



## Muslim Students in America: Within Reach of the Truth

Dramatic events seem to bubble forth on a daily basis from the Islamic world. It seems like we can't go a day without facing questions about the thoughts and actions of Muslims. Who are they? What do they believe? How can they ever be reached with the gospel?

Most of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims live in nations that restrict communication of the message of Jesus. Thus, Muslims are one of the largest unreached or under-reached people groups on the earth. God, in His wisdom and grace, is bringing increasing numbers to study at American universities. Currently, more than 150,000 international Muslim students are present on our campuses.

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Here in America, they can engage in three spiritual experiences that might elude them in their home countries--talk with a true follower of Jesus, encounter true Christian love and discover the truth of the Bible. But now that these Muslim students are within reach of the truth, will we help facilitate such experiences for them? Will we reach out to them with the love of Jesus?

### 1 Understanding Their World

#### The Beginnings of Islam

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca (in the land that is now Saudi Arabia) in 570 A.D. He was greatly disturbed by the idol worship of his culture and often retreated into the desert to meditate on the proper way to worship the true God. When he was 40 years old, it is said that the angel Gabriel appeared to him with his first revelation from God. These revelations continued, and they were later gathered together into the Quran.

Muhammad was eventually run out of Mecca

by the keepers of the idols in an event that marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar (A.D. 622). He fled to Medina where he attracted enough followers to make it possible for him to return to Mecca in A.D. 630. After Muhammad's death, Islam continued to expand under various leaders - through conquest and through trade contacts.

#### Islam in the World Today Where do Muslims Live?

The vast majority of Muslims live in the area of the world that has been identified as the “10/40 Window”— that area between the 10 and 40 degree north latitudes on the globe. The country with the largest number of Muslims is Indonesia, followed by Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Iran. Though we tend to think of Muslims as Middle Easterners and speakers of Arabic, that particular group comprises less than 25% of the world's Muslims.

#### Types of Islam

There are as many as 150 different branches of Islam, but they can generally be grouped under two main types - Sunni and Shia - with one special branch, Sufi.

The Sunni-Shia split occurred in A.D. 680. A primary difference between these two branches is their understanding of the qualifications of the leader for the universal Islamic community.

**Sunni** – About 85% of all Muslims are Sunni. In addition to following the Quran, Sunnis try to follow the sayings and actions of Muhammad that were collected after his death in the books of the Hadith. The Hadith show more clearly how to practice the teachings of the Quran. Sunnis believe that the leader for Islam (called a caliph) can be anyone selected by the consensus of the community. There has been no universally recognized caliph since the Ottoman Empire fell and the caliphate was disbanded in 1924.

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**Shia (or “Shiite”)** – About 14% of all Muslims are Shia, and they are found mainly in Iran and Iraq. Shiites believe that Allah provides for the continuing guidance of the community through the Imam, who must be a direct descendant of Muhammad. The majority of Shia believe there were 12 Imams (Ali was the first) and that the twelfth went into hiding where he waits to return one day as the Mehdi (“Messiah”). There is no Imam present today, though in places like Iran the Ayatollah (“a word from Allah”) takes the place of the absent Imam. Shiites follow a non-literal interpretation of the Quran and their own collections of Hadith.

**Sufi** – This is not really a separate branch of Islam but a mystical belief system that cuts across both Sunni and Shia branches. Sufis adhere to an allegorical reading of the Quran. They believe that the soul can rise to the very presence of God and eventually be united with God through prayer and discipline. They often follow a “holy man” who gives spiritual guidance in the search for union with God through self-discipline, mystical intuition, and sometimes music and dancing.

## Beliefs and Practices

Islam is a complete way of life that governs all aspects: moral, spiritual, physical, intellectual, social, economic and legal. The following descriptions are generally true throughout the Muslim world. Variations will occur in certain cultures or nations.

### Cultural Beliefs and Practices

- **Wearing the Hijab(head-covering)** – Muslim women should dress modestly. Wearing the head covering (Hijab) is a mark of commitment to faith. In some countries, it is obligatory, but in others it is a personal choice.
- **Family Life** – The family is considered extremely important in Islam and includes the entire circle of familial relationships, including in-laws. Obligations to parents are strongly stressed. In many senses, marriage is considered the union of two families.
- **Shaking Hands** – Many Muslims do not shake hands with people of the opposite gender. When meeting a Muslim, wait to see if he or she offers his or her hand first; then follow accordingly.
- **Honor / Shame** – Muslim cultures, like most in Asia, are honor/shame oriented. One’s self-identity and respect is determined by an intricate network of socially acceptable behaviors and relationships.
- **People Oriented vs. Time Oriented** – Emphasis is placed on relationships and being with others and not on keeping to a strict time schedule for events or appointments.
- **Ethnic Pride** – Ethnic pride is a psychological factor that enables Islamic culture to remain generally unchanged. Most Muslims are proud of being followers of Islam. According to Islam, they are destined to dominate.

### Religious Beliefs and Practices

- **Faith Path** – “Islam” means “Submission to God.” In general, Muslims believe or do what they have been told - not what they have discovered for themselves through study or questioning. Therefore, few read the Quran, and most are dependent on religious leaders to explain the Quran or Hadith.
- **Prayer Customs** – Muslims are required to pray five times a day. Men are en-

couraged to pray in the mosque though they may pray anywhere during the prescribed times. Memorized prayers are offered in Arabic.

- **Cleanliness** – Cleanliness (washing in a certain way) is a prerequisite to prayer. Muslims generally do not keep pets, including dogs, inside their homes, and they avoid contact with them.
- **Dietary Restrictions** – Pork products and alcoholic drink are haram (forbidden) in Islam. Muslims eat halal meat which is meat slaughtered in the Islamic way and blessed with the name of God.
- **Ramadan and Celebrations** – The month of Ramadan is set aside for fasting; during this month Muslims do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. The Quran declares that: “When Ramadan comes, the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are put in chains.” Muslims believe that their good actions during this month bring a greater reward than at any other time of year.
- **Eid-al-Fitr** marks the end of Ramadan.
- **Eid al-Adha** (about 70 days after Eid-el-Fitr) is an occasion to commemorate Abraham’s obedience to Allah in offering his son Ishmael.
- **Sin and Forgiveness** – According to Islam, people sin but are not sinful by nature. Most “sin” is only considered a mistake that is due to forgetfulness or hu-

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man weakness, and it can be forgiven by God through sincere repentance. There is no need for a Savior or substitute sacrifice. When we use the term “sin,” many Muslims may think only of major downfalls like murder or adultery. Thus, they will not agree with the biblical view that “all have sinned...”



- **Judgment and Salvation** – Islam teaches that on the Day of Judgment, every person will be accountable to God for his or her words and deeds. A practicing Muslim is always striving to be righteous while hoping and praying for God’s acceptance and grace. There is no assurance of salvation in Islam unless one is killed in a holy war (“jihad”).

itual war, and we must consistently trust God in prayer for each of our Muslim friends.

### Make Friends

Most Muslims respond very positively to those who reach out to develop a loving relationship with them.

- Your friendship should be genuine. Live out your faith by demonstrating how your relationship with God helps you deal with everyday aspects of life (family, job, fears, future). Godliness is attractive to a Muslim.
- Your faith should be communicated early and naturally in your relationship with a student. Explain your faith - what you believe and why.

### Read the Word

The Word of God as applied by the Spirit of God is what creates faith. Encourage your friends to read the Bible for themselves (preferably, with you) and to begin with Mark or Luke. If they do not have Bibles, obtain some in their language(s).

### Know What You Believe

We should know how to respond to these typical objections that Muslims raise against the Christian faith.

- **The Bible has been corrupted or changed.**

- **Personal response:** Ask why your friend thinks so. Has he or she ever read the Bible? Ask for examples of “errors.”
- **Theological response:** Focus on the nature of God – He is all powerful and can protect His Word. Also focus on the nature of inspiration – God used human authors to communicate His meaning through their vocabulary and style.
- **Logical responses:** Ask, “When do you think the Bible was corrupted?” If your friend says it happened before Muhammad, point out that the Quran speaks highly of the Bible. If your friend says it happened after Muhammad, point out that we have copies of the Bible from long before Muhammad’s time—and they are unchanged.

- **Jesus is not the Son of God; there is no Trinity.**

- Assert that Christians also believe in only one God.
- Ask questions such as these: What do you believe about God? What is He like? Is anything impossible for God? Is it possible that He could take on human form in order to communicate more clearly with us?
- Invite your friend to study the Bible with you on this topic.

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- **Jesus did not die on the cross.**

- Explain the necessity of the crucifixion due to God’s holy and just character.
- Explain the “offensiveness” of sin to God’s character and righteous demands.
- Explain the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection to our faith.
- Explain the evidence for the resurrection.

### Be Patient

Remember that there are many barriers for

## 2 Connecting Them To Jesus

### Key Components of Effective Outreach

#### Personal Preparation

Muslim evangelism should follow the basic model of I Peter 3:15-16.

- Be Spirit-filled.
- Be equipped to give answers when questions arise from their interaction with your life.
- Always act with respect toward them as persons whom God values and loves (not as targets or projects).

#### Prayer

Muslims are captive to a spiritual blindness, but God is at work “setting the captive free and bringing sight to the blind.” This is a spir-

a Muslim to cross in order to place faith in Jesus—family, cultural, theological and political. Model the love and grace of Jesus. Continue to spend time with your friend even if he or she initially rejects the gospel.

## 3 Do's and Don'ts

**DO...**be loving, friendly, fair, and courteous.

**DO...**be the initiator in the relationship. Take a personal interest in others, their culture and their nation.

**DO...**make a distinction between true and nominal Christians.

**DO...**pray with Muslims whenever possible, focusing on their needs.

**DO...**ministry on a one-to-one basis (group settings for spiritual conversations are often not effective with Muslims).

**DO...**treat Bibles with respect (keep them off the floor, out of the bathroom, etc.).

**DON'T...**criticize Islam, Muhammad, or the Quran.

**DON'T...**discuss Middle East politics, especially matters pertaining to Israel.

**DON'T...**get into heated arguments. Present your beliefs clearly but with respect.

**DON'T...**assume words have the same meaning (sin, Messiah, salvation, Son of God). Define what you mean by these terms.

**DON'T...**expose your friend's interest in the gospel to others - especially other Muslims.



### Cultural Issues

- ***Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door.*** Roland Muller. Xlibris, 2000.
- ***The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures.*** Jayson Georges, 2014.

### Resources to Give to Muslim Friends

- ***Glad News! God loves you my Muslim friend.*** Samy Tanagho. Authentic Publ. 2003
- ***Dear Muslim Friend.*** Jerry Mattix. ECS Ministries. 2014

### Booklets

- ***Adha and the Injeel.*** Fouad Masri. Crescent Project, 2004. (a gospel presentation)
- ***Is the Injeel Corrupted? My Search for the Truth about the New Testament.*** Fouad Masri. Crescent Project, 2006 (a defense of the authenticity and reliability of the New Testament).
- ***The Five Principles.*** This booklet, which explains five essential points for ministering to Muslims, is available in pdf format from [tipnetinfo@gmail.com](mailto:tipnetinfo@gmail.com) upon request.

### Web Sites

- **[www.whoisthemessiah.wordpress.com](http://www.whoisthemessiah.wordpress.com)** – This video lecture series explores what the Bible teaches about the Messiah. Some of the topics covered are: the need for, the prophecy about, and the purpose of the Messiah, as well as answering challenges Muslims make to the

trustworthiness of the Bible and the deity of Jesus.

- **[www.reachinginternationals.com](http://www.reachinginternationals.com)** – Many articles on reaching international students with a special section on outreach to those from the Middle East.
- **[www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org)** – A wealth of articles and links for resources related to Muslim ministry.
- **[www.commanetwork.com](http://www.commanetwork.com)** – The public site for Coalition of Ministries to Muslims in North America. It has a number of resources and links to helpful information and testimonies by former Muslims.
- **[www.multilanguage.com/catalog.htm](http://www.multilanguage.com/catalog.htm)** – A site for ordering Scriptures in languages spoken by Muslims.
- **[www.ReachingTheNationsAmongUs.org](http://www.ReachingTheNationsAmongUs.org)** – A site for the multi-language JESUS film plus links to many other resources and cooperating organizations.

### Videos

- **Crescent Project video series.** – A six-part series introducing the basics about Islam and how to engage Muslims in spiritual conversations.
- **[www.everystudent.info/fiveprinciples](http://www.everystudent.info/fiveprinciples)** – This is a private site containing six videos covering the major apologetic issues for sharing our faith with Muslims.

*For more information on how to reach this people group, please contact us at [tipnetinfo@gmail.com](mailto:tipnetinfo@gmail.com).*

## 4 Recommended Resources

### Books

#### Evangelism and Outreach

- ***Answering Islam.*** Geisler and Saleeb. Baker, 2002.
- ***Engaging Islam.*** Georges Houssey. Treeline Publ., 2010.
- ***Understanding Islam and Christianity.*** Josh McDowell and Jim Walker. Harvest House, 2013.
- ***Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus.*** Nabeel Qureshi. Zondervan, 2014.