

learning to share with Muslims

BY MICHAEL H. EDENS AND MIKE SHIPMAN



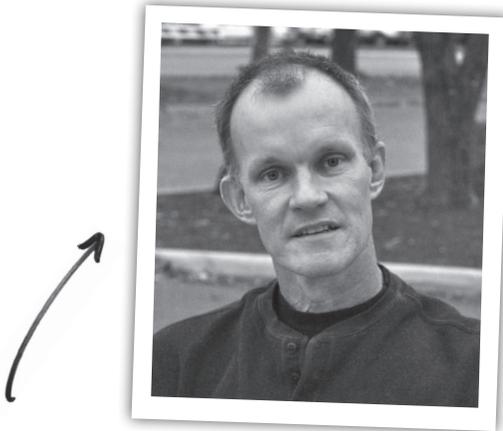
STUDY 1:

In our world, "Islamic" and "Muslim" are not words most Westerners think they will apply to friends they care deeply about. That must change for committed followers of Jesus Christ called Baptists.

About one-fifth of the world is identified as Islamic. Muslims are as diverse as their location (every continent) and the color of their skin (as in Christianity, every hue is represented). Only about one in five Muslims are born into the Arabic-speaking region of North Africa and the Middle East. Most Muslims live east of that region and have an Asian heart language. The glue that holds this global people together is common Islamic beliefs and Arabic as the language of prayer.

»» Cultural Connections

Islamic worldview resembles Western post-modernity in its willingness to adapt to different cultures and in its rejection of facts in determining truth. But it also is marked by tradition as rigid as the most traditional Western worldviews and is anything but relativistic. These contradictions may cause uncertainty and bewilderment as you seek to build relationships with Muslim friends



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and be a witness in their lives. But let us offer a brief explanation that may help restore your confidence that God can use your witness.

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Islamic religion and culture are complex. At the birth of the modern world in the West, reason was welcomed alongside faith in forming culture. Islam, facing largely the same options in Baghdad several centuries earlier, rejected reason as means for dealing with apparent conflict in revelation. Both Shia and Sunni Islam limit the power of rational thought to build culture. This is why quranic statements that conflict with history are not a problem to Muslims. Historic facts and observations are dwarfed in the presence of a statement from divine revelation. This unquestioning attitude has spread in our time to much of quranic interpretation. The developed traditional explanations while not “revelatory,” are very authoritative. Your Muslim conversant is not impressed by human history or intellectual points of argument. Muslims are, however, deeply relational, and building community by telling and listening to stories is a valuable part of life for them.

Another major element in how Islamic values impact life relates to innocence/guilt and honor/shame societies. You have probably been raised in the first type of society; Islamic cultures are the latter type. Both types of societies have moral values, but the reason something is seen as the right thing to do is different. We say, “It’s the right thing to do,” and we mean, “Do this and in general people will see you as blameless and innocent.” In that culture, saying it is the right thing to do means doing it will not bring shame but honor to your clan (extended family or nation) or the Islamic community. These principles inform and guide Muslims in developing cultural norms, values and their worldview.

»» **Core Beliefs**

While there are five to seven basic beliefs and a set of five religious practices, which we call pillars, that mark Islamic life (these are available on the Web and in most books on Islam), we will deal only with two questions Islam seeks to answer before talking about how to share your faith with Muslims.

Who is God? Muslims believe the creator God is a simple indivisible spirit far above relating to His creation and that He has decreed and revealed Islam to be the religion of humanity. There are problems with both parts of this belief, but we advise you to simply let your Muslim friend identify his view of God and religion. Then ask if he would like to know what you believe. We will guide you in that important part of the relationship, but be aware that as your Islamic friend talks about God, whether he uses the Arabic word “Allah” or “God,” his concept is different from God as He presents Himself in Jesus Christ and the Bible. Allah or “the God” is the only word used to translate the Bible’s word for the living God in the Bibles Arabic-speaking Christians read. Muslims will quickly point out that God has no one with Him and especially that He is beyond having a son. Islam teaches that God’s transcendent observation is remote, yet sovereign,

while the Bible portrays God as transcendent, sovereign and intimate. Know there are significant differences in your view of God's nature, but present what God has done in forgiving your sin. Don't try to teach theology to a Muslim friend.

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The second part of Islamic belief is that God planned for humanity to worship through Islam from the beginning of creation. They believe that even today all babies everywhere are born with an inclination towards Islam. Since the essential meaning of Muslim is "one who is submitted to God," we agree that God wants all to submit to him. However, we disagree on the plan for submission; the Bible shows that sovereign God laid out a way back to Himself before creation. In Islam God simply forgives sin and lays out a plan for a worshipping community and a life of submission. For Muslims, knowing what God wants people to do is the whole purpose and content of God's revelation, which is the Quran. The Bible presents the sovereign God choosing, before creation, to adopt sons and daughters who receive His personal self-sacrifice as the slain Lamb. The Bible is the story of God revealing Himself to His creation. This gets us to the second question and faith statements Muslims believe.

What is humanity's problem? Muslims believe that while people sin, these are actions against themselves, not against God. God can simply mercifully absolve whom He pleases of sin. Sin is not seen as rebellion against God, but as mistakes in a person's thoughts, attitudes or actions which damage him. In Islam, humanity is not damaged by Adam's sin to the extent that people cannot please God in this world. God will judge all human actions and mercifully grant entrance into paradise to the faithful. Because the Muslim community externally reinforces correct Islamic behavior, many outsiders see the religion as a works-based salvation. However there is a major difference. A person's entering paradise (salvation) is solely God's decision. While Allah weighs all aspects of life, no action or attitude — except dying in the cause of Islam — can assure a Muslim of entry. This lack of assurance causes most Muslims to think of God with abject fear that the Islamic God capriciously may reject them.

Sharing the Gospel with Muslims is intimidating for many people, but it doesn't have to be. Understanding the kinds of difficulties that could occur and how to deal with them can embolden us to step out in faith to lead Muslims to Christ.

» **Barriers to the Gospel**

First of all, avoid discussion about controversial political situations related to Islam in the United States and Middle East. Muslims are often passionate about the plight of other Muslims around the world. Be sensitive to their concerns and avoid taking sides. There may come a later time when you can thoroughly discuss these issues, but focus first on sharing the Gospel, without introducing potential hindrances.

Second, Muslims aggressively defend their prophet. Therefore, focus on the Gospel and the greatness of Jesus, instead of demeaning their prophet.

Third, witnessing to Muslims can be intimidating because of security concerns, especially in places where Islam is the only legal religion. Certainly, there is no guarantee that sharing the Gospel will always be trouble-free. But we've found that sharing the Gospel during the first meeting in a relational, conversational way rarely causes security problems. Security problems most often arise once people are baptized, rather than during the witnessing conversation if done this way.

Fourth, because Islam arose around 600 AD, centuries after Christianity, it was designed to refute many of the claims of Christianity. That is why Muslims often have prepared responses to keep would-be witnesses at bay. Some common objections include, "God never had a Son," "God is not three," and "The Bible has been corrupted."

»» **Bridges to the Gospel**

Apologetic approaches for reaching Muslims are used effectively by some missionaries. However, starting with apologetics to refute Muslim claims almost always results in an argument or debate. Because of this, discussing controversial topics often hinders either the presentation or hearing of the Gospel. Most of us don't feel prepared to debate these volatile topics.

We suggest you avoid controversial topics as much as possible, at least until after you've shared the Gospel. If the person to whom you're witnessing interjects a controversial topic or tries to change the subject, try simply saying, "Hmm, that's interesting. Let's finish talking about this first, and then we'll discuss that issue." Responding this way usually allows us to complete the Gospel presentation before dealing with controversial issues.

Of course if Muslims hear and believe the Gospel, they'll work through their objections quickly. Either way, having shared the Gospel, we then answer their other questions if they are sincerely seeking truth. If they merely want to argue or debate, we politely change the subject or bow out of the conversation.

We use the Any-3¹ evangelism approach, which is a non-combative and proven effective way to witness to Muslims. Any-3 follows the informal, interactive way Jesus witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). The steps of Any-3 are as follows: Get connected, get to a God conversation, get to lostness, get to the Gospel, get to a decision.

1. **Get connected** – Engage a Muslim in "small talk" to get to know them for three to seven minutes.
2. **Get to a God conversation** – Ask them their religious preference (to which they will respond "Muslim" or they will ask you if you're Christian). Respond by saying, "Most all religions are alike, aren't they? We're all trying to please God and get our sins

forgiven (or pay off our sins).” Next, discuss the fact that we are all sinners.

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Or, bring up the topic of sin and conclude, “We’re all sinners, aren’t we?”

- 3. Get to lostness** – Having established that we’re all sinners, ask, “What are you doing to pay off your sins (get your sins forgiven)?” Muslims usually mention daily prayers, giving alms, fasting and going on the pilgrimage to Mecca in response to this question. Ask inquisitive questions about each of the points they mention, and after discussing at least three of these points, ask them: “Are your sins forgiven yet?” “When will your sins be forgiven?” “How about on Judgment Day?”

Note: Muslims generally have no assurance of salvation. Their common belief is that if their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds, then they’ll probably go to heaven. However, most Muslims do expect to go to hell for a time to pay for their sins.

- 4. Get to the Gospel** – Once your Muslim friend has admitted that he doesn’t know whether his sins are forgiven or will be forgiven, make the following transition statement: “What I believe is different. I know my sins are forgiven, not because I’m a good person, although I do try to be good. My sins are forgiven because God Himself made a way for our sins to be forgiven.”

Next, share the Gospel, emphasizing that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

- 5. Get to a decision** – Ask the person these two questions: “Does it make sense to you that we can’t pay off our own sins, but God made a way through Jesus’ sacrifice? Do you believe this?”

If the person responds affirmatively, make sure he is claiming to believe that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Next, read Romans 10:9-10, stressing the need to repent from sin and surrender to Jesus as Lord. If the person believes the Gospel and is willing to confess “Jesus Christ is Lord,” then lead him in a prayer to surrender himself to Jesus.

God is calling Muslims throughout the world to believe in Christ. Join God’s work by confidently sharing the Gospel with them.

¹ Any-3: Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime – Lead Muslims to Christ Now!, WIGTake Resources, Monument, Co., 2013.

»» ***Additional considerations***

4Truth.net – Find more on the basic tenets of Islam at
<http://www.4truth.net/fourtruthpbworld.aspx?pageid=8589953003>.

Theology and Practice of Mission edited by **Bruce Riley Ashford** – To learn more, read the chapter “Mission to Muslims.” In the book, more than a dozen experienced missionaries, pastors and professors write essays providing a clear biblical/theological framework for understanding the church’s mission to the nations:

<http://www.bhpublishinggroup.com/books/products.asp?p=9780805464122>.

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