though many do emigrate if they are able. By some estimates, Iran has the fastest growing Christian population in the world. Many Muslims are disappointed with the failed promises the Islamic Revolution yet still want to know God and live in peace and harmony with their fellow Iranians. Some have found a way to do this in the Christian faith. Still others experience dreams and visions of Christ or an angel or a saint which may begin a spiritual journey.

Iranian Christians appreciate the important role of Persia in the Bible, and view the introduction of the Arabic religion of Islam as a step backwards in culture and philosophy. A conservative estimate of Christian converts from Islam in Iran is around 100,000, though some sources propose much higher figures (a million), which I believe are unrealistic.

Conversation points for your Iranian friend:

1. Call her Persian. Ask her about Persian culture.
2. Share a story in the Bible about Persia with him and ask him what he thinks.
3. Point out that the Persian language has a great body of literature and ask why they must pray in Arabic.
4. Ask them about life in Iran before and after the Revolution. Just listen and get a feel for where they are politically and if they sense that Iran lost something.
5. Read up on some Persian saints, like Anastasius the Persian, James the Persian, Shirin, and Aphrahat. Ask your friend if they knew that there are great Persian saints in history.

Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is an almost-landlocked country in the Middle East sharing borders with Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabi and Israel. Jordan is roughly the size of Indiana, and its population is about 11.5 million—close to the population of Georgia. At least three quarters of the country is desert. The official religion of the government is Sunni Islam, comprising some 95% of the population.

There is a small but ancient Christian minority of 2–4%. The largest denomination is the Jerusalemite Orthodox Church, though there are also Catholic and Protestant groups. It's impossible to say for sure, but the oldest Protestant congregation in the country is probably Saint Paul's Anglican Church in the Ashrafiyeh neighborhood of Amman, the capital city. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is illegal.

Parts of what is today Jordan are known in the Old Testament as Moab and Edom and Ammon and Midian. Indeed, the name of the city Amman may well come from the ancient tribal name Ammon. The Hebrews would have spent some of their 40 years wandering throughout this land. It is home to the exquisite Nabatean remains of Petra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and named in 2007 as one of the “new seven wonders of the world.”

For many centuries Jordan was part of the province of Greater Syria in the Ottoman Empire, which was broken up after World War 1. This marked the independence of many of the countries in today's Middle East and North Africa (MENA). (The book to read is *A Peace to End all Peace* by David Fromkin.)

From 1921 to 1946 it was called the Emirate of Transjordan, led by an imported prince from Mecca. In 1946 Jordan gained independence from the British Mandate and Abdullah I was its monarch. In 1994 Jordan signed a peace agreement with Israel gaining generous patronage from the USA. King Abdullah II, born in 1962, has reigned since 1999. He claims to be 41st generation descendent of the founder of Islam.

Jordan today has few natural resources but exports fertilizers, pharmaceutical products, textiles and apparel, and certain detergents and chemicals. But really, the main resource of Jordan is stability. Many ministries, denominations and companies have their regional center in the Kingdom and/or hold meetings and conferences there. The monarchy is characterized as friendly to the West and civil with Israel. The Kingdom tends to have a positive reputation in the USA and Europe. However, conversion for Jordanian Muslims to Christianity is strictly prohibited, meaning that the country does not in fact have genuine human rights.

If you have a friend from Jordan here are some possible discussion topics:

1. Why don't you allow people to leave Islam for another religion, or for no religion?
2. Why don't you allow a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman?
3. Tell me about Petra and the Nabateans.
4. Tell me about the Christians there—I have read there have been Christians there since the 1st Century.
5. How can I pray for your country. (Of course, this is a great question for any country, including the USA).

Morocco

The country has between 37 and 38 million people (2024). This is close to Saudi Arabia (36–37 million) and Peru (34–35 million). In terms of the USA, the population is slightly lower than California (39 million) and a bit above Texas (31 million).

Morocco is a young nation, with 27% of the population aged 0–14. Unlike the nations of Europe where people have very few children, Morocco has a healthy fertility rate of 2.05 children per woman. Morocco has a high emigration rate. A main destination is Spain, where Moroccans are the largest unreached people group.

The ethnic profile of Morocco is a mix of two main groups: Arabs and Berbers. The Arabs entered the country in the 8th Century at the dawn of Islamic imperialism. The indigenous people of the land are called the Amazigh, though in historical literature they are often called Berbers. The language of the Berbers is called Tamazigh and it has its own alphabet. The Bible has been translated into this language.

Many Moroccans have mixed ancestry. For hundreds of years, Morocco also had a thriving Jewish community, but today almost all of the Moroccan Jews have emigrated to the state of Israel.

Sharing the gospel with Muslim citizens in the country is technically illegal. Despite this, Christianity has grown over the last few decades resulting in thousands of Moroccan Christians, though many have emigrated in search of religious freedom and better economic circumstances.

The capitol city is Rabat, and the largest city is Casablanca.

The government is a monarchy and the gross domestic product per capita is about \$4000, like the Philippines or Egypt. Morocco's economy relies primarily on services (including tourism) and industry—mainly construction, mining and manufacturing.

Local cuisine includes tagine, which is a stew made with meat and vegetables cooked in a covered ceramic dish.

Couscous is also common. Another local dish is called pastel, a pastry dish often stuffed with chicken, spices, egg, and almond. All these dishes have local variants, of course. Tagine refers both to the food and the clay vessels in which the food is prepared and served.

The local dialect of Arabic is a combination of modern Arabic, Berber, and French. It is not always easily understood by other people from the Arab world, and there are significant regional variations. Unlike some other countries in the Arab world, Morocco has not experienced significant social upheaval in recent decades.

Ask your Moroccan friend about:

1. His favorite recipe for tagine
2. Why did she decide to emigrate from Morocco?
3. Let him know you heard about Moroccan Christians and ask him what life is like for those converts.
4. Take ten minutes to read up on the recent international news and ask about recent events. Your friend will be impressed as Americans rarely know about events outside of the USA. This is a way to show your friend honor.
5. Ask about what city they are from (or which city is near their hometown) and learn a bit about it. Then ask about a landmark there.

Pakistan

One of the largest countries in the world, with a population of about 244 million. That is a bit less than Nigeria and a bit more than Brazil. The largest cities are Karachi and Lahore, with 30 million people between the two. The per capita GDP is about \$1,600, meaning it is a very poor country, similar to Yemen or Ethiopia. Its main neighbors are India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Pakistan used to be part of the British Empire along with India and Bangladesh. After World War II, the British decided to grant India independence. India and Pakistan separated into Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority countries. This process was called “partition” and was violent and chaotic. Since partition, Pakistan and India have fought four wars against each other. In addition to this violence, there was a civil war in 1971, and Bangladesh broke off to achieve independence from Pakistan. At the time of partition, Pakistan was more prosperous than India, but that is not the case anymore.

Pakistan is infamous for its blasphemy law, whereby a person accused of blasphemy can be imprisoned or even executed. Over 95% of the country is Muslim, and that is overwhelmingly traditional Sunni Islam. There are some Shi’as and a small group called Ahmadi Muslims, who are largely regarded as heretics by Sunni Muslims and are persecuted. There is a small Hindu minority (2.1%) and an even smaller Christian minority (1.3%). The Christian minority is evenly split between Catholics and Protestants.

The Pakistani economy is always in a precarious state, and millions of Pakistanis have emigrated—especially to the UK, where they form most of the population in numerous neighborhoods and wield substantial political power. Marriage to first cousins is common in Pakistani culture because it helps preserve property in a family, and for Pakistanis living abroad, it helps secure visas for more relatives to move overseas. The Pakistani military is the most important economic actor in the country. The average Pakistani woman will have 3.4 children during her lifetime (this is called Total Fertility Rate or TFR). This high TFR, along with the corrupt economic system, ensures continued emigration to the West for the indefinite future. (By comparison, the TFR of the USA is 1.64 and that of Spain is 1.12. A stable population requires a TFR of 2.1.)

- Ask your friends what part of the country they are from and learn more about it.
- Ask them if there are any local food dishes from their region. Ask them what languages they speak. (The official languages are Urdu and English, but there are several others.)
- Ask your friend how you can be praying for Pakistan, and then do so with them right then and there.

Many Pakistanis are proud of their country but also feel deeply embarrassed at how corrupt and unfruitful it has been. Some Pakistanis will blame colonialism for the sad state of the country, even after 80 years of independence. The only export an average American would know from Pakistan is the Taliban, which was birthed there.

Palestine

We arrive at our first profile that does not pertain to a country. What is Palestine? In using this word, we are not endorsing or criticizing any political orientation.

The name has referred to many different expanses of territory over the centuries in the Near East. It appears to date back to the arrival of the sea people named the Peleset to what is today Gaza in the 12th Century BC. These became over time the Philistines and over the centuries Philistia came to be known as Palestine. Over the centuries “Palestine” was a geographical region, not the name of a particular ethnic group. And then, the geographical region differed from century to century.

But today how is this contentious word used? When we hear Palestinian today it tends to mean a non-Jewish Arab from within the borders of the State of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

For many centuries all of this land was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. That empire expired after World War I, and the Arab sections of the empire were divided by the French and British under the Sykes-Picot agreement. (The book to read is *A Peace to End all Peace* by David Fromkin.)

In 1920 the British Mandate commenced over the Trans-Jordan. After World War II (1939–1945) large numbers of Jews immigrated to British Palestine. The mandate ended in 1948 and a war erupted between the Arabs and Jews. The Jews were victorious and established the secular State of Israel, informed by socialist political values. The areas not

dominated by the Jews were the west bank of the Jordan River and Gaza, a small strip of land on the Mediterranean Sea.

The State of Israel was recognized as a sovereign state. The people of Gaza and the West Bank were recognized as refugees by the United Nations. Many of them emigrated to other parts of the world. A few countries have recognized the state of Palestine, but most have not.

The people of the West Bank and Gaza are technically stateless—which means they don't have the ability to acquire a passport, and this limits their ability to travel internationally.

In 2008 the people of Gaza, tired of the corrupt rule of the political party Fatah, elected Hamas, which was internationally recognized as a terrorist organization, to rule Gaza. After 2008 no more democratic elections were held and since then Hamas has ruled Gaza. The constitution of Hamas declares a key goal: the destruction of the Jewish State (Israel). It is not easy to envision a future when Hamas and Israel can peacefully live side by side.

The people of Palestine often feel they are oppressed by Israel. Israel does not allow for Palestinians to travel freely or operate their own ports or airports. On the other hand, Israelis claim that opening ports means allowing for importing weapons, which historically is accurate.

As Christians, we should recognize there is no political solution to this problem. When you are talking with your Palestinian friend:

1. Mention Jesus, the “prince of peace”, and tell them that Jesus is the only one who can bring true peace
2. Ask him if Islamic politics actually helps. Say all the Jews are gone, how would things be better?
3. Ask him why so many people are trying to leave a good Islamic government, if Islam is the truth?
4. Ask him about Christianity in his land. There are many Christian saints from Palestine. (If you want more info on this, ask the IMO resource coordinator.)

Syria

Syria has been a prominent region in the Middle East since biblical times. References to people from Syria appear as far back as the book of Numbers in the Old Testament. Following World War I, the Ottoman Empire was divided, and the modern Middle East was shaped by the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Syria and Lebanon became part of the French Mandate, with Lebanon designed as a majority-Christian country and Syria as a Muslim-majority country. The French Mandate ended in 1946 when France withdrew its troops.

From 1970 to late 2024, Syria was governed by the Assad family dictatorship. The Assads, members of the Alawite sect—a branch of Shi'a Islam—led a secular regime that granted Christians in Syria more rights than in many other Middle Eastern countries. However, in December 2024, the capital city of Damascus was overtaken by Islamist rebels. The country's future remains uncertain.

Historically, Syria has had thriving Christian and Jewish communities. Although Christians now make up only 3–5% of the population, Syria was about 10% Christian in 1990. The rise of an Islamist government and the potential implementation of shari'a law could accelerate the emigration of Christians, similar to what has occurred in Iraq, the West Bank, and Egypt. Most Jewish Syrians emigrated after the creation of Israel in 1948.

Syria's population of approximately 25 million is predominantly Muslim—90%—with Sunni Muslims accounting for 75% and Alawites about one in nine. Syria is roughly the size of North Dakota, with a diverse geography

that includes ancient churches, Roman ruins, mosques, and Mediterranean resorts. However, much of the southeastern region is arid desert. Arabs constitute the majority, but a significant Kurdish minority has drawn attention from neighboring Türkiye, which has sent troops into northern Syria to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state.

The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, led to the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. Many sought refuge in neighboring Middle Eastern countries, while Germany and the Nordic countries became primary destinations in Europe. Despite the war and significant emigration, Syria's population continues to grow rapidly. However, it is unlikely that many emigrants will return, even with the resolution of the conflict.

Damascus, the capital, holds significant historical and religious importance. It is home to the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, despite the ancient city of Antioch—modern-day Antakya—being located in Türkiye. The Orthodox Church of Antioch is among the oldest in the world. Damascus also retains biblical significance, with Straight Street, mentioned in Acts 9, still accessible today.

While Christian emigration continues to outweigh growth from conversions, some Muslims in Syria have turned to Christianity in recent decades. According to Islamic eschatology, Jesus will return to Damascus—a belief distinct from the Christian view of His return to the Mount of Olives. Notably, St. John of Damascus, one of the first Christians to write about Islam, lived in this historic city.

Engaging with Syrian Friends:

- Ask your Syrian friend if they have visited the Roman ruins of Palmyra.
- Share a story from the Bible about Damascus, such as Acts 9, and invite your Muslim friend to reflect on it.
- Ask your Muslim friend if they are hopeful about Syria's future under the new government.
- Inquire about the success of shari'a in fostering justice and prosperity in other nations.
- Discuss why so few Syrians might choose to return home.
- If trust is established, ask what your Muslim friend believes about the return of Jesus and share the Christian perspective, supported by Scripture.

The United Kingdom

Islam is the second-largest religion in England and Wales, with approximately 7% of the population identifying as Muslim. This number is expected to rise to around 20% by 2050. In Scotland, the Muslim population is between 2% and 3%. Many British Muslims, or their parents, originate from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

The United Kingdom as a political entity dates back to 1603, when King James VI of Scotland ascended to the English throne, becoming King James I of England—a monarch best known for commissioning the King James Bible. Today, the United Kingdom consists of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Geographically, Great Britain is a single island, while Northern Ireland shares the island of Ireland with the Republic of Ireland.

At its height, the British Empire encompassed nearly a quarter of the world's population and territory. Its global influence helped spread Christianity, particularly through the efforts of Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries who traveled to Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia.

According to legend, Saint Joseph of Arimathea brought Christianity to Britain in the 1st century. While this remains uncertain, historical records confirm that Christianity had taken root by the 3rd century, as British bishops were present at a church council in Arles, France, in the early 400s.

Over the centuries, Britain experienced waves of invasions and migrations, including the arrival of the Angles and

and Saxons from continental Europe. This is why English is most closely related to Frisian, a language still spoken in the northern Netherlands. The very name England means land of the *Angles*.

The Decline of Christianity in the UK

Christianity in the UK has declined significantly in recent decades. The state churches—the Church of England and the Church in Wales (both Anglican), and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian)—once played a central role in British society. In 1980, approximately 11.1% of the population attended church; by 2005, that number had dropped to 6.3%, and today it is even lower, at around 5%.

Meanwhile, Muslim immigration from Pakistan, India, and other former British colonies has grown rapidly. Many former churches have been converted into mosques, and today, more people attend mosque services on Friday than attend the state churches on Sunday.

However, there are signs of hope for Christianity in the UK. Pentecostal and Catholic churches have seen growth, fueled by immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, Poland, and Latin America. Additionally, a significant number of people have converted from Islam to Christianity, though such conversions often come with personal risks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that converts sometimes face persecution, and reports indicate that authorities may be hesitant to intervene due to fears of being accused of racism.

Challenges Facing the UK

In recent years, the UK has faced a rise in violent crime, including knife attacks, terrorism, honor killings, and acid attacks on women. Meanwhile, an increasing number of migrants have arrived via small boats from France, often seeking the UK's generous welfare benefits. Deportation remains rare.

At the same time, the cost of living has soared, with energy prices and real estate costs rising sharply. The National Health Service (NHS), once a point of national pride, struggles with delays and systemic dysfunction. The British Navy, which once built and maintained a vast maritime empire, has significantly declined in global influence.

A Call to Prayer

Despite its challenges, the UK has a rich Christian heritage, producing great thinkers like C.S. Lewis (Anglican) and J.R.R. Tolkien (Catholic), as well as missionaries such as Saints Patrick and Boniface. As Britain navigates an uncertain future, consider praying for your British friends. Ask them how they see their country's future and how you can pray for them. Encourage them to rediscover the great Christian legacy their nation has given to the world.

Yemen

Yemen is a country on the Arabian Peninsula, south of Saudi Arabia and west of Oman.

The country is almost entirely Muslim, though there are a handful of Catholic and Anglican chaplaincies in the main cities for foreigners. Even then, these do not function freely or safely—if at all. About two-thirds of the population are Sunni Muslims, while the remaining third are Zaydi. Zaydism is a form of Shi'a Islam, and almost all Zaydi Muslims alive today are in Yemen or southern Saudi Arabia, or have emigrated from Yemen. Several Islamic sources relate how some Yemenis were among the earliest converts to Islam in the 7th century.

The frankincense brought to Jesus at His birth was likely from this region, as it is made from the resin of a tree found there. It is also possible that Yemen is the original place where coffee was grown, though some believe it was nearby Ethiopia. The country is home to the island of Socotra, known for its rare and unique plants and trees.

Yemen was formed in 1990 when two former countries united, but its history since then has not been peaceful.

Around 1994, the country descended into civil war—a conflict that continues to this day. Several parties have been involved, supported by foreign countries and groups—the two main ones being Saudi Arabia and Iran, along with several other Muslim countries, Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and more. While the war had settled into an informal ceasefire for years, the Houthis have recently resumed attacks on merchant vessels and have launched rockets at

Israel. These weapons are widely suspected to have come from Iran.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, but also one of the most fertile. Its total fertility rate (TFR) is among the highest globally, with the average woman giving birth to between 3.5 and 4.5 children during her lifetime. (By comparison, the average woman in the USA gives birth to 1.65 children—below replacement rate.)

Yemeni culture is deeply tied to tribal groups, which has both positive and negative implications. Qat chewing is a common pastime for men. Qat is a mild stimulant, and men often chew it and talk for hours in the afternoon. Unfortunately, it is a water-intensive crop in an arid country. It is also a local tradition for men to carry a curved knife in a scabbard as part of their daily attire. Women's rights are limited in this conservative Islamic culture, though education is a possibility for some.

Some possible questions for your Yemeni friend:

1. Have you been to Socotra? I've heard the plants there are quite unique!
2. Is it true that coffee originally comes from Yemen?
3. Ask about the civil war, and then pray for peace in the country together.
4. Share the story of the Wise Men visiting Jesus, and mention that the frankincense was likely from Yemen. Ask them what they think about the story.

This Ambassador Handbook is intended as a guide for IMO Ambassadors as they share Christ with their Muslim contacts. An Ambassador is a Christian who is praying for and seeking to share the gospel with their Muslim contacts and who has signed up as an Ambassador at an IMO event or online at www.imuslimoutreach.com/get-involved.

Ambassador Coordinators contact each Ambassador monthly via text to ask them for prayer requests, and they share those prayer requests with the Special Prayer Team, a group of hundreds of Christians who have committed to praying for Ambassadors as needed.

Currently there are IMO Ambassadors in dozens of countries around the world. Could it be that God is calling you to join this wonderful worldwide movement? Has He put Muslims in your sphere of influence, where you have opportunity to pray for them, befriend them, and share with them the most important news in the history of humankind? Use the QR code below to connect with IMO and get more deeply involved.



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