

EDITORIAL COMMENT



Rethinking Our Approaches to Muslim Peoples

RICK WOOD, EDITOR, *MISSION FRONTIERS*

Dear Reader,

When I say the words “Islam” or “Muslim,” what thoughts or images come to your mind? Do you think of bloody pictures of terrorist attacks from Israel or New York? Do you think of masked gunmen with AK-47s raised in the air and explosives strapped to their chests? Perhaps fear or anger rises in your heart. If so, you are not alone. I think all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, have had these images pressed into our minds by television images from around the world. When I have spoken with people in churches about reaching Muslims with the gospel, the one thing that I have encountered most often is fear. Believers are often afraid for their personal safety

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when thinking of making contact with Muslims, even those in the USA. But how does God want us to respond? It might be natural for us to be fearful, but we are called to supernatural living. And fear is not part of supernatural living. We are called to faith as we proclaim God’s glory in every tribe and tongue, including among Muslims.

Carl Medearis, Ted Dekker and former South Carolina governor David Beasley got together recently for a global webcast on January 28 to talk about why we fear Muslims and what we can do to reach out to them. We have a report on this webcast on page 10. If you would like to watch this webcast, you can access it by going to <http://www.whyyoufearme.com/live/archive/012810/>.

Carl and Ted traveled throughout the Middle East with the goal of determining whether Jesus’ command to love our enemies is a realistic proposition in our age. Ted, a popular author of many Christian novels, admits that he had the same fears that many of us might have at the thought of entering “enemy territory” and meeting with the second in command of Hezbollah. They went with the goal of loving the Muslims they met. Carl explores this idea of loving our enemies in his article, “Loving Bin Laden,” starting on page 6.

Carl and Ted have just released an exciting new book, *Tea with Hezbollah*, which we have excerpted on pages 11-13. It is the incredible, heart-pounding account of their journeys in the Middle East

to meet with a number of Muslim leaders whom many would likely call terrorists. Is it possible to

love these kind of people with the love of Christ? It is a great read, but it also provides some of the keys to reaching the Muslim world with the love of Christ.

But what can we take away from all this? Are Carl and Ted the only ones who can love their “enemies” and love Muslims with the love of Christ? Or is it possible for the rest of us to put our fears aside and to reach out to Muslims, especially to Muslims in our midst? God has brought the world to our doorstep. Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists live and work in our neighborhoods—perhaps even next door. Do we care enough about these people to move outside of our comfort zones, conquer our fears and bring the love of Christ to them

in genuine friendship? It is the love of Christ that transforms lives, and it is the love of Christ that can transform the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist worlds. If you would like to be a part of reaching out to people from other cultures, Carl Medearis has set up a website that can help. Just go to www.iwillbeafriend.com for more information on how you can be involved.

Clues to Ministry to Muslims

Carl and Ted’s experiences in the Middle East give us some insights as what to do and not to do in bringing Muslims to Jesus.

God has already placed a deep level of respect and honor for Jesus in the hearts of many Muslims. In their travels, Carl and Ted found no opposition to their talking about the person of Jesus. In fact, talking about Jesus opened doors and broke down barriers of mistrust and fear. With this as a starting point, we can seek to lead Muslims to focus on Jesus, learn about Him from the Scriptures, and encourage them to follow Him. Imagine what could happen if Muslims actually started to study the Bible in search of Jesus?

Jesus is welcome, but our *Christianity* is not. What Carl and Ted heard repeatedly was that Muslims like Jesus but not our Christianity. We must come to terms with the fact that our job is not to go around the world and force our versions of Christianity on people and “convert” them to our side. This is not a contest to see how many people we can get to become like us and join our “team.” Our job is to introduce them to Jesus and His love for them and let the Holy Spirit guide them into following Jesus in their own unique way as they learn about Him from the Scriptures.

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It is also time for us to stop calling ourselves Christians. Does that shock you? At best the term has become meaningless, and at worst it has become an obstacle to sharing Jesus with the unreached. In our Western culture there is almost no statistical difference between those that call themselves Christians and those that don't. Rates for divorce, pregnancies outside of marriage, abortion and more are all virtually the same. People who believe the Bible and those that don't both call themselves Christians. In the Muslim world the term comes with much negative baggage. A few years ago my wife led a Muslim woman to faith in Jesus. The first thing the woman asked was if she had to start calling herself a Christian. My wife wisely said, "No," and the woman was greatly relieved. Much better, more meaningful terms would be "follower of Jesus," "disciple of Jesus" and "believer in the one true God." These are not offensive to most Muslims, and they are actually more descriptive. If we insist on

calling ourselves Christians, then we are insisting on miscommunicating to Muslims and causing unnecessary offense.

Bashing Islam and Muhammad is not an effective strategy. Over the years I have run into many books, emails and broadcasts from people who seem to think that running down Islam and Muhammad will convince Muslims to "convert" to their side. They seem to think that if they just have a good enough argument, then Muslims will see the light and dump their deeply-held beliefs. Yet note, by comparison, if someone comes to my home and says many ugly things about my mother, I am not likely to agree with him even if some of what he says is true. I am also not likely to want him as a friend or to listen to anything else he has to say. If we want Muslims to follow Jesus, then we must come to them with love and respect and not try to argue them into the Kingdom. People generally do not move instantaneously from one belief system to another based on the best of arguments

or evidence. God meets us where we are and often moves us gradually to where He wants us to be.

I have talked with enough missionaries to know that there are still many who believe that any believer in Jesus from a Muslim background must convert to our culture and traditions and reject their own in order to have a genuine salvation experience. This has been the prevailing method for the last 1300 years, with few Muslims coming to faith in Christ. Missiologists call this the "extraction" method because the Muslim is being removed from his culture and community. But as missionaries have begun to rethink their approach and reach out to Muslims with love and respect, a new day is dawning in Muslim ministry with growing numbers of Muslims beginning to follow Jesus within their own cultural contexts. A renewed focus on Jesus in both the Muslim and Christian worlds is what we need to finally find the love and peace we all seek with God and each other. f

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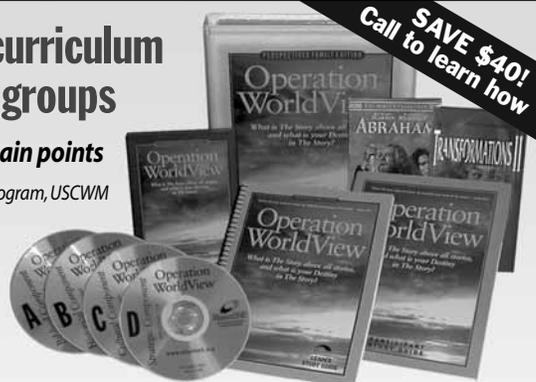
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