

Participant's Guide

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, smiling warmly. He is holding a young child with dark hair, who is also smiling broadly. The man is wearing a light-colored sweater, and the child is wearing a dark blue shirt and a necklace with a large, light-colored pendant. The background is dark and out of focus.

Muslims, Christians, and Jesus

Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships
Four Sessions

CARL MEDEARIS

International Expert on Christian-Muslim Relations

with STEPHEN & AMANDA SORENSON

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INTRODUCTION

A shadow has fallen over many of us who seek to follow Jesus. Not only do we wonder if Muslims are safe enough to reach out to, but we struggle to have the compassion of Christ to do so. It's easy to believe that the problem is Islam itself. For centuries, many people have reduced the conflict to a simplistic generalization: *Christianity vs. Islam*.

There is no doubt that religion can be a hotbed for deep convictions, zealous emotions, and, at times, fiery conflicts. While it is true that some terrorists today utilize the banner of Islam to kill and destroy, there is nothing to be gained by accusing a religion of brokering violence when it is committed by a handful of its followers. I am convinced that the majority of Muslims are far more concerned with obeying the commandments of God than waging holy war against infidels. In fact, I have observed many Muslims who already live close to the truths of Jesus.

Therefore, my intention through this study is to help those who follow Jesus to focus less on whether or not it is “safe” to reach out to Muslims and more on the clear command of Christ to “go into *all* the world.” This is a topic I first explored in my book, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, published by Bethany House. I am grateful to Bethany for allowing me to use that book as a foundation to develop the *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* video curriculum.

I highly recommend reading the original book *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* as you progress through this study. It offers many more stories of how Muslims have grown in their relationship with Jesus. It helps you

to answer common questions Muslims ask. It shows practical ways to love your neighbor by reaching out to Muslims.

I'm not the final word on Islam. I'm only a follower of Jesus who loves Muslims and seeks to live out his command to go into *all* the world. My desire is to introduce you to practical steps you can take to befriend a Muslim. I want to show you how to avoid making stereotypes of Muslims and to avoid reinforcing stereotypes of Christians. I want to help you learn how to live a life that truly is good news to a Muslim.

Carl Medearis
Denver, Colorado
April 2011

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Group Size

The *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* video curriculum is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. To ensure everyone has enough time to participate in discussions, it is recommended that large groups break up into smaller groups of four to six people each.

Materials Needed

Each participant should have his or her own participant's guide, which includes video outline notes, group discussion questions, personal reflection, informative sidebars, as well as a "Steps to Take on Your Own" activity section to deepen learning between sessions. Although the course can be fully experienced with just the video and participant's guide, participants are also encouraged to have a copy of the *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* book. Reading the book alongside the video curriculum provides deeper insights that make the journey richer and more meaningful.

Timing

The time notations — for example (*20 minutes*) — indicate the *actual* time of video segments and the *suggested* time for other activities or discussions. For example:

DVD DISCUSSION

(7 minutes)

Adhering to the suggested times will enable you to complete each session in one hour. If you have additional time, you may wish to allow more time for discussion and activities.

Facilitation

Each group should appoint a facilitator who is responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For ease of use, Bible passages are printed in the participant's guide.

Before You Begin

Prior to Session 1, it will be helpful for you to view the “10 Myths about Muslims” and “For Leaders” segments on the DVD.

Of Note

Quotations throughout this participant's guide are taken or adapted from Carl Medearis's book, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* (Bethany House, 2008), and are so noted. For brevity, the book title has been abbreviated *MCJ*.

SESSION 1

What Is Islam?: Exploring Our Fears and Stereotypes

How are those of us who follow Jesus supposed to relate to Muslims? This is not a question about differences between the religions of Christianity and Islam, nor is it about political distinctions between the Muslim world and the West. It is, rather, a question of the heart. How do we express an attitude of love and compassion toward people we don't understand? How do we reach out to people who follow an unfamiliar religion that most of us find intimidating? How do we deal with our fear and suspicion so that we might begin to build bridges that lead to Jesus, the Prince of Peace?

MCJ

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT

(4 minutes)

The centuries-long history of conflict between Christianity and Islam has led to negative perceptions, fears, and emotionally charged interactions between people of both faiths today. Even the words we use to talk about these religions and their respective beliefs or practices can incite a spontaneous, powerful response.

- For example, what do you think and feel when you read or hear words such as: *infidel*, *Crusades*, *Islam*, *jihad*, *Sharia*, *Christian*?
- What do you think a Muslim might think and feel regarding these same words?

DVD OBSERVATIONS

(20 minutes)

As you watch the video segment for this session, use the following topics as a guide for taking notes.

Islam and Christianity: the roots of our fear

John 4:35 — Open your eyes

to God's love for all people

to those who are hungry to hear the good news of Jesus

The language of the Qur'an

The voices of Islam — political violence vs. moderation

What message might Muslims be open to hearing?

DVD DISCUSSION

(9 minutes)

1. When the tensions that often exist between Christians and Muslims were explored in the video, what did you think and feel? Why?
2. In what ways have various influences (such as culture, news media, church teaching, your family, where you have lived, personal relationships, and your formal education) shaped your perceptions of Islam and Muslims?

To what extent have your perceptions affected your willingness to learn more about Islam and its followers?

3. When definitions of key words such as *infidel*, *jihad*, and *Sharia* were explained in the video, how did they compare to your understanding of those words and your view of Muslims?

4. What do you think it would be like to be a Muslim who lives, works, and raises a family in your community today?

If you were a Muslim living in your community, what might be your view of Americans? Or Christians?

What might you fear?

5. What kind of relationship do you think Jesus wants his followers to have with Muslims?

GROUP BIBLE EXPLORATION

(18 minutes)

What Does Jesus See?

Jesus clearly viewed the world from a different perspective. While Jesus lived and taught on earth, his viewpoint and responses to what was happening in the world around him often surprised people. He reached out to bless little children instead of shooing them away. He challenged some of the closely held practices of the religious establishment. At times his teachings amazed his disciples, and at other times they struggled to understand his meaning.

1. Jesus' unique perspective is clearly seen in his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42). Although Jews and Samaritans normally did not associate with one another, Jesus struck up a conversation with a Samaritan woman whom he knew was an adulterer. He spoke about spiritual matters with such conviction that she ran to gather other people from her village to come and see if he was the Christ!
 - a. After his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus said to his disciples: “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together” (John 4:35–36). What do you think Jesus was communicating to his disciples by making this statement, and how do you think they understood it?

- b. Do you think Jesus' statement means that people today—including Muslims—are ready to receive the good news about Jesus? Why or why not?
-
- 2. What Jesus did next is truly amazing: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world'" (John 4:39–42).
 - a. How badly do you, as a follower of Jesus, want others to know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world? Would you set aside your schedule in order to stay with a person who was hungry to hear about Jesus?
 - b. What specific actions might followers of Jesus take in order to share who Jesus is with people of other faiths and "harvest" the fields that Jesus says are ripe?

- c. What is holding you back from doing things such as sitting down with a Muslim and beginning a conversation about Jesus?

Jesus Does Not Want Us to Be Afraid

When God calls his people to follow and obey him, fear is a natural response. We do not know what threats may be ahead of us. We do not know what will be required of us or how great the personal cost may be. But God is the God of salvation, not of fear, and throughout the Bible he promises to be with his people when they do his work.

3. When Joshua assumed leadership of Israel after Moses' death, God told him to "be strong and courageous ... for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:1–9). When Jesus was in a boat with his disciples during a storm on the Sea of Galilee, he calmed the wind and the waves and asked his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).
 - a. What effect do you think fear has on the ability of God's people to fulfill the work he wants to accomplish in the world?
 - b. To what extent has our fear of Islam—fueled by a minority who claim their religion as a banner to kill and destroy—convinced us not to reach out to Muslims?

4. At a critical time in Israel's history, God warned the prophet Isaiah: "Do not call conspiracy everything this people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread" (Isaiah 8:12–13).
- a. What do people in the West fear about Islam and Muslims?
- b. In what ways do you think this passage can help those of us who follow Jesus today to put our fear of what is happening in the world around us in proper perspective?
5. To help put fear in its proper place, read aloud the following Scripture passages:

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults. . . . My righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.

Isaiah 51:7–8

“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:14–15

- a. What do you think causes us to fear sharing the message of Jesus with Muslims, and on what do we need to focus in order to overcome our fear?

- b. What are some practical way(s) we might begin to act on our faith and trust in God rather than responding in fear to Muslims?

THINK ABOUT IT

The world is full of strife, war, conflicts, and hatred. The life that Christ offers is the opposite. He provides a way to live in this very world, but to do so in peace and love. But we have to choose his way. It doesn't come easily or naturally. . . . If you want to reach a [Muslim] person, you have to look at him [or her] as an individual. The preconceptions you may have about Islam need to be discarded from the beginning if you want to have a genuine relationship with a Muslim. There can be no more generalizations and blanket distinctions. . . . We need to go beyond “understanding” and “dialogue” and get down to a personal heart-to-heart level.

MCJ

Opening Our Hearts to Share the Good News of Jesus

When it comes to Christians and Muslims, it may surprise us that negative stereotypes go both ways! Muslims have judged us the same way that we have judged them. They are just as afraid of us as we are of them. But God wants all the world to know who he is (Isaiah 12:4–6). The love of Christ breaks down the barriers of fear and prejudice and opens our hearts so that we can see, hear, and share the good news that’s available to all people.

6. Instead of judging, condemning, and holding grudges, Jesus said: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37).
 - a. To what extent have you—and other people you know—feared and judged Muslims based on stereotypes rather than choosing to forgive and reaching out to them?
 - b. Why is it important for us as followers of Jesus to examine honestly our tendency to judge and withhold forgiveness from all Muslims because of the harm a few have brought to us?
7. When followers of Jesus consider what it means to obey his clear command to “Go into *all* the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15, italics added), we often wonder if it is “safe” to do so. But that may be the wrong question. The crucial question

is not about whether or not we will be safe, but whether or not we will obey our Savior's command to go and share the good news.

- a. In what ways do you think prejudice has led us to focus on the wrong question and hindered us from obeying Jesus' command when it comes to Muslims?

- b. How hard is it for us to change our focus and open our hearts with compassion to people who may be just as afraid of us as we are of them?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

(3 minutes)

As the world watched smoke and ash spew into the Manhattan sky on September 11, 2001, I (Carl) was teaching students in Kansas City about loving Muslims. In fact, I had just drawn a diagram on the white board showing how we so often think in an *us-versus-them* paradigm. I was literally erasing the line between the words *us* and *them* when someone burst into the room in tears and told us what had happened.

The next week, our family returned home to Beirut. For days after our arrival, we received a steady stream of visits and calls from friends saying how sorry they were. One friend, Ahmed (not his real name), came by our house, slumped into our couch, and rubbed his face with his hands.

“Carl,” he said, “these terrorists have seriously hurt the peace we have worked so hard for.”

“What do you mean?”

“America will go to war,” he said, shaking his head, “and I am afraid that it will not end for years.”

“I know.”

“The West does not understand us. They see an Arab and they feel fear. They hear talk of Islam and they are suspicious. I am afraid that things will spiral out of control and that hatred will grow between my people and your people.” He sighed. “Again.”

What impact has this session had on your views of Islam and Muslims?

What impact has it had on your willingness to open your eyes to the spiritual harvest that Jesus sees and to open your heart to Muslims?

DID YOU KNOW?

It doesn't get much press in our world today, but the prophet Muhammad made a treaty with certain Christians in his realm that provided religious and administrative autonomy for non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic State. It allowed, among other things, protection from attack, safe and unhindered worship, and freedom from persecution for the crimes of others. Throughout the centuries, sincere Muslim rulers have adhered to the founding principles of this treaty in managing the affairs of non-Muslim subjects. To learn more, search the Internet for Muhammad's Treaty with the Christians of Najran. Several sources list the details of this pact. One of the most informative sites is Al-Islam.org, which includes an article on foreign policy of an Islamic state by Ibrahim Amini. Part 8 of the article includes Pacts of Cooperation and Non-aggression with Unbelievers (www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/foreign-policy/9.htm).

CLOSING

(1 minute)

Pray about what you have discovered during today's session and how you might apply these discoveries to your life and your relationships with Muslims. Pray especially for a clear understanding of Jesus' example of reaching out to others. Ask God to deliver you from fears that would hinder you from obeying Jesus' command to "go into *all* the world and preach the good news."

STEPS TO TAKE ON YOUR OWN

Each of us has opinions about Islam and Muslims. The events of September 11, 2001 that made terrorism nearly synonymous with Islam have made it easy to cement our stereotypes of Muslims. But fear, anger, bitterness, and/or a lack of forgiveness can quickly cause us to forget how much God loves all people (including Muslims). If our deepest desire is to respond in faith with God's love and to share the good news about Jesus, we need to learn how to reach out and connect heart-to-heart with Muslims and other people who adhere to different spiritual beliefs.

1. During the next few days, take a personal inventory of your perceptions and attitudes in relationship to Muslims.

- Which of your beliefs and attitudes would you say are the greatest hindrance to developing a heart-to-heart relationship in which you could share the good news about Jesus with a Muslim friend?
- In what ways have these beliefs and attitudes impacted your life and/or relationships with people around you?
- What do you consider to be the attitude or behavior that is most difficult for you to change?

2. In keeping with Jesus' command to take the good news to *all* creation, what might you do to begin establishing relationships with Muslims? Which of the following options are you open to exploring?

- Do you know any Muslims in your workplace, your school, or your community? (If you haven't already, perhaps it would be a good idea to introduce yourself!)
- Would you consider inviting a Muslim (or family) to join you at a community event or invite them into your home for a meal? If not, what do you think would be a good first get-together?
- If you don't know any Muslims, where is the nearest mosque or university? A mosque may host local community events, and groups for Muslim students may welcome your interest and hospitality.

HINTS FOR GROWING A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP

As you seek to fulfill Jesus' command to "go into all the world and preach the good news," remember that there have been many centuries of division and fighting between the Big Three monotheisms — Judaism, Christianity, Islam. As a result, potential hot buttons and land mines are plentiful in any relationship you may have with a Muslim. So make an earnest decision not to be defensive, retaliatory, or presumptuous. Your relationship is about you, your friend, and Jesus — not about religious institutions or the history of hatred and shame.

MCJ
