

Sharing Christ With a Muslim

Witnessing to the Islamic Community

About 30 years ago I began to teach people how to share their faith in Christ in one-on-one encounters. I soon learned something that has stuck with me through the years: evangelism is more of a *process* than an *event*. There are times when we share the gospel story or our personal testimony pertaining to it when we see immediate results. In this case we reap, what I call, a *John 4:38 experience* where the Bible says, “*Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.*” The thought is that if we win someone on the first encounter, someone else has probably been praying for them for years witnessing to them, and sharing the gospel. We have come to realize that evangelism usually involves a process of time and takes a lot of prayer, persistence, and divine guidance.

The above is true as we attempt to share our faith with the followers of Mohammad. If you win a Muslim in the first encounter either he or she wasn't a very good Muslim or someone else had already done the hard work and you were just there at the right time to reap the benefits.

The Challenge That Is Before Us

Following Muhammad's death, Islam became an evangelistic movement. It quickly conquered North Africa, the Middle East, and central Asia. Islam is the only world religion that has ever dominated and taken over large populations and territories from the Christian church world. A few years ago I was privileged to travel to Turkey, a beautiful country that is 99 percent Muslim. All seven cities mentioned in the Book of Revelation are in this country and it is completely dominated by Islamic rule. Several areas where the apostle Paul preached and planted churches are now under the crescent of Islam.

The Muslim world has been difficult to penetrate with the gospel, but believers who are willing to prepare themselves can find a way to effectively share Christ. Here are some general guidelines.

- Show proper *respect* for human personality. If you examine the way Christ witnessed, you will soon realize that He always showed respect for the culture and the people to whom He communicated. He smashed the social taboos of the day by speaking to the woman at the well. He ministered at the other end of the spectrum by witnessing to Nicodemus, a powerful and wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. Everyone we meet regardless of their *social, cultural or ethnic* background is worthy of our respect.
- Learn to *love* the people of Islam. This is one trait that will get you through the most difficult encounters. A few months ago I was invited to teach in a weeklong conference on evangelism in London, England. The teaching sessions were scheduled in the morning and each afternoon we went out on the streets and in the communities to meet people and share Christ. Since London is filled with Muslims, it was inevitable that we encounter them as we ministered. That one week helped me to understand more about their culture than all the books I had

previously read. *These people are serious about their faith!* It was a moving experience for me to be speaking to Muslims for over an hour and hear them say with real conviction, “I pray to Allah that you would accept Mohammad as his prophet.” These people are sincere! I did discover, however, that there are pious Muslims as well as lax ones, but the ratio of nominal people in Islam is lower than among Christians. The Muslim clings tenaciously to his confession of faith and repeats it daily. We have to remember that Christ died for them also and He loves them with an everlasting love. We must show them the same passion for the Bible as they do their holy book, the *Koran*.

- Have *knowledge* about their culture, beliefs and practices. We must have a general working knowledge of church history, the *Koran*, and some knowledge of the Muslim belief about Christ and Christianity. As we witness to them we should know where they stand in their knowledge about Evangelical Christianity. Here are just a few of the things they think about us and some of what they believe:
 - They believe that Jews and Christians have deliberately distorted the Old and New Testaments to hide the predictions of the coming of Muhammad.
 - They think we believe in three gods, (This is a great insult to a Muslim as no “other god” can be associated with *Allah*.)
 - They do not believe that it was Jesus who died on the cross—another, such as Judas Iscariot, was crucified in His place.
 - To them sin is the failure to live up to the Islamic moral code and the pillars of Islam.
 - They do fear hell fire.
 - They do believe there is a purgatory.
- We must receive *empowerment* from Christ that will help us demonstrate the power gifts of healing, miracles, signs and wonders. It is interesting to note that most Muslims will respect a visible, tangible, miraculous demonstration of the power of God. They are easily attracted to spiritual vitality. The truth is: they want to *see* it!—Can the Christian community *show* it?

How to Share Your Faith With a Muslim

Those who anticipate interaction with Muslims must consider a method of approach. No other faith, not even Judaism, is so resistant to the traditional “confrontational” or “encounter” approach that we find common in personal evangelism today. It will not be effective to just walk up to a Muslim and share the plan of salvation. Terms like *sin*, *salvation* and *cross* that we commonly use in witnessing have an entirely different meaning for them. Since they deny that Jesus ever died on the cross they simply cannot accept our understanding of salvation. Here are some simple steps that will help in the witnessing approach.

- Establish *friendship*. The Muslim will be impressed with a Christian’s words only if he experiences genuine friendship from the Christian and sees him living a consistent moral life. The goal is to demonstrate to these people the love and quality of life in Christ. It is better to win the Muslim as a friend than to win an argument and lose his friendship. Avoid critical remarks about Muhammad, the *Koran*, and Islam even if your faith is criticized. Your patience, understanding,

and display of friendship can cause the Muslim to be attracted to the Bible and the Christian faith.

- Pray for *discernment*. Only God can help you share the best possible answer when you talk with Muslims.
- Respect the *culture*. It will be easier to witness if the Christian shares with his or her own gender. Muslim men are very uncomfortable when approached by a woman because they are taught not to look a woman in the eyes for fear of temptation.
- Seek *dialogue*. So much of our witnessing is monologue. We were created with two ears and one mouth—learn to use them accordingly! The best evangelistic encounter with a Muslim is when there are plenty of questions asked by both sides. It is our job to listen, be attentive (be able to repeat back what is told to us) and ask plenty of questions to show respect and to get the people to talk about their personal beliefs. A good way to open a dialogue is to ask a Muslim to tell you what his religion is and what he believes.
- Find a witnessing *hook*. For me, it has been their respect for Moses the prophet and the acceptance of Christ as a prophet. There are four sacred books in their religion: the books of Moses, the Psalms of David (think of how we can use the wonderful prophecies concerning Christ from these Psalms!), the Gospels of Christ, and the *Koran*. They feel that the *Koran* is the most accurate because it was the latest revelation. You've got to begin somewhere and I think this is a great way to open up the discussion. Focus on the thought and question, "Who is Jesus?" Then begin to explore this concept in the *Koran* and in the Bible.
- Share your *testimony*. Nothing will be more effective than for you to share the life-changing, life-transforming power of God in your life. Remember the Muslim mind is one of fatalism—they believe that whatever Allah wills will be. Not so with our God! Through your testimony, you can relate the power of God to change the course of events and give you peace, real joy and assurance of eternal life (three things that they do not have). Keep in mind that Muslims are very serious about visions and dreams. If you have had a genuine vision or dream from the Lord don't be timid about sharing it as it can be the means of attracting that person to the Bible and Christianity.
- Share the message of Christ. There is absolutely no substitute for the presentation of the gospel.
 - *Share what God thinks of them*. The concept of God as a loving heavenly Father is completely foreign to Muslims. Show them from the Scriptures just how much God loves all people. Share Jeremiah 31:3 where God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Also share the golden text of the Bible, John 3:16—it still works!
 - *Tell them the condition of man*. Explain the true meaning of sin in the sense that it is "missing the mark." It is a failure to live up to God's perfect standard as found in Matthew 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Show that we, as humans, cannot save ourselves. We need divine help.
 - *Show them God's plan for our freedom*. There is hope in Christ. We have to help them see that it was indeed Christ who died on the cross. But our

hope is in the fact that He rose from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is the best way to show His power over sin. I recommend the book, *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell, because it explains the deity of Christ in a simple, easy-to-understand style. We must show our friends that only through our blessed Savior can sins be forgiven. Show that God has provided a way whereby all sin can be forgiven, and every trace of guilt can be completely removed.

- *Help them make a commitment.* This is where you will learn that it takes time to win a Muslim convert. You have to realize that in an Islamic society, there is no separation of church and state. The law of the *Koran* is the rule of all citizens and to convert to another religion is an act of treason. Therefore, this will be a big step for Muslim believers. Explain that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship through Christ whereby we can know our heavenly Father. Prospects must realize that Christ alone fills the void in their hearts and brings them into relationship with God.
- *Be patient.* Remember we said it is a *process* and not an *event*. The Muslim has no cultural concept for the gospel. For this reason, we should not become discouraged if there is no immediate response. Be patient with your Muslim friend. Continue to share the gospel with prayer and faith, knowing that the Holy Spirit can make the truth real to him. Through the years of my teaching evangelism, I have always relied upon the powerful truth of John 16:8 that says, “*When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.*” Our job is to share. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict and convince people of sin.

Follow up for the Muslim

As I write this material I can't help but realize that when a Muslim decides to follow Jesus Christ that this is really the beginning of our work. I think a key word here is *community*. We have to rely on the body of Christ to come together and help disciple converts from Islam. The church must be ready to receive and nurture them. Immediately, we must involve the person in a basic Bible study. We should be aware of the convert's family situation. He should be encouraged to discreetly witness to his family by sharing his new discoveries in the Bible. A visit to his home would be a good idea at this point. The goal is to make friends with his family. Also, at every opportunity you must pray with and for the new convert. Also, you must teach him to pray using the Lord's prayer as a model. Lastly, you must encourage the new convert to become a part of a fellowship that will nurture his spiritual growth.

Closing Thoughts

Most of the Muslims today claim a spiritual heritage from Ishmael. It is interesting to note that the name *Ishmael* is derived from the same root word as *Samuel* and means that *God hears* or *God answers*. God has heard! He promised that He would make Ishmael a great nation. He has kept that promise! These people are part of God's plan for these last days. They are being won to Christ by the thousands!