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If thou wert in doubt as to what  
We have revealed unto thee, then  
ask those who have been  
reading the Book from before  
thee....

**HOW TO  
REACH  
OUT TO  
YOUR  
MUSLIM  
FRIENDS**

From taxi drivers to medical doctors and from students to professors, we can no longer miss Muslims in our neighborhoods. From farmer's markets to malls we notice many women with head scarves shopping. Paying for the gas at the local gas station, we are greeted by Pakistanis. In light of the terrorist attacks by Muslim militants, how should we as Christians respond to the Muslims we meet every day? Should we be afraid of them?

Xenophobia is the fear of strangers or foreigners, or anything that is strange or foreign. For most of us, Muslims and the religion of Islam are maybe even strange, foreign, and frightening. The Bible tells us to care for the foreigner and strangers in our midst (Ex. 23:9). When we talk to Muslims, we would find that many Muslims are fearful of American's opinions and how they will react towards them. The Bible commands us to love all people. Christians are to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:43-48).

How then can we love our Muslim neighbors and reach out to them with the love of Christ? Here are some thoughts to ponder.

### **1. Avoid stereotyping Muslims.**

Not all Muslims are the same. There are the *conservative* Muslims who read the Qur'an, go to the mosque on Friday for the collective prayer and keep the 5 daily prayer times, keep Ramadan (a month of fasting during the daylight hours), give money in keeping with Islamic law, and at one point in their life go on a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Most in the USA are *moderate* Muslims, who say prayers, (mostly on special and high occasions) and only occasionally go to the Mosque. They aren't fanatical about their religion just as most Americans aren't fanatical about their religion. Lastly there are *cultural* Muslims, who are Muslim in name but don't practice any religion.

### **2. Allow yourself to meet Muslims.**

Muslims have preconceived ideas about Christians and Christianity. Meeting a Christian is the best way to dispel preconceived ideas Muslims have about Christians. Probably the greatest reason Muslims have not come to Christ is they have never met a true Christian. They haven't seen up close how a true Christian lives' their life. They will rarely ever go to churches to meet

that they feel compelled to ask the other person about their faith. Some people feel they are witnessing when they get a chance to talk about religion. If the Muslim with them doesn't initiate a spiritual topic, they get the conversation started by asking the Muslim to tell them about Islam.

Asking Muslims about Islam conveys the idea that you are seeking. If you are with a strong Muslim, he will talk about Islam without your prompting. If you are with a cultural Muslim, your questions might challenge him to learn more about Islam and become a better Muslim. It is more worth while to ask him if he understands the form of Christianity that he sees here in the West and to ask if we could explain true Christianity to him.

Sometimes our shy attempts at sharing Christ with others don't address the need the person has. We Christians have a great opportunity to reach out in love to our Muslims neighbors as never before. God has given us an opportunity to show the difference Christ has made in our lives by reaching out in friendship.

If they say the Bible is changed, ask the following questions: Who changed it? What was changed? When was it changed? Where was it changed? Why was it changed?

There are some things we should **avoid in witnessing**:

### **1. Too Focused on Friendship:**

We can become so focused on establishing a friendship or meeting someone that we leave out the spiritual dimension because we are afraid it will be offensive. Usually the opposite is true and they will respect someone who brings their faith into a discussion. However, if we establish a relationship with a person with no spiritual dimension to it, it becomes awkward and difficult to add it later. If we try to introduce the subject later, the person with whom we have established the relationship may feel betrayed. You were one person at the beginning and now you are someone else. It becomes obvious to all is that there was another agenda for the relationship other than a genuine friendship. In addition, if the new friend refuses to talk about spiritual issues, the relationship becomes awkward and begins to flounder. Therefore, it is important to establish the spiritual side of your life from the very beginning.

### **2. Too Focused on Converting:**

Some eager persons are out "to win people for Jesus." In their zeal for God they go at the task like a hunter after its prey. This approach is often forced and may appear like a memorized presentation. Our Muslim contact will feel as offended by that as we do when harangued by a cultist's canned and aggressive presentation. To avoid this perception, allow the person into your walk with God. Live your life openly and try to be salt and light to the person with whom you talk. This means your conversation encourages the person to live righteously as they see that your walk with God is integrated into every aspect of your life. When confronted with a need, do as you do in a church setting, pray with the person about the need. When a person shares an injustice, express how this breaks God's heart and brings the injustice to God's attention.

### **3. Too Focused on Religion:**

At times Westerners are so ignorant about other religious beliefs

Christians, so putting yourself in a situation to meet Muslims and openly living your Christian life before people is the first place to begin. This can mean learning the name of the gas station attendant and developing a relationship more than just paying for the gas. Many Muslims live in the U.S. for years before an American Christian befriends them.. Many never have that privilege.

### **3. Topics you will encounter.**

As you meet Muslims, you will discover that there are cultural norms for conversation that are different than ours. There are two subjects Americans seem to avoid, politics and religion. However, politics and religion are the topics of choice for many Muslims. Politics will center on American foreign policies and the Palestinian plight in the Middle East. As Christians we must not let our patriotism get mixed with the Kingdom of God. Don't feel compelled to defend American policies as Christian policies. Grieve as God grieves over human tragedies. Let our human solutions show their inadequacies and share that God wants all men to seek him.

### **4. Establish the spiritual dimension in your friendship.**

In any relationship, it is very important to establish the spiritual dimension from the beginning in the relationship. As a Christian seeking to be salt and light in this world (Matt. 5:13-16), it should be our desire to minister God's grace with each person we meet. The Christian should develop the skills of using a conversation to look for ways to share some aspect of Christ. We should seek to share spiritual truth that adds God's perspective to the conversation. Muslims rarely meet Christians who live their Christian faith openly. Muslims would not be offended as most Americans would be, if you bring in the spiritual dimension in your life; but would welcome it as a breath of fresh air. Often a Muslim will start a statement with 'As a Muslim I believe...' don't be hesitant to respond 'As a Christian I believe...' this will gain you respect and might encourage your friend to ask more questions about your faith.

### **5. Questions to use.**

When meeting people for the first time, it is good to use questions to establish a relationship. The purpose of the questions are to es-

establish a spiritual relationship with the individual from the beginning and create opportunities to share our faith. Once this spiritual dimension is established, you have identified yourself as a spiritual person. When trouble enters their lives, they may seek you out for prayer or counsel. This provides opportunity to talk about your faith.

### Questions to use:

a. **Where are you from?** People love to share about where they are from. This interest in their country of origin shows you care. If you know your geography, often this question will help you know whether they are Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. Should you have visited their country or have friends from there or living there, it gives you a point of commonality.

b. **How long have you been here?** This question helps you to learn some of the issues they might be facing. For instance, if they have arrived within the year, they will be facing legal and cultural adjustments. If they have been here for years, they may even feel alienated or isolated from the host culture. Individuals who move to another culture usually experience a depression between the third and ninth month as they make adjustments to the new culture. They might be going through this.

c. **Find a need-based issue and ask if you can pray for them on the spot in Jesus' name.** 99% of people will not object to prayer. For most, the prayer you offer in their presence may be the first time anyone ever prayed for them and their needs. Prayer is a tremendous privilege of ushering that individual into the very presence of God. Prayer is respected and more can be said in prayer than in a lecture or debate. Give good theology in prayer, Because of the relationship we have with God through Christ and as children of God we can lift up the needs of others. Boldly pray in Jesus' name, not being ashamed of Christ. But, we must be careful not to end up preaching, our goal is to pray for them.

d. **Give literature.** After you have prayer, be prepared to give some appropriate literature. People are always more open to re-

ceiving literature after you have impacted them in a positive way. 'The Answer is God' from The Bridges Option is a good one to have on hand . They have many others which can be seen on their website [www.bridgesoption.org](http://www.bridgesoption.org) . Just make sure that you are familiar with the contents and understand the presentation it makes before you distribute any literature to someone else.

### 6. Be receptive to hospitality.

Hospitality in American culture is inviting someone to your home for dinner. You never drop in unannounced. But for most first generation Muslims, the greatest sign of friendship is stopping by unannounced. Be prepared to drink tea or "chai" as it is called and eat a light snack. There is a proverb that says you haven't talked until you have eaten together. Remember there is a polite exchange that means so much in their cultures. When asked if you want tea, refuse saying you don't want to put them out. When they offer it again, gently refuse saying you don't want to trouble them. When they say it's no trouble, accept if they are having some. This polite exchange allows the host to show their hospitality and their friendship. This goes a long way in establishing a friendship. They may rarely visit you but desire you to visit them.

### 7. Use your holidays as a teaching tool.

Invite your Muslim friend to your home for the various American holidays, explaining the history behind the symbols and the event. Remember that Muslims consider pork and pork produces unclean, so don't serve pork. Give a Jesus video in their mother language as a gift of your friendship at Christmas or at the end of Ramadan. Then sit down and watch it with them. Explain the significance of what Jesus taught and his death and resurrection.

### 8. Get the scripture into their hands.

The Bible is a great way of dispelling mis-understanding of the Christian faith. Muslims are told to read the Bible in the Qur'an. But Muslims are told that the Bible of today is not the original, and that the last revelation has come in the Qur'an, their holy book. When Muslims read the Bible, God speaks to them. Suggest getting together to read some of the New Testament. When they have questions, you can answer them. Don't get sucked into debating the Bible, read it together.