

# ISLAM



## *Quest for Understanding the Islamic Faith*

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*“The angel of the Lord also said to her, ‘I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.’”* Genesis 16:9-10 *“As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.”* Genesis 17:18, 20

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”* Matt. 28:18-20

*“Jesus’ commandment, ‘But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...’”* Matthew 5:44

*“...both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”* Acts 2:11

*“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”* 2 Corinthians 3:12-16

*“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* Colossians 4:5-6

*“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become*

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*all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*

*“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-21*

*“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Revelation 7:9*

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## QUOTES

“The greatest crime in the desert is finding water and keeping silent.” Bedouin Arab Proverb

“Seek first to understand before you have earned the right to be understood.” Steven Covey

“As a Christian, I want to give a faithful account of my beliefs but to slander another faith, by not knowing what they believe, serves only to discredit my own.” Hopper reflections on 1 Peter 3:15

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This is an introductory lesson on Islam as a religion and Muslim people. It is designed for those seeking an overview of Islamic faith, culture, and doctrine. More specifically, this lesson is intended to assist those preparing for cross-cultural ministry in the Muslim context in finding bridges to communicate the Gospel message.

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this session, the learner should be able to:

- Express greater understanding of the historic development and expansion of Islam
- Describe the basic beliefs and practices of Islam including the 5 pillars.
- Express greater understanding of Muslim worldview and culture
- Identify common bridges for sharing the Gospel with Muslims
- Understand the need for contextualized ministries among Muslims

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## CASE STUDY: A SURPRISING ANSWER AND A COMPLEX QUESTION

About two years after the crisis, most of the relief organizations were pulling out of Aceh,

Indonesia after the Great Tsunami of 2004. It seemed the number of relief organizations was diminishing daily. Alexi was among those who remained in Aceh to address the long-term reconstruction and healing of the region that had been so deeply affected by the tragedy of the tsunami. Life was beginning to take on predictable patterns again. Local residents were no longer operating in “crisis mode,” but were beginning to seek a return to normal life. Alexi’s work had been so focused on shuffling and orienting teams of relief workers from the West. She’d had very little time to form relationships with young women or make friends even though this had been her primary motivation for coming to Indonesia. After completing her English degree from a Christian university, she answered the call of God in her life to plant her life in a Muslim context and seek to form relationships with women with whom she might eventually be able to share her faith. Besides her great concern for the suffering of the Indonesian people, she viewed the relief work as an opportunity to live out her calling. That is why she took a role as a volunteer coordinator and host for an American relief organization.

In her studies at the Christian university, Alexi had been taught that Muslims were spiritually lost people who needed to be saved and that Muslim women were oppressed and needed to be freed. As she studied books and articles on Islam, she was convinced that the Muslim woman’s desire for freedom from the veil and other forms of oppression would create openness to the Gospel message.

Alexi was excited when one of the American visitors, Joni, who had grown up in Indonesia, asked her to go to dinner with her and some of her Indonesian friends who were Muslim. Alexi was “along for the ride” as she depended upon Joni to lead the way by choosing the restaurant and planning the evening. Arriving early, Alexi was surprised that they were eating in a very upscale restaurant. She opened the menu and nearly gasped as she viewed the prices. She hoped that Joni had some extra cash to help her pay for an entrée. As Joni shared her own story as a missionary child in Indonesia, Alexi was relieved to know that she and Joni probably had a similar worldview. Joni was now a very successful businesswoman in the United States and was using her “spare time” to assist in any way she could with relief efforts. Being fluent in the language, Joni could quickly connect with people and assist them without the need for a translator.

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*THE GOVERNMENT WILL SOON BE  
RE-INSTATING THE SHARIAH LAW.*

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Joni’s friends began to arrive one by one. Alexi became a little self-conscious as she noticed that she was “under-dressed” for the occasion. All of the women wore very high-quality clothing and were carrying leather designer purses. They were lovely, colorful and veiled. They were also excellent English speakers which allowed Alexi to understand more of the conversation than she had planned. She was a bit surprised by their seeming independence. They had traveled alone to the restaurant, one of them with car keys in hand. They ordered confidently from the menu and didn’t seem to pay much attention to prices. These women seemed very strong and intelligent.

Joni introduced Alexi to the group as a worker for a relief organization. The women thanked Alexi for her willingness to leave her home and come to Indonesia to assist with relief efforts. Joni then asked the women to introduce themselves. Alexi sat in amazement as each one introduced herself by name, described her family and then stated her occupation – I am a physician at the National Hospital...I am a professor at the University...I own a retail

business...I am an engineer who serves as a consultant for the Ministry of Development... Alexi was taking in lots of new information throughout the evening as she listened to the conversations of these very successful and capable women. They did not at all fit the profile of the oppressed Muslim woman she had been taught about in America.

At one point, the conversation turned toward the recovery process of Aceh. One of the women stated, “The government will soon be reinstating the Shariah law.” Alexi saw this as her chance to join into the conversation and perhaps move it in a spiritual direction where the women might express their fear and dread of the looming oppression. She jumped into the conversation by asking the woman, “So how do you feel about that?” The response that followed was surprising – perhaps even shocking for Alexi. The women began openly dialoguing about Shariah.

“I cannot wait until the law is reinstated,” said the physician. “Ever since the Shariah was discontinued when relief workers came in, people have been acting disrespectfully...they play radios and loud music during our prayer times. Their businesses are open and they walk the streets during holy times...”

“Yes,” chimed in a second woman. “When Shariah is being enforced, I feel like my children are safe when they walk down the streets coming home from school. But now – I have no idea what my children are going to be exposed to.”

“I agree,” said the third woman. “And I am ready for the return of the veil. Our young women need to understand that the veil brings us honor and we are treated with greater respect when we respect ourselves. “

The conversation was an open one and Alexi felt comfortable asking questions about Islam and what it was like to be a Muslim woman. The women didn’t seem inhibited in sharing their thoughts. At one point the conversation took a turn as one of the women looked at Alexi and asked her a question that took her off guard – “Please explain to me why in America Madonna’s right to express herself is greater than your right to raise your children in a country free of influences that corrupt your youth?”

Alexi was taken aback by the question and immediately pondered how she might distinguish between her citizenship and her own belief. She struggled for words to explain her position with the women whose religion and culture were one.

**REFLECT #1**

1. How did the Muslim women in this lesson differ from your own views of Muslim women?
2. Do you think these women are representative of other Muslim women? Why or why not?
3. If you were Alexi, how would you answer the question that was directed at her? Where would you attempt to lead the conversation?
4. What truths of the Gospel would you focus on with women like these?

## INTRODUCTION: A QUEST TO UNDERSTAND

You have probably heard it said that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. While some recent studies (<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>) have suggested that this is not true, we do know that Islam is growing and that

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there are more than 1.5 billion Muslims living in the world today – close to one-fifth of the world population. Until the 9/11 event in the United States in 2001, many in the world had very little knowledge about or interest in Islam. In spite of the fact that many Muslim people from various nations were migrating to Western nations, followers of Jesus in the West have typically sought very little knowledge of Muslim people, their belief or their culture.

Islam is a very ethnically diverse religion. While some may draw a caricature of a Muslim that looks very ethnically Arab, the majority of the world's Muslim population is actually located in Asia. In fact, the largest population of Muslims is located in Indonesia where Islam is the dominant religion in more than 127 of the 700+ distinct ethnolinguistic people groups. Other countries with the highest number of Muslims are India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

What many find so surprising about Islam is the fact that in the midst of its great ethnolinguistic diversity, there are some strong commonalities among Muslims worldwide. Islam is not a complicated religion for the most part. The major doctrines, guidelines, and duties of Muslim faith are expressed through common rituals and maintained traditions that seem to be somewhat consistent across national and ethnic boundaries. High levels of ritual, performance, and tradition are also factors that attribute to the religion's sustained growth. Other simple factors that contribute to its growth are birth rate and the marriage of Muslim men to women from the outside. On a more intentional level, Muslims populations are growing through Muslim evangelism (*da'wah*) and immigration to urban areas where the pool of potential converts is expanded. In the West, immigration accounts for some 70% of the general population growth in the European Union over the past five years.

As followers of Jesus and witnesses of His power and His desire to reconcile men to God, we are not to fear the growth of Islam as a threat to Western political freedom or well-being. A Christian's concern about Islam must go beyond fears or feelings of intimidation since we know that God is the designer of history and His plan will prevail. Our concerns should be rooted in the things that concern God. It is not His will that any Muslim should perish, but that all would come to a saving knowledge of truth. God loves Muslims and He is calling his people to love them, too. If we are to engage Muslims with the Gospel, we need to first become learners – understanding what we can about Muslim faith and culture and seeking bridges to form relationships and share our faith.

## THE HISTORY OF ISLAM

We will begin by reviewing the history of Arab peoples out of which Islam was birthed. Depending upon the sources, there are various accounts of the history and development of Islam. With much of the early history of Islam transferred via oral means and later via Islamic scholarship, piecing together history has its challenges.

Open your Bible and read the following passages:

- Genesis 15:1-5
- Genesis 16
- Genesis 17
- Genesis 21:1-21
- Genesis 25:12-18

As you have examined the Scriptures, it is apparent that God in His divine wisdom preserved the life of Ishmael and prospered him as a father of twelve sons who were established as tribal leaders. We find references to the Arab peoples throughout Scriptures sometimes offering friendly gestures toward the descendants of Isaac, such as generous offerings of gold and silver to King Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:14) or offerings of flocks to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. At other times the Arab tribes are the opponents and oppressors of God's people as was the case in Nehemiah 2:19 and 4:7. However, we see God's true desire for the Arab peoples as the Gospel is proclaimed through the outpouring of the Spirit to Jews at Pentecost in the Arabic language. As the prophet Joel and Simon Peter explained – *everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved* – including the descendants of Ishmael!

The spread of the Gospel penetrated Arabia and, over time, so did aberrations and distortions of God's truth. The Caleb Project publication, *Encountering the World of Islam*, describes the presence of Christianity in 6th century Arabia this way:

*...there were Christians in Arabia. In the north, there were several Arabic tribes which had become Christian. In the south in Nejrán were many Christians who had their bishops and priests and their Scriptures in the Syriac language. This Nestorian Church of the East, which had previously sent its missionaries into Arabia, had not met with great success in its efforts to convert the Arabs, most of whom had remained pagans. It seems the Christians lacked the love, purity of life and spiritual power needed to make them an effective missionary agency in Arabia. (p. 13)*

While Arabia could primarily be described as pagan in the 6th century, Jews in this region held a strong commitment to monotheism. Because of misunderstanding about the Trinity and the unfortunate veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Christians were not viewed as monotheistic, but rather as worshipers of three gods – the Father, the Son, and the Mother Mary. In the midst of this religious milieu, a small group of intelligent men known as the Hanifs met together to discuss political and religious problems. The question was often posed – “Who can tell us of the One True God?” Holding in common with the Jews a strong commitment to monotheism, Islam emerged as one answer to that question.

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*EVEN THOUGH THE CRUSADES ARE A LONG-FORGOTTEN HISTORICAL PERIOD IN CHRISTENDOM, THESE WARS ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF MUSLIM THINKING...*

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Islam was birthed in the early 7th-century culture of Arabia (known today as Saudi Arabia). Around A.D. 570, Islam's prophet, Muhammad, was born in the city of Mecca. Orphaned by the age of six, Muhammad was raised primarily by his grandfather and then his uncle. Although his uncle was very poor, his family lineage from a respected and powerful tribe and his marriage to a wealthy widow gave Muhammad access to wealthy and influential people of Mecca. While there were Arabs who were followers of the One True God (Allah), history tells us that Mecca was a center of commerce where more than 360 gods were worshiped in the Ka'aba.

Muhammad appears to have been a sincere God seeker. Around A.D. 610 while worshiping and praying in a cave, Muhammad claimed to be visited by the angel Gabriel in a dream who told him, *Recite thou in the name of the Lord, who created man from clots of blood.* (Sura 96:1-2). According to Islamic tradition, after awakening from his sleep, Muhammad discussed this visitation with his wife, Khadija, and they agreed that Allah must have been calling

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Muhammad to be a prophet to the Arabs. Later, Muhammad claimed to receive other revelations from the angel Gabriel, through a voice, the ringing of a bell or through dreams. These times of revelation were characterized by Muhammad falling to the ground, appearing agitated, sweating and foaming at the mouth. These messages were delivered to him in Arabic. Because he was illiterate, Muhammad recited the revelations to others who recorded them. After his death, these recitations were recorded in the **Qur'an** which serves as the central religious text for the Muslim people.

While we as Christians question the origin of Muhammad's inspiration, the message itself and the life and practices of Islam's *prophet*, there are several things Muhammad accomplished during his lifetime:

- He united warring tribes within the region
- He abolished idolatry
- He sought and gained rights for women
- He promoted belief in One True God
- He stopped the practice of infanticide

Orthodox Islam does not claim Muhammad to be divine, but rather the last and greatest prophet of God – *the seal of the prophets*. Muhammad abhorred idol worship and passionately believed in one God, Allah. Muhammad's claim to receive messages from God via the angel, Gabriel, and his commitment to one God was not received well by his contemporaries.

In A.D. 622, conflict arose between Muhammad and pagan traders. Additionally, he found his message rejected by Jews and Christians. In the heat of conflict, Muhammad fled to Medina where he secured his military leadership, developed his political power and achieved several military victories. He triumphantly returned to Mecca, destroyed the idols in the Ka'aba and established Islam as the religion of all Arabia. As people converted to Islam, they were forced to speak Arabic, the language of the Qur'an (thus, the *language of God*).

Muhammad became the sole leader of the Arabian people and Mecca became the center of his religion. He was able to conquer the whole of Arabia in his lifetime. In A.D. 632, Muhammad died and was buried in Medina. As soon as he died, a crisis in leadership occurred. Who would govern the rising Islamic community (**ummah**; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ummah>)?

Internal fighting began and resulted in a great divide in Islam. The **Sunni** sect encompasses nearly 90% of the Muslim population. Leadership is chosen through community consensus. In the **Shiite** sect, leadership is chosen through a succession of **imams**.

Within one century of its inception, the geographic and demographic spread of Islam moved across the Middle East and into most of North Africa. It spread westward into Africa and to Spain and eastward on the Silk Road to Central Asia and China. Along other trade routes, it penetrated India and Indonesia. Eventually, it spread to Western Europe and beyond. Muslim economic control of the world's trade routes was the primary factor that contributed to its rapid expansion and development.

Europe's reaction to the spread of Islam resulted in conflict. Two of the major periods of historic conflict that arose between the world's three major monotheistic faiths were the Crusades and the conflicts brought about by imperialism of European powers as they

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colonized Muslim territories. Even though the Crusades are a long-forgotten historical period in Christendom, these wars are at the forefront of Muslim thinking – particularly in light of current world events. This is especially true in Islamic countries where there is American and Western military presence (such as Afghanistan and Iraq, 2012). Many Muslims believe they have the right to resist and destroy the infidel (non-believing) colonizers who appear to be on a crusade to annihilate their culture and corrupt their society. Not only is a Western military presence viewed as a threat – but so are American and Western interests, ideas, idols, and values. Western entertainers such as Madonna are viewed as threatening to the well-being of society as are Western movies, literature, music, products, and fashion. Companies such as McDonald's, Starbucks, Subway, and MTV are many times an unwelcome presence as they symbolize the values of a threatening cultural force.

There have been many changes in the world since Islam was established. Islam's beginnings were small but rapidly formed into an all-encompassing social system and multi-cultural religion. Muslims today are faced with three responses to the modern world:

- A return to the militant/political roots of conquering and invading such as was carried out by Muhammad in the 6th and early 7th century
- Embracing modernization by becoming ecumenical through reform and secularization
- Attempting to find a middle ground between radical entrenchment and liberal dilution

### REFLECT #2

1. What do you learn from the Scripture about God's love for Muslim people?
2. How would you explain the "Trinity" to someone who believes you are a polytheist?
3. What are some positive things about the life of Muhammad you could agree upon in conversation with a Muslim?
4. What surprised you about the history of Islam?

## CASE STUDY: ANSWERING IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

It was a case of stepping out in faith when Ben's home church accepted the call of God to engage an **unengaged** (<http://www.finishingthetask.com/>) segment of a large semi-nomadic people group in the northern Sub-Saharan region of Africa. Feeling the call to serve cross-culturally among this people group on behalf of their church, Ben and Missy spent over a year in cross-cultural training with missions leadership in their church. Afterwards, they moved their lives overseas and studied language and culture in order to live among this folk Islamic people group in a key village in a desert region. With frequent volunteer teams coming over from their church, Ben and Missy's presence in the region brought a host of humanitarian ministries into a very famished and impoverished area, opening up opportunities for short-term volunteers to share the Biblical story in various forms. Ben, however, kept himself clear of humanitarian ministries and was staunchly committed to keeping his personal ministry focused on evangelism and church planting.

Because of Ben and Missy's willingness to learn the local language, dress according to local custom and show great respect for the culture, they were readily accepted by the village. They viewed themselves as students of local culture and the local village loved being their



teachers. Ben was a game hunter and outdoorsman. His lifestyle was a good fit for the rugged environment. Ben and Missy built a mud hut with the assistance of local workers and took up residence in the key village. Using it as a base, they were developing a network of villages where they were partnering with same-culture believers to teach Biblical stories which they prayed would lead to a church planting movement. Ben was also showing the *Jesus Film* utilizing a small projector and sound system – projecting the film onto a white bedsheet which he could post on the side of any mud hut. Many Muslims in the area had come to see the film.

As Ben was making his way to the well for water one morning, the local Imam (Islamic leader) called out to him from beneath a tree in front of his hut. Ben walked over to greet the elderly Imam. Realizing his trip to the well must be set aside for the sake of conversation, Ben squatted down by the mat where the Imam sat reading his Qur'an. Boubecar, the Imam, continued the traditional greetings. But finally, the conversation slowed and things became very quiet. Boubecar then said to Ben quietly, "I am receiving a lot of criticism from the people in this region for allowing you to live here since you say Jesus is the Son of God." Ben sat still wondering what direction the conversation was going to go. Boubecar then continued, "Can you explain to me why you say Jesus is the Son of God?"

Ben's mind began to race to grab the right tool for this opportune moment. He prayed to God for wisdom as he sat down on the mat with Boubecar and entered into a very thoughtful conversation. Rather than jumping to a quick and simple "pat answer," Ben saw this as an opportunity to build a foundation of understanding for Boubecar. Remembering the words of Fouad Masri in *Bridges* training, Ben chose to take advantage of this amazing opportunity by asking Boubecar a question – "In your understanding, Boubecar, which came first – God, His Word or His Spirit?" Boubecar enjoyed being asked to share his opinion. He pondered for a few minutes and then answered – "they all came together because they are all One." Ben saw this as a bridge. Boubecar had just admitted that God exists in various forms even though He is One God.

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*CAN YOU EXPLAIN TO ME WHY YOU  
SAY JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD?*

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By the time morning turned to noon, Ben and Boubecar had agreed upon many things – God's oneness, man's choice to sin, the necessity of the sacrificial law provided by God through Moses, the prophecies of a Messiah, the sovereignty of God to preserve His word through time, the virgin birth of Jesus... Wisely, Ben knew that he could not instruct the Imam – but that he must choose his questions wisely – asking leading questions that led to open conversation, understanding and continued relationship. Ultimately, Ben was able to take the conversation full-circle and land back at the original question he had asked Boubecar – *which came first – God, His Word or His Spirit?* Quoting from John 1, Ben explained what Jesus' disciple, John, wrote in the Injeel (Gospels) – ... *In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...and we beheld his glory...the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* Ben continued in the book of John telling the story of Nicodemus, the religious leader who came to Jesus at night and was told by Jesus to be "born again." Ben was ultimately able to share from the Injeel that because God loved the world, he gave his son, Jesus, to be the sacrificial lamb for all mankind. Those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

After several hours of conversation, Boubecar stated, "I now know why you say Jesus is the

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Son of God and I want you to know that I am no longer offended by that.” This was by no means Boubecar’s embracing of Christ as Savior, but it was a great step toward understanding, deeper relationship, and further dialogue.

Feeling led by the Spirit to go, Ben excused himself, rushing to the well to get water in his bucket. Upon arriving back at the hut, Missy said, “Sorry I was gone so long but as I was walking to the market I ran into some women who had come to the Jesus Film last night. I asked them if they had any questions about the film and you won’t believe the question they asked me. They asked, ‘why did they kill him...why did he have to die?’ I said ‘what a great question!’ We talked for almost an hour about it!”

### REFLECT #3

1. How would you have responded to the Imam’s inquiry, “Can you explain to me why you say Jesus is the Son of God?” (Try to avoid simple answers like “the Bible says it and that makes it true.”)
2. Identify 12 key Biblical stories you would use to tell the Big Story of God’s love and forgiveness (Example: God’s Creation and the Fall of Man, Abraham Chosen to Bless the Nations, etc.).
3. What were some things Ben did well in his dialogue with the Imam? What do you think he could have done better?
4. Imagine being approached by a group of Muslim women who had viewed the Jesus Film for the first time. They ask you the question, “Why did they kill him? Why did he have to die?” How would you explain the purpose of Jesus death to women who had no Biblical context for understanding the need for a Savior? (I encourage you to steer away from your own opinion and be very Biblical in your response.)

## WHAT DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE?

Any attempt to summarize the belief system of a major world religion in one brief lesson is an act of futility. However, we can gain some basic understanding of the beliefs held in common by most Muslims around the world. Since few Muslims have been won to faith in Christ by argument, it is better for us to study Islam in search of bridges that will allow us to have meaningful and informed conversations with Muslims that build trust and create further dialogue. As learners, we will examine Islamic belief from three angles:

- The Holy Books
- Pillars and Practices
- Cultural and Social Beliefs and Traditions of the Muslim community

### THE HOLY BOOKS

There are several Islamic holy books – the Qur’an, the Hadith and the Sunna. The Qur’an is the sacred book of Islam, and Muslims believe it is God’s perfect and final word. Muslims view the Qur’an itself as a miracle possessing power and it is held in high regard and treated with great respect, unlike the Christian understanding of God’s Word as existent beyond print, the printed page, paper, and ink.

Muslims believe the Qur’an is not to be written upon, tossed or laid upon the ground. It is physically handled with great care. Some Muslims will use a Kursi, a throne-like wooden holder, to support the Qur’an while reading to portray its holiness. A Christian who desires the opportunity to explain the Bible to a Muslim must be conscious of how to handle, carry and position our own holy book in a way that ascribes respect and reverence. When using

the Bible in a Muslim context, one should never place the Bible on the floor, leave it on the dashboard of the car, toss it, write in it or carry it in a way to infer that it is equal or inferior to other books.

The Qur'an is about the size of the English New Testament and is divided into 114 chapters called *surahs*. It is not organized chronologically or thematically. It is believed to be most perfectly understood in Arabic and Muslims are taught that it cannot be translated into other languages. For the most part translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into other languages has not been permissible as it is considered a dictation of the words of God, and the words of God came from God to Muhammad in Arabic.

The Muslim view of the Qur'an differs from the Christian view of the Bible. The Qur'an is believed to be *divine dictation* from Allah to Muhammad while the Bible is viewed as the inspired word of God – messages relayed to humans through men who engage their own language, personality and thought-patterns into the text. Muslims are taught to never question the Qur'an – only to submit to its commands. The Qur'an is also viewed as the *Word of God* in tangible form. As a Christian, you believe that God's Word took on flesh in the form of Jesus. This is an important distinction you should be aware of as you approach the Qur'an. We should not make the mistake of comparing book to book. We always want to point the Muslim to a person – Jesus, the Word of God. While a Muslim believes the Qur'an is God's final revelation, we can be assured it is neither a God-inspired text nor God's final revelation (See Revelation 22:18-19.)

The *Hadith* is another holy book for Muslims. The *Hadith* are collected sayings and actions of Muhammad, second only to the authority of the Qur'an. These sayings were collected about 300 years after his death. There are thousands of hadiths and the major sects of Islam each have their own version. The Qur'an and the Hadith must be read together.

The *Sunna* is the recorded life and acts of Muhammad as transmitted and recorded in the hadith. These are the traditions or manner of life referred to as the “straight path.”

Some would also classify the *Shari'a* as holy. *Shari'a* comprises the rules and practices derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith. *Shari'a* is the fundamental law of Islam which is viewed much like a constitution for the Islamic community. It is considered the application of God's divine will to every situation that could arise in life. As is the case in Saudi Arabia and Iran, *Shari'a* in some countries serves as the constitutional law for the nation and is used to define what is legal and just.

Within Islam's holy books is an explanation of sin. The most serious and unpardonable sin is elevating anything or anyone to a place of equality with God. Unlike the Biblical view of sin as innate in the human condition, the Qur'anic view of sin is that all people in the world are born as true Muslims – pure and innocent. It is assumed that Christians have been deceived and strayed from the “straight path.” So Muslims are sent to serve as guides back to the true path.

Islamic theology considers “the fall” just a minor slip by Adam and something entirely forgiven by Allah. Muslims believe that Adam and Eve repented of their mistake and God forgave them. No further effect on the human race occurred. Since in Islam there is no sin nature, the need for a *savior* does not exist. There is no assurance of salvation. Salvation is

achieved by conformity to the five pillars of Islam and ultimately the will of Allah. No one can know for certain that he or she has received salvation prior to the judgment.

When considering God's revelation to man, the common understanding for a Muslim is this:

- God sent the Tawrat (Books of Moses in the Hebrew Scripture) – but it was changed.
- God sent the Zabur (Book of David/Psalms) – but it was changed.
- God sent the Injeel (The Book of Jesus/the Gospels) – but it was changed.
- God sent the Qur'an to correctly convey his message to men.

## PILLARS AND PRACTICES

Along with faith in the authority of Muhammad as the final prophet and belief in the finality and perfection of the Qur'an, strict adherence to the five disciplines of Islam is required in order for a Muslim to satisfy the will of Allah. These disciplines are most often referred to as the Pillars of Islam. Most Muslims identify five pillars. However, there are some more fundamentalist expressions of Islam that identify Jihad or Holy War as a sixth pillar.

**First Pillar: The Confession of Faith – Shahada.** The power of Muslim Theology and philosophy lies in its brief, yet often repeated, creed, "I testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." Millions of times each day this phrase is spoken by devoted Muslims in Arabic. Reciting this creed in the presence of a Muslim makes one a Muslim. The Shahada is declared at each prayer time, as the first words whispered into a newborn's ears (making them Muslim) and as the last words spoken at death.

**Second Pillar: Ritual Prayer – Salat.** The Salat are ritual prayers prayed five times a day, beginning before sunrise with the final prayer offered prior to sleep at night. The Muslim is required to pray facing Mecca. Obligatory prayers must be said in Arabic. Salat is a ritual and not a conversation with God. These prayers can be communally exercised in the Mosque or prayed alone. The prayers include recitations from the Qur'an spoken in Arabic (only) in conjunction with ceremonial washing (wu'du) and formulated prostrations (rak'as). Prayers are led in mosques by respected lay leaders (Imams). Men and women pray separately. Friday prayers are considered most important. Pause and listen to Islamic calls to prayer. Arabic prayers with English subtitles version can be heard at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cF2bf8hC\\_sU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cF2bf8hC_sU)

**Third Pillar: Almsgiving – Zakat.** The Qur'an teaches the giving of 2.5% of one's capital wealth to the poor. In doing so, the Muslim's wealth is purified. Zakat requires a Muslim to give not only money but also time and energy toward the propagation of Islam. The Hadith (see Holy Books) also outlines specific dues for various classifications of people according to the bounty of their trade.

**Fourth Pillar: The Fast – Sawm.** During the lunar calendar month of Ramadan, every Muslim is to observe a fast from sunrise to sunset. The daylight hours are set aside for self-purification. Nothing is to pass over their lips during this time. Some Muslims will not even swallow their own saliva during the daylight hours. After sunset, feasting and celebrations occur. Also, Ramadan is intended to remind the Muslim of the giving of the Qur'an to Muhammad.

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**Fifth Pillar: Pilgrimage – Hajj.** Muhammad grafted this pillar into the religion of Islam as a continuance of ancient Arabic customs. All Muslims are required to journey as a pilgrim to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Once in Mecca, a Muslim is to walk around the Ka'aba seven times. Muhammad taught that the Ka'aba was the original place of worship for Adam and later for Abraham. All Muslims are expected to engage in this life-changing activity. Realizing that all Muslims do not have the means or potential of traveling to Mecca, some Islamic leaders teach that the favor of Allah can be earned by visits to other holy sites.

**Sixth Pillar: Holy War – Jihad.** While popular interpretation of this Arabic word implies that Muslims utilize Jihad to destroy non-believers and propagate Islamic faith, the word actually means “to struggle or strive.” Jihad is recognized by Shi'ite Muslims as a sixth pillar. To struggle for Allah has historically held many implications for the Muslim – to struggle with one's self, one's sin, one's own will as one seeks to submit to Allah. Also, Jihad describes a struggle to maintain faith in the midst of persecution. However, Sura 9:29 implies that it is the duty of the Muslim to subdue those who worship idols and all others who do not acknowledge the religion of truth. Yusuf Ali in his translation of the Qur'an entitled, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, translates the passage this way:

*...Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and his Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Sura 9:29, YUSUF ALI)*

Muhammad used the term, *People of the Book*, to refer to Jews and Christians.

Note: Many Muslims don't include this as a pillar, and it isn't mentioned in the Hadith from which the pillar concepts is derived.

## OTHER BELIEFS

### One God

As previously stated, the core doctrinal beliefs of Islam can be found in the Quranic text. Belief in the Qur'an and the holy books is one of the major doctrines of Islam. However, the centerpiece of Islamic faith is the belief in **One God**. In his book, *Understand My Muslim People*, Dr. Abraham Sarker suggests that the strength of Islam is the idea of one God. Islam views Allah as the Creator of all things including mankind. Allah is absolutely one. He is beyond the understanding of man so that only His will may be revealed and known – but not his person. In Islam, there is no concept of a personal God. Nor is there a belief in the Trinity. God cannot be called, “Father” and in the Islamic perspective, he cannot be the Father of Jesus. This is seen as a blasphemous statement. Muslims often state, “God is not begotten, nor does he beget.” The idea of God having a son through Mary is outside the realm of Islamic understanding. Yet the Muslim believes that Jesus was a great prophet born of a virgin since the Qur'an states this as fact. In contrast to the impersonal Allah, Jesus taught his followers in the model prayer to address God, “Our Father who art in heaven...” Christians believe in a personal, relational Heavenly Father who desires to relate and communicate with his children.

Allah remains distant from man and has a capricious nature. In Islam, one can be the best Muslim possible and still not go to Paradise because God can always change his mind. The

identifying title, *Muslim*, means *one who submits*. The understanding of a Muslim is that Allah is not satisfied with lip service – submission to Allah integrates faith, action, lifestyle, and obedience to his will.

Many Christians are unsure if Allah and God are the same. Because of the great contrasts between the Muslim and Christian views of God, many Christian workers and translators among Muslim people struggle with the decision of whether to use the name “Allah” in scripture translation, in discussions about God and in prayer. Is *Allah* of the *Qur’an* the same as the God of the Bible? Christians who are sharing their faith with a Muslim should not be afraid to use the word, *Allah*, for *God* when communicating with an Arabic-speaking Muslim. This is the only word Muslims have to explain the Creator God. All Arabic language Bibles use the word, *Allah*, a derivative of the Hebrew name *El* (translated in English as *God*) when speaking of the God of Abraham. Even Arabic Christians use the name, Allah, for God.

The real issue is this – it is not the name of Allah with which we disagree. It is the character of Allah in Islam that contradicts the God of the Bible. Dr. Sarker explains that the most appropriate question we ask in this matter is, “Did Muhammad teach and does the *Qur’an* state that the God revealed in the Bible is the same God that Islam proclaims?” The answer is “yes.” The *Qur’an* affirms in Surah 29:46 that Muhammad believed that the God of the “People of the Book” (Jews and Christians) is the same God he proclaimed. Muhammad passionately believed he was continuing the revelations that had begun with Abraham’s One God.

### Prophets

Adam, Abraham, Moses, Noah, David, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus... Do these names sound familiar to you? These men are considered some of the most significant prophets in Islam even though the messages ascribed to them differ from the Biblical account of their life, purposes, and words. In Islam, there are three characteristics that define all the prophets: they are all human (negating the possibility that any prophet could have been God incarnate), they are all male and they are infallible (sinless). The teaching of the sinless lives of prophets is not supported by the teachings of the *Qur’an* or the Hadith – but appears to have developed in of Islam perhaps to put Jesus on a level playing field with other prophets. There are twenty-five commonly-held prophets in Islam.

Muslims highly esteem the life of Jesus (*Isa* in Arabic). Ask a Muslim, “Do you believe in Jesus?” The answer will be, “yes,” with great conviction. The name of Jesus (*Isa*) is mentioned ninety-seven times in the *Qur’an* – more than Muhammad. Jesus is known by other honorary titles in the *Qur’an* such as *Messiah* and *Word of God*. Yet he is believed to be only a prophet. Islam teaches that Allah protected all his prophets and never allowed any of them to be killed. (Why would God kill his own prophet in such a dishonorable way?) This explains why Muslims deny the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus and deny that his sacrifice for mankind is part of God’s plan of salvation for everyone. Muhammad is believed to be the final prophet or the “seal” of all the prophets.

### Angels

Islam affirms the reality of angels as messengers of God. According to Islam, angels perform important functions for God on earth and will be present at the end of time. Included among them are four archangels, the interrogating angels, and the recording angels. In addition to angels, Islam teaches that Allah created demons and another type of beings called jinns. Jinns are believed to have a free will to either accomplish the will of Allah or they may choose to

disobey him. Satan, considered God's opponent, is identified as both an angel and a jinn in the Qur'an.

Among the interrogating role of angels is the responsibility for questioning the dead. Islam teaches that before a dead person enters the grave, two interrogating angels will ask three questions – *Who is your Lord? What is your faith? Who is your messenger?* If one answers correctly – *Allah, Islam, and Muhammad*, respectively, the body will be allowed to rest. If answered incorrectly, these angels will torture the corpse until the Day of Judgment.

### Final Judgment

Islam teaches that the world will be judged at the end of time. A scale will weigh one's good and bad deeds. The good deeds (obedience to the five pillars and the teachings of the Qur'an) must outweigh the evil deeds. The concept of fate or fatalism is an important one as well. Whatever Allah decrees (both good and bad) must come to pass. Any evil or good that comes is sent from Allah and nothing should be done to stop his will. Humans must not strive to change the will of Allah. This explains the commonly used phrase, *in sha allah*, which means *If Allah wills it*. Muslims believe everything in life is planned by Allah and nothing happens unless Allah wills it. For example, when I (Kaylyn Hopper) was living in Damascus, I often walked with my friends rather than riding in taxis. One day the mother of my friend, Khadija, and I were crossing a very busy intersection. I looked both ways before crossing the street –but she did not. Suddenly, she was hit by a taxi. We rushed her to the emergency room in that taxi and I waited by her side. During her recovery, I asked her, *Khadija, why didn't you look to see if any cars were coming?* She answered that it was Allah's will and that no matter what, she could not and would not alter what Allah had pre-determined. Allah's will had already been pre-determined and she was not to try to disturb that plan.

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*TO SIMPLY PROCLAIM, JESUS DIED  
FOR YOUR SIN, IS NOT AN ADEQUATE  
APPROACH TO SHARING WITH A  
MUSLIM.*

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### Islam's Universal Nature

This belief creates one of the largest philosophical chasms for Christians who want to share their faith with Muslims. For in the Muslim mind, man is not born a sinner. Rather, all people are born Muslim and Islam is the universal plan of Allah. In contrast to Christian belief, Islam teaches that every man is born good and with the potential to be a good Muslim through submission to Allah. Every man is born a blank book. Additionally, every man is responsible for his own actions and must pay for his own sin. Since man is not born a sinner, there is no need for a savior. Since every man is held responsible for his own sin, there is no concept of substitutionary atonement (Jesus dying to atone for the sins of the world). This is important for us to understand as witnesses of Christ in Islamic cultures. To simply proclaim, *Jesus died for your sin*, is not an adequate approach to sharing with a Muslim. There is no philosophical or theological foundation for understanding this truth. Christians should understand our Scripture and our own theology in order to answer the question, *Why would Allah allow Jesus to die?* Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion of Jesus. It makes no sense. Allah would never allow Jesus to be put to death. Instead, they believe Allah rescued him from the cross and caused someone else (some believe Judas Iscariot) to take on his form and be hung in his stead.

An understanding of Islamic belief and worldview is imperative for those seeking to have an

effective witness among Muslims. But it is also important that you understand your own Bible and belief system so that you can adequately share the truth in a religion that has distorted much of the Biblical text. However, argument and debate are not effective means of sharing one's faith with a Muslim. Criticism of Muhammad or the Qur'an will quickly close doors in relationship and dialogue. There is nothing that will speak louder than your actions to Muslims who surround you. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus, yet you do not live out the teachings of Jesus, your witness has no validity. You can possess all knowledge of Scripture and your belief system – but if you have no love for Muslim people, you will only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Relationship and commitment to community are highly valued by Muslim people. Sincere love and enduring friendships will speak much louder than your words.

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### CASE STUDY: GOOGLE FALL OUT

Katherine grew up in a large conservative church in the southern United States. Even from a very early age, she knew she wanted to be a “foreign missionary.” She had heard stories of famous missionaries like Lottie Moon and Ann Judson and she knew this could be her story, too. Throughout her early teens, she learned about different countries and people groups through the missions education programs in her church. She would watch for opportunities to hear missionaries speak when they were home on their “furloughs” and she would wait to ask them questions. She watched television programs about exotic locations and dreamed of the day when she would be able to go overseas to share Christ with the lost.

Because Katherine's family were faithful members of the church for three decades, her dreams of being a “missionary” were known by everyone. She attended a Christian university and majored in Biblical studies with a missions concentration. Upon graduation, she applied for an overseas ministry position through a traditional sending agency funded by her denomination. The organization readily accepted Katherine. Her church family was

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*ARGUMENT AND DEBATE ARE NOT  
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FAITH WITH A MUSLIM.*

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thrilled, proud and excited. *Imagine...one of our own becoming a “foreign missionary!”* They wanted to be a part of her life in a significant way, so they formed a prayer group in her honor and committed to pray for her faithfully. They even went as far as to collect funds, as needed, for her prayer letters to be sent out and for any incidentals she would need on the field. With prayer support and a commitment from her church, she felt secure in her going, knowing she had many “holding the ropes” as she went.

After a ten-week intensive cross-cultural training program to prepare her for her cross-cultural assignment overseas, she spoke at several local churches about her assignment, her people, and her country.

Katherine's “platform identity” was working with other “missionaries” in a consulting firm. This vocational platform provided all of them working visas so they could live and work there full-time. Her English writing and speaking skills provided many opportunities for her to make friends in an Arab culture eager to improve their English skills. Young, single, educated Muslim women were always looking for friendships with foreigners in the hope they could



provide a contact for a job, or provide a benefit. So, understandably, Katherine had a wide network of Muslim women friends.

One significant event changed the direction of Katherine’s ministry. At a large conference of Muslim business women, she met a Muslim woman named Fatima. Fatima was in the early stages of developing her own business. Fatima wanted to provide training for young Arab girls on how to write resumes and how to prepare for job interviews. Katherine was ecstatic. She knew this was a “God thing” and immediately jumped at the opportunity to help Fatima with her business. Fatima was equally excited that she had found such a talented writer and speaker. Katherine would invite her missionary colleagues over to add their expertise in the developing of the company. In a very short time, working with Fatima became her full-time ministry, and she began to spend her days at Fatima’s office exclusively. In the beginning, Fatima would ask her why she didn’t have to be at work, and Katherine would say that as a business consultant, she could work her own hours.

As the months went by, Katherine would have a prayer time early in the morning and read from the scriptures with Fatima and her secretary, Aisha. The three of them built an amazing bond of friendship. Even after spending hours together at the office, they would enjoy meals together in each other’s homes. Katherine frequently shared her faith in Jesus, and on occasion, would make an appeal for a Bible study together. There was little resistance because they trusted and loved Katherine and believed she was a gift from Allah.

Fatima leaned on Katherine for much of the written correspondence and administrative support. She knew Katherine was a professional businesswoman and she was an integral part of the success of the business venture. The business expanded and another staff member was hired to help with the administration. Muneira was always eager to be with Katherine and asked many questions about the Bible and Jesus. In fact, in two short months, Muneira accepted Jesus as her savior. She and Katherine would meet together privately in the evenings to pray for Fatima and Aisha.

One day, Fatima was searching on the internet and typed in Katherine’s name. What appeared on the Google search engine was puzzling. There were over 10 sites that were exact matches to her name. The first match was from a church in a small town in Texas that had posted on their homepage an opportunity to come hear the testimony of a woman going to live with the Muslims. Another article had been written and posted about “Katherine, the missionary, going to the Middle East to win Muslims to Jesus.” Scrolling down, Fatima read an article from an interview made at a Christian school. In the interview, Katherine spoke of the preparation needed to live and work with Muslims “in order to bring them to Christ.” The websites provided multiple blurbs from church newsletters, blogs from well-meaning friends back home, and housed outdated information from college days and other assorted religious files that were still floating in cyberspace that had never been removed from the Google search engine.

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*SHE FELT SHE HAD BEEN USED..*

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Fatima felt confused, betrayed, and then angry. She felt she had been used and began to doubt everything that Katherine had ever told her. She believed Katherine’s whole life and identity was a lie. She felt sick to think she had introduced Katherine not only to business colleagues,

personal friends, and family but had also trusted her with the most intimate details of her life and business.

Not only did Katherine lose her friendships, but she also lost her integrity and credibility with those to whom she was ministering. She no longer had a testimony to offer and lost the opportunity to save face in a shame and honor culture. Fatima's parting words to her included the threat of turning her, the company she worked for, and all the foreigners she knew over to the government officials.

**REFLECT #4**

1. Is it really possible to have an open, authentic friendship with someone whom you are ultimately misleading about your true motives, identity, and reason for being there? As followers of Jesus, eager to build friendships and wanting to share about the truth in our lives, is it ever justifiable to conceal who we truly are? What are the risks involved?

2. What practical steps could you take to ensure you and those around you (family, friends, church, etc.) are not mishandling sensitive information? How can you respect the host culture, but at the same time, not attempt to deceive those with whom you interact?

3. How can you be a good friend and love others well even if they never show interest in Jesus as savior? How will you fight the temptation to view them as projects?

4. Philippians 2 reminds us of the beauty of the incarnation of Jesus. As we live out a life of service, we are instructed in verses 5-8: *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

What does obedience to this passage mean in an Islamic context? To what degree do we surrender our rights and identity in order to make ourselves nothing and take on the likeness of those we are called to reach? How do we contextualize the Gospel without surrendering the heart and message of the Good News?

## BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE GOSPEL

It is important to understand everyday life and expressions of Islam today. Islam has changed over the centuries. But in many ways, it has stayed the same. For most Muslims, Islam is as much a way of life as it is a system of beliefs. In fact, the daily lives of Muslims may often bear little resemblance to the formal practices of orthodox Islam. It is important to read the culture of Islam you are submerged in to ask questions that provide insight for effective ministry. Question like: *What is family life like in this Muslim community (ummah)? How do honor and shame affect the life of the ummah? How can I become a part of family and community life? What are the special celebrations, traditions and holidays I can participate in? What are the rhythms and schedules of daily life like in the community which I should respect and sync with? How does a respectable person of my age, gender and stature dress in this society? How can I prove to be modest? How do I form appropriate relationships?*

For most Muslims, day-to-day living consists primarily of family, neighbors and the outer community circles. These relationships provide contexts for cross-cultural reciprocity of hospitality, honor, gifts, music, and sports. An Islamic family's ethnicity, customs, values, and language mix with the teachings of Islam to form a local community culture. In order to truly understand Muslims and minister to them, we need to appreciate the forces affecting their daily lives. Much of the time we will spend with our Muslim friends will be over meals and with families. Learning to relate through familial relationships will open up more opportunity for sharing than a discussion of their theological beliefs. The ummah is the unifying element

of Islamic society. The rituals of birth, engagement, marriage, death and annual feasts are core religious experiences for the ummah.

Family commitment is important to Muslims. Rival in importance is the value of honor and shame. Honor is the motivator of behavior – the arbitrator of justice. The binding force of honor is tied to community. Muslims have a strong sense of group identity. A shameful act on the part of one brings shame on their family and community. That is why shameful behavior is considered a great transgression against community. The family's honor, for the most part, rests on the chastity of their females. The female often carries the full weight of honor and shame. This reality explains why western movies, music, and advertising are considered a great threat in Islamic community.

Shame can also be brought upon a household if a family member chooses to break from faith and traditions. The fear of bringing shame on oneself and the family is a powerful motivator in community. To a westerner, this tight bond might seem highly restrictive, limiting personal choice and individual identity. Yet for the Muslim, this bond brings the benefits of security, safety and a sense of belonging.

Hospitality is an expectation among Muslims. A visit in a Muslim home is unforgettable. Guests are treated as royalty and are given the very best the family can offer. It is a good practice to reciprocate this type of hospitality by inviting Muslims into your own home.

Festivals are central in Muslim society. Cross-cultural ministers must be sensitive to local customs. Many festivals and celebrations are common throughout the Islamic world as a means of promoting social identity and solidarity. Festivals should be acknowledged and respected by foreigners. For example, a foreigner who eats out in a public restaurant during Ramadan (fasting) will not be viewed as respectful of local culture. The opportunity to witness is greatly diminished by one who is not respectful of the culture and traditions of Islam. On the other hand, Christmas and Easter are wonderful times to invite Muslims to participate in your own celebrations and festivities. Because many Muslims have a history of oral learning, they love narratives and want to listen to stories. This provides great opportunity for a Christian to share Bible stories, Christian traditions, poems, songs, and prayers.

The vast majority of Muslims view life as an integrated whole. Islam is life and culture. In direct contrast, the western worldview sees life in very distinct compartments. We may adopt different behaviors depending on whether we are at home, church or work. Westerners have a high tolerance for diversity, individualism and even inconsistency. Muslims value interdependence and integration of the family, community, and work. If we are to have an effective witness in a Muslim community and lasting friendships with Muslims, Christian workers cannot afford to relate to Muslims only through our own cultural lenses.

Below are some suggestions for breaking down social and cultural barriers in an Islamic context:

- Interact only in same-sex company. Genders are usually separate in Islam and piety and purity are respected.
- Women (and men) should always dress modestly. While a westerner may state, *you cannot judge a book by its cover*, there is an Arabic proverb that states, *you know the book by its title*.

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- Men should not enter a home where no male is present.
- Let winning a friend be the goal, not winning an argument.
- Express hospitality appropriately.
- Be a learner and be watchful of customs – how to sit, how to eat, how to enter a house, etc.
- Maintain a consistent lifestyle – one that reflects the Gospel message.
- Learn not only local language but Islamic vocabulary, greetings, and pronunciations. Be able to speak somewhat knowledgeably about Islam while maintaining the identity of a learner.
- Never criticize Muhammad or the Qur'an.
- If you are married (or single), avoid public displays of affection.
- Wives should not correct or interrupt their husbands in public. Of course, husbands should not correct or interrupt their wives in public either – although this would not be considered inappropriate in Islamic culture.
- Live as a representative and ambassador of Christ with gentleness and humility.
- Be willing to surrender your western rights as long as you do not betray your conscience, faith or practice of Biblical Christianity.
- Be prepared to share stories from the Gospels at opportune times.
- Be present for people in time of physical need or crisis.
- Be as much a part of the public community as is healthy and possible – attending special events, sporting events, community festivals, etc., as a family or with same-gender friends.
- Follow Islamic diet as described by the *Haram* – avoiding pork, shellfish and the drinking of alcohol. While the blood of Jesus has set us free from the observance of the law, for the sake of witness and the avoidance of offense, these are simple things that can be set aside.

### REFLECT #5

1. Read the account of Paul's visit to Athens in Acts 17:16-34. This text describes Paul as distressed over the spiritual situation of the city. In this distress, he seeks bridges to the local culture and worldview. Some of the bridges we observe in this passage are:

- Linking to religious beliefs held in common by Paul and locals in the culture (Jews and God-fearing Greeks)
- Going to common places of meeting.
- Complimenting the people for being religious.
- Making note of monuments in culture.
- Quoting secular poets.
- Linking to the popular concept of God's "offspring."
- Acknowledging and agreeing with the commonly held belief in a mysterious *unknown* God.
- Reasoning with those who liked to reason.

Paul was attempting to open doors by engaging the local culture on their own turf. As we enter into Muslim contexts as witnesses, we should also be looking for bridges to share our faith. List below some of the bridges you can identify between your own Christian belief and Muslim faith.

2. What are some of the ways you can form bridges from a social standpoint?

3. What are some habits you will need to change in order to be an effective cross-cultural witness among Muslims?

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### IN CONCLUSION

From my [KayLyn Hopper] two decades of experience in missions to Muslims and from discussions with fellow missionaries, church planters and evangelists, I have concluded that our church planting efforts among Muslims have failed, in part, due to our unwillingness to go deeper within Islamic culture. There may be American cultural behavior that actually is a barrier to Muslims hearing the gospel message. Those who want to minister cross-culturally need to rethink some of their American behavior (e.g. eating pork, women wearing short sleeve blouses). The question arises, *what do I keep and what do I release?* Too often our personal preferences, cultural traditions, and even our supposed freedom in Christ has broken the trust in community. We can identify with a Muslim woman's veil and yet lack an appreciation and respect for Islamic culture. We send out mixed messages.

When I was a missionary in the Middle East, I wanted to take my new friends to window shop and treat them to a meal in a Western restaurant. Both of these were an American woman's pastime. These Muslim wives finally found the courage to tell me that honorable women do not go out during the day when they should be home. By trying to include them on an American custom, their husbands became suspicious of my intentions, believing that I was distracting their wives from their responsibility to the family and believing that I was encouraging them toward loose behavior.

There are numerous creative ways to share the gospel with Muslims. I believe we are entering a time when the church is doing some very creative and very strategic thinking about being an effective witness to Muslims. The PANORAMA training you are engaged in is one of these ways the church is using as a tool that will provide new opportunities. Our ministries will be effective to the degree that God is introduced to Islamic culture and the Muslim worldview (perception of reality) is reshaped by the Biblical message. We can show Muslims that not only do we love them, but God loves them, too. We may not know all the answers, but we know what Jesus has to say to them.

In our bold efforts to contextualize the gospel, we must remove stumbling blocks to the gospel. Cross-cultural workers must realize that to live among Muslims will require a change in their lifestyle. If we do not contextualize, our gospel will remain foreign and irrelevant to their daily lives. We must be sensitive to the local culture while being true to God's word. As much as we may want to appear as cultural insiders so that Muslims will not reject the gospel message, we can never truly get close enough to completely identify with Muslim culture. While we try to identify with Muslims by eating local foods and following local customs, we struggle with knowing how much identification is too much. We need to know where to draw our lines and when our faith is being compromised. We must accept the fact that there will be a great tension – allowing our approaches to be determined by those we have come to serve, yet remaining true to the Word and Spirit of our Lord.

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*IN OUR BOLD EFFORTS TO  
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Honoring what is acceptable to a particular Muslim group is critical when presenting God's truth to a new culture. Admittedly, it is difficult to determine what is permissible. Questions such as, *Do we fast with them during Ramadan? Do we dress distinctly Muslim in order to share in*

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*their culture? Do we use the Qur'an as a bridge when witnessing? Do we say prayers in ritualized form facing Mecca?*

Contextualization is a means to an end. A Christ-centered witness is a greater goal. I struggle to form a personal position on such important issues. The Lord is constantly guiding me – even as I write this lesson for you. This I know – it is significant for us to obey the Great Commission and to make disciples among Muslim people. Now is the time to motivate and inspire each other with effective methods and practices. In light of what we have learned, do not be deterred. Let us go together and taste the sweetness of spending time with Muslims so that by ministering to them, they will encounter Isa.

Ma salameh. Go with peace.

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### SELF-AWARENESS, SURVIVAL, AND SOLUTION

Imagine that you have just arrived in your location of service among a Muslim people group. What are some of the first steps you will take to begin engaging your local community in relationship?

What changes can you begin making in your current lifestyle that will prepare you for life and witness among Muslim people?

If God has given you a heart for Muslim people, describe below your “end-vision” for the people you will engage through your witness. What are your dreams for these people in the end?

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ISLAM

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## AUTHOR

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