

SHARING CHRIST WITH MUSLIMS

Dr. Billie Hanks, Jr.

Due to increasing travel and world-wide shifts in population, it is no longer unusual to find followers of Islam in many traditionally-Christian parts of the world. Because of ancient rivalries, few religious groups have been more difficult to converse with on a meaningful spiritual level. Fortunately, however, those circumstances are now beginning to change.

Recently, during a trans-Atlantic flight, I enjoyed an excellent conversation and Bible study with a Muslim banker from London. Both his questions about Christ and his explanations concerning Islam were open and honest, this kind of experience is becoming more common with each passing year.

Perhaps because of misconceptions brought about my Muslim contact with Nestorianism,¹ it is sometimes necessary to assure our Islamic friends that Christians have always believed in one God—not three (God the Father, Mary the Mother of God, and Jesus the Son).² Typically, their questions concerning Christian doctrine of the Trinity³ and the divinity of Christ are unique to their religious background. For this reason, you will need to carefully teach your Timothy the information in the chapter in order to help prepare him for witnessing to Muslims.

Few men are as well qualified to give practical instruction in this area as Rev. Charles Marsh, a missionary to Muslim countries for forty-five years. His excellent book, *Share Your Faith With a Muslim*,⁴ from which much of this chapter has been adapted, is a must for every Christian who desires to understand how to communicate the gospel to Muslim friends. Another excellent and more modern book is entitled, *Dialogue and Interfaith Witness with Muslims*, by Ray Register.⁵

The “ISA” of the Koran

Every Muslim professes to believe in Jesus, but we must understand what it fully means. The “Isa” (Jesus) in the *Koran*⁶ is only one of the six great prophets of Islam. These are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Isa, and Muhammad. They see these men as major prophets, each of whom introduced a new law from God for his generation. In addition, some 124,000 lesser prophets are also revered.

The “Isa” of the *Koran* was sent only to the Jews. Though he was born of the virgin Mary, he was not the Son of God, and his teachings denied the doctrine of the Trinity. He healed the blind, cleansed lepers, and had the power to raise the dead, but this was only by God’s permission. Rather than telling the coming of the Holy Spirit, they believe he foretold the coming of Muhammad (see John 14:16).

The Muslim’s “Isa” cursed Israel, was not crucified, and did not die—yet; he appeared to have died to those of his day. He is alive today and will return to earth to

marry, have children, reign forty years, establish Islam worldwide, and die at Medina, where he will be buried in a special grave beside Muhammad.⁷ In summary, the Koran specifically denies the two most outstanding truths about Christ in the Gospels: His *deity* and his *atonement death*.

Even a casual knowledge of biblical truth reveals that the “Isa” of the Koran is not to be equated with the Lord Jesus of the New Testament. For this reason, we must convey to the Muslim something of the true wonder of the person of our Lord before using the term, “Son of God,” which refers to His deity. It will also be necessary to communicate “why” Jesus came and “why” He chose to die. Let us remember that until he grasps this truth, he cannot be saved (John 3:36). It will take time to fully communicate, but when one has done so, how rewarding it will be.⁸

Attempt to understand the Muslim point of view. Muslims believe “that the term, ‘Son of God,’ means that God had sexual intercourse with a woman and Jesus was born as a result. This, they say, would be blasphemy!”⁹ Because of this, Muslims generally feel that the name, “Son of God,” is both dishonoring to God and to the Lord Jesus.

To deal with the deeper issue and lead them to a biblical understanding, we must emphasize the truth that if Jesus Christ were *Savior* who was less than God, the bridge of salvation would be broken on God’s end.

To immediately tell a Muslim that Jesus is “God” only widens the gap of misunderstanding. He may ask you, “When Jesus was born, was God born? When He died, did God die?” Because of his failure to understand the profound truth of the Trinity, he may then ask, “Who was looking after the world when God died for three days?”¹⁰

Communicating the Truth Concerning the Son of God

Lesson #1

When a Muslim asks, “Was Jesus the Son of God?” you can respond by asking, “*What do you understand the term, ‘Son of God,’ to mean?*”

He will probably reply, “It can have only one meaning: God went to bed with a woman, and a baby was born.” Once he has stated his deep misconception, you can help him deal with it honestly.

“No Christian in all the world believes that; such a thought would be blasphemy!”

In astonishment, the Muslim may say, “Then, what does it mean?”¹¹

You can then explain that in everyday speech the expression, “son of,” is used as a *metaphor* and does not imply a *physical* relationship. For example, a bad person is referred to as “the son of a jackal” in some countries, while in others a strong willed person is called a “son of a gun.” In the Bible, the apostles James and John are referred to as the “Sons of Thunder.” (Mark 3:17) We know that jackals, guns, and thunder do not have human babies.¹² In the Bible; it describes a spiritual, rather than a physical, relationship.

This concept is clearly seen in the word, “image,” which means “likeness.” Colossians 1:15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” The spiritual meaning intended by the term, “Son of God,” is also expressed in Luke 1:35, “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” therefore the Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (KJV). Here we can explain that it was His *sinless character*, *selfless love*, and *miraculous power* that marked His likeness to God.

Lesson #2

Moving beyond a casual witnessing conversation to a sustained relationship with a Muslim requires the patience to develop an environment of trust.

Like the experience of those in the day of Jesus’ earthly ministry, there will ordinarily be progressive levels of understanding concerning the true meaning of His identity as the Christ. Pause to reflect. At first, those early believers recognized Him as teacher, then as a healer, a prophet, and a Savior. Though He has said it many times in many ways, it was only after His death, burial, resurrection appearances, and ascension that they actually realized He was God. It should not seem strange to us that a modern-day Muslim would go through a similar process to find the truth.

It is good to remember that Muslims accuse Christians of making a *man* to be God. We must remind them that the *Bible consistently teaches it was God who became a man*. The eternal Word became flesh! The movement was from above, not from below. Jesus said, “You are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23b). This important concept can be illustrated by other Scriptures, such as John 1:14a, which says,

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory...” (KJV).¹³

The Muslim often refers to Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Knowing that, you can read John 1:1-4 and affirm that God truly desires to speak to man, He does this through His Word. As an example of this, simply say, “Let me ask you a question. Where were the words I just spoke, before they came from my mouth? They were in my mind, but if you performed surgery on my brain, you would not find them. In some mysterious way, I and my words are the same. Whatever my words do, to please you or annoy you, you can accurately say that I am the one doing it. Just so, whatever the Word does, God Himself is actually doing it.”¹⁴ Jesus Christ did not merely speak about God, as other prophets did—He was God’s sinless, perfect Word.

Lesson #3

In sharing your faith with a Muslim, you may begin by asking, “*What do you think about the person of Jesus Christ?*” As you talk, help him realize the importance attached to his answer. You can say, “One day Jesus Christ will return, and when He does, He will ask you the question that He once asked the Pharisees: ‘What is your opinion of Me?’”

As you continue your conversation, you can say something like this: “Do you really feel that the Lord Jesus is just a prophet, or one good man among many? No, He is unique. There is no one like Him in the world.”¹⁵

To illustrate the uniqueness of Christ, the following questions from a penetrating message by Charles Marsh can be discussed. Although these questions may at first seem unnatural to you, you will find them to be effective in witnessing to a Muslim. Carefully discuss each question and answer with your Study Group Teammates. Be sure he or she is able to reconstruct the major points of this valuable presentation. To improve these ministry skills, practice by asking these questions and giving the suggested answers.

Questions #1: What do you think of the Lord’s wonderful birth?

After the Muslim’s response, point out that no one was ever born in the way Jesus was.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, *before* they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is *of the Holy Spirit.*’” (Matt. 1:18-20 NASB) Isaiah foretold how He would be born (Isa. 7:14),

and it happened exactly as he said. No other birth ever occurred like this. Even His name implies its uniqueness.¹⁶

Jesus was the son of Mary; however, you call Ishmael the son of *Abraham*, John the son of *Zacharias*, Muhammad the son of *Adbullah*. All other men take the name of their father. Why did Jesus take His mother's name? Because He had *no* earthly father. He was born of the virgin Mary, by the power of God, apart from the intervention of a man.¹⁷

Question #2: Why do you think he came into the world?

After waiting for the Muslim to respond, point out that God created Adam, our father, from clay. State that we are children of Adam, and so were the prophets. We were created from the earth, but the Lord Jesus came down from heaven. Though He took upon Himself a human body and became a man, He was, nevertheless, pure and clean—like the snow and rain that come from above.

It is no wonder the Bible says that all other men “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). We are from the earth and are infected with sin. It was His response to our need that led Him to come into the world. The Scriptures teach that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Tim. 1:15)

At this point in your discussion, you could use the following illustration:

One night while talking, two men fell into a deep pit. One man said to the other, “Help me! Get me out of this place!” The other replied, “How can I? I’m in the same fix you are!”

Both men were in the pit, so they couldn’t help each other. Then they heard a voice from above, calling, “Take hold of this rope.” The assistance they needed came from one who had not fallen into the pit. He was able to bring them help from above.

The *best* man among the prophets *could not save us from the pit of sin*, but Jesus did not inherit a sinful nature. He was not from the earth; He came from above. God sent down His angels from heaven to announce His miraculous birth: “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11, KJV) How wonderful!¹⁸

Question #3: What do you think of His life?

“Every man who fears God must confess his sin and ask forgiveness. David did. Abraham did.”¹⁹ In fact, one prophet said that he had to ask forgiveness of God seventy times a day. “(This was Muhammad, but do not mention his name.)”²⁰

The Lord Jesus was perfect. You can search the Bible and the Koran in vain to find a single verse where Jesus asked for forgiveness. He did not need pardon, because He was sinless. Even those who knew Him best—his constant companions—said that He was without sin throughout His life.

God forgave the prophets when they confessed their sin, but Jesus was different. He could even say to His enemies: “Which of you can silence Me by pointing out one sin that I have done?” (John 8:46, Arabic) None of them could point out a single sin in His life. Who of us would dare to make such a challenge to our enemies?

During Jesus’ trial, He was brought before Pilate and falsely accused. When Pilate could find nothing wrong, he washed His hands and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just man.”

There was never anyone else who was sinless. The quality of His life was unique and incomparable. No one in history was like Him.²¹

Question #4: What do you think about the teachings of the Lord Jesus?

On one occasion, His enemies sent the police to arrest Him. They listened to His teaching and then came back without having made the arrest, saying in amazement, “Never did a man speak the way this man speaks” (John 7:46 NASB).

Think about the meaning of Jesus’ words: “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12 NASB)

A wise old man once explained what Jesus meant by using an illustration from nature. He said, “The prophets are like the moon. Just as the moon shines in the night, the prophets brought God’s light into this poor, dark world. The crescent moon shines brighter and brighter, until it becomes a full moon, and then wanes and dies. But another full moon will come and take its place. So the prophets came, one after the other. Each one gave his message, died, and left his place to another.”

Every nation has had some light from God. Men’s religions are like the light of a candle or the moon. But who uses lesser lights when the sun has risen? Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” He is the sun of righteousness. Have you ever seen the sun wane or grow smaller? No, it never dies; it is for everyone in every land. Jesus Christ is like the sun. His teachings are for every country.²²

Question #5: What do you think of his ability to meet needs?

He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “The prophets all came to *point* the way back to God. They said, ‘This is God’s way. Do this. Do that. Follow this teaching. Keep the commandments.’ But Jesus alone said, ‘I *am* the way. Follow Me.’”²³

One day, while visiting a large city, a little boy got lost. He asked a policeman to tell him the way home. The policeman tried to help by explaining: “Go up Grande Avenue, make the second turn to the left, then the third to the right. Cross the bridge, avoid the traffic circle, and take the middle road.” The little boy burst into tears. The policeman had given him the right directions, but the boy was incapable of following them. Just then a strong but kind man from the boy’s home town came along. The boy

was so tired, he could no longer walk, so the man actually picked him up and carried him home. The policeman told him the way, but the second man *was* his way. Only Jesus said, “I *am* the way.”²⁴

Question #6: What do you think about Jesus’ knowledge?

Do you know *where* you will die? At home, or in a foreign country? Do you know *how* you will die? Will it be through illness, an accident, or natural death? Will you be old or young? Do you know the month or the day? You and I must admit that we do not know these things. Only God knows.

However, the Lord Jesus foretold where He would die. He even shared many details concerning His future death in Jerusalem. “And He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.”” (Luke 18:31-33 NASB) He told His disciples *when* He would die. It would occur on the feast day when everyone would be killing a lamb to celebrate the Passover. He would die as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. He explained that after three days He would rise again! Each event happened exactly as He predicted. He was not like other men, the prophets did not know the details surrounding their death, and neither do you or I.

The Lord Jesus alone could say, “No one (takes my life) away from Me. But I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18 NASB). He had never sinned and did not deserve to die. He could have gone to heaven without dying, but He *chose* to die for the sake of others. He gave His life for us, that we might be forgiven. He died as the Good Shepherd, giving His life for His sheep. His knowledge and courage were without equal.²⁵

Question #7: What do you think of His victory over death?

After Jesus died, He was buried in a tomb in Jerusalem. Roman soldiers did their best to keep Him in the tomb. They rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the grave and then sealed it. Then they surrounded the grave with armed guards. Though they knew He was dead, they feared because of His prophecy that he would miraculously arise from the dead. As prophesied, angels came, and as He promised, He arose, showing Himself to His disciples on several occasions and then, finally, to more than 500 people. He rose again as He said He would. The resurrection took place to show everyone in the world that the saving work of God on the cross had been completed. The people saw Him, touched Him, and even ate and drank with Him, after His resurrection. He wanted them to fully believe that His words concerning His death and resurrection were true—so He showed them His hands, His feet, and His side!

For ordinary men, death is life's greatest enemy. The prophets died and remain dead. One day soon, you and I will also die, but the Lord Jesus conquered death! He is alive today! He has the power to save all of us who will come to God through Him. "Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.'" (John 14:6 NASB) He desires to make us pure and godly like Himself. He has prepared a place in heaven for all those who will believe in Him and accept His gift of salvation. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2 KJV).

What prophet is living today after having died? In all the world, He stands alone as the Savior. Is Jesus not totally unique?²⁶

Question #8: What do you think of His ascension?

The Scriptures record that Jesus had just concluded His parting words to His faithful followers when He was lifted up from the earth and received into a cloud. As they were looking intently into the sky, two angels in white clothing said to them, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11 NASB) Because the Lord Jesus humbled Himself on our behalf and accepted an undeserved death out of love for us, the Scripture says that "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11 NASB) When Jesus ascended back to the glory of heaven, it was fulfillment of the request included in His prayer: "And now, glorify thou me together with thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5 KJV)

If I were to ask my Jewish friends whom they would like to have occupied the highest place of honor in heaven, they would probably say, "Moses." If I would ask the same question of my Muslim friends, they would probably say, "Muhammad." If I ask my Christian friends, they would doubtlessly say, "Jesus." However, God did not choose to consult with Jews, Muslims, Christians, or the followers of any other faith. For His own reasons, in His own time, He elected to exalt the Lord Jesus far beyond anyone in heaven or on earth. He is unique among men of every age and nation. This is God's sovereign choice, and even the proudest knee will ultimately bow to Him--either in heaven or on earth.²⁷

Question #9: What do you think about His demands on your life?

The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me...whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." (Luke 9:23, 24b NASB) It has never been easy to accept the lordship of Jesus. His first disciples were called upon to leave their homes, their parents, and their jobs to follow Him. For many, there was the humiliation of breaking

family traditions and experiencing the loss of social status. Today, He calls on us to demonstrate our willingness to do the same.

To acknowledge Him as less than your Savior and one true Lord is *not* to acknowledge Him at all. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters...” (Matt. 6:24) He expects from us no less than He gave—and that was everything! To merely accept Him as a teacher, a healer, or a prophet, is to belittle the uniqueness of His sacred mission. He came to be our Savior. That is why He said, “(I have) come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10 NASB) The prophets who needed forgiveness themselves could never be our Savior. It took One who came from above, untainted by sin, to take our place and experience the full judgment of God on our behalf. Because Jesus lived out His claim and showed us the love, power, and purity of God as none other, His demands are absolutely logical. His birth, His life, His miracles, His love, His death, His resurrection, His return to heaven, His teachings, and His eternal presence, call for man’s deepest response. There is no one like Him in heaven or on earth. Should He not be the King and Lord of your life?²⁸

As you discuss the insights of this chapter with your Study Group Teammate, help him or her to understand that no matter how clear and truthful a witness²⁹ may be, in the final analysis a Muslim must choose to respond to the drawing power of the Spirit of God, enabling men to experience the miracle of conversion. As the Scriptures say, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:3b)

As Christ is exalted and uplifted, people of every race and religious background will continue to be drawn to Him as they come to realize that “religion” is not an adequate means of forgiveness and salvation, but the incomparable Christ is!

Footnotes

¹“We see an early exposure of Muhammad and his followers to a decadent, divided, and distorted Christianity. Islam arose in a religious milieu in which Christianity was riddled by the Christological controversy. The main Christian presence to which the early Muslims were exposed was the *community of Nestorian*—many of whom were slaves. They had dispersed from the Mediterranean region in the fifth century A.D. after their condemnation by one of the Church councils. They scattered migrating east to Persia and India and south to the Arabian Peninsula. *They may not be characterized as having been worldly and having a confused Christology.*” Dr. Earl R. Martin, *The Christian’s Responsibility Toward Muslims*.

²*From Share Your Faith With a Muslim*, by Charles R. Marsh. Copyright 1975. Moody Press. Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Used by permission. p.41.

³“For Muslims, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity amounts to Tritheism. Surah 4:141 ‘Say not “Trinity”: desist: it will be better for you: For God is One God’.” Martin.

⁴Marsh.

⁵Register, Ray G., Jr., Dialogue and Interfaith Witness and Muslims. Fort Washington, Pa: The World Evangelism Crusade, 1979.

⁶“The Koran is regarded as the perfect holy book of Islam, which supersedes all other scriptures. Torah-The Pentateuch, Zabur-the Psalms, the Injil-The Gospel. These are the first three of the four holy books in Islam. The Koran is the fourth. The Bible is regarded by Muslims as being in a present corrupted form. They assert that Christians do not have the pure original revelation of God. They further claim that the Koran rectified distortions in Christianity brought about by Jesus’ disciples—notably the Apostle Paul” (Martin).

⁷Marsh, p.41.

⁸Marsh, p.43

⁹Marsh, p.42. Note: “Muslims do not accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God. They regard this idea as blasphemous. They say His Sonship is an invention of the Council of Nicea and that it is contrary to the basic tenet found in Surah 112:3 ‘He begetteth not, nor is He begotten’” (Martin).

¹⁰Marsh, p.42

¹¹Marsh, pp.42-43

¹²Marsh, p.44

¹³Marsh, p. 43

¹⁴Marsh, p.44

¹⁵Marsh, p. 46

¹⁶Marsh, p. 46

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., pp. 36, 48.

²³Ibid., p. 48

²⁴Ibid., pp. 48-49.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 50-51.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 51-52.

²⁷Ibid., p. 52

²⁸Ibid., p. 53

²⁹For additional witnessing suggestions see Appendix 7.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WITNESSING TO MUSLIMS

By Carl Ellis

For those who sense God's calling to minister to Muslims, here are some practical suggestions:

- Be yourself.
- Try to understand Islamic doctrine from the perspective of Islam. Recognize the corruption of Christianity Muhammad had encountered and that his motivation was to reform the worship of the one true God.
- Be a good listener. Don't evaluate a Muslim only on the basis of his doctrine. Examine the situation that led him to Islam and the goals he is trying to achieve through it.
- When the motivation and goals are Biblical, affirm them. When they are not, lovingly challenge them. And whenever possible, use words according to his definition, not yours.
- When dealing with a Muslim's doctrine, do not use the occasion to show him how much you know about his faith. Instead, deal with him on the basis of what he expresses to you about his beliefs. You'll find he is never totally consistent with the doctrine he holds.
- It's always important to draw out the person by asking questions in the genuine spirit of wanting to be informed. Give him a chance to express himself and make sure he knows you understand what he's saying.

Ask him, "Is this what you mean?" Then try to summarize his point. If he says, "Yes," then proceed to evaluate, critique, or challenge.

As in playing tennis, allow him to give you his best shot; then gently lob the ball back to his side of the net. Let him make the mistakes, then move in with your own game plan. In other words, do not be bowled over by his argument. Stand firm, with poise and confidence.

Remember, just as there is jailhouse religion among professing Christians, there will be the same among professing Muslims. Things are not always as they seem.

If you are familiar with his theology, you can tell when he begins to feel the pinch. Usually, he will begin to repeat himself or make up his theology on the spot.

Don't take advantage of his vulnerability by lording over him. Rather, seek to communicate subtly but clearly that you are aware of his tenuous position. The very fact that you refuse to pulverize him will communicate more about the validity of the Christian faith than if you had devastated him with your rational arguments.

- Do not use a King James Bible. According to the teachings of some Muslim sects, King James himself translated this version and corrupted it. I recommend the New International Version.
- Avoid all pictures of God, Jesus, and Biblical characters.
- Although in most cases the Muslim community may be a *de facto* black group, do not initiate issues concerning race. Many Muslims have a humanistic slant and see themselves beyond blackness. According to their humanistic claims, therefore, being black or white should pose no barriers.
- Never use the word trinity. Because of the Muslim teachings, this word often connotes the worship of three gods and will bog you down with issues of polytheism. From Scripture, we know that God's oneness of being is never diminished by His tri-personhood. There are many ways to express the Trinity concept. One way, for example, is to use the term *Godhead*.
- In dealing with Muslims, remove all offenses-except the cross. Against love, there is no defense, Islamic or otherwise.