



WHERE TO
START WITH
ISLAM

A NEW APPROACH TO ENGAGING
WITH MUSLIM FRIENDS

SAMUEL
GREEN



“I wrote this book to help Christians know where to start when it comes to understanding Islam and talking with their Muslim friends about the gospel. In my experience, the starting point is key...”

Samuel Green has spent more than two decades speaking with Muslims and finding out what they are taught about Jesus and his followers: that Jesus wasn't crucified, the Bible is corrupted, and the Trinity is the weak point you won't be able to explain. He has also come to realize that their book, the Qur'an, makes claims about Christianity and history that simply aren't true.

Where to Start with Islam will equip you to understand and address these assumptions and know where to start as you seek to present your Muslim friends with Christ and share with them about his wonderful gift of salvation.



I have lived in the Middle East for 20 years. I don't know of anyone who has done better work in understanding and answering the challenges of Islam than Samuel Green. Any Christian who wants to respond to Muslims with love and truth needs this book.

J. Mack Stiles, Pastor of Erbil International Baptist Church, Iraq, and former IFES General Secretary in Dubai

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J. Mack Stiles

Pastor of Erbil International Baptist Church, Iraq

Former IFES General Secretary in Dubai

Where to Start with Islam delivers just what it promises. Drawing on years of gracious yet robust engagement with Muslims, Samuel Green offers Christians an excellent primer to negotiating the religious discussions they will very likely have with Muslim friends and neighbours. Biblical, detailed and practical, I recommend it highly!

Richard Shumack

Director of the Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam, Melbourne School of Theology

Where to Start with Islam is a wonderfully practical and clear provision to help Christians rise to the challenge of presenting the gospel to Muslims. Elegantly weaving love and truth together, Samuel Green has distilled deep wisdom and decades of face-to-face experience with Muslims into this beautifully lucid and comprehensive book. With consummate skill, Green equips readers to bring the challenge of the gospel home to their Muslim neighbours.

Mark Durie

Pastor and author, Melbourne

Where to Start with Islam is a practical, respectful and informative contribution for Christians to understand the complexity of Islam and to love Muslims as God does. Muslims are coming to Christ in multitudes, and Christians ought not to be driven by fear and hate but by love and passion for Christ. This book will empower you to share your faith with your Muslim neighbour as never before.

Ayman S Ibrahim

Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Some experts calculate that, at the current rate of growth, Islam will become the world's dominant religion by 2070. There are various reasons for this, one of which is that historically the church has avoided mission to Muslims. We have not gone out to them—but now they are coming to us. Unsurprisingly, there has never been a time when so many Muslims are searching for and finding the real Jesus. Now is the time to join in the harvest. Samuel Green's three decades of experience compressed into this book will help you do just that.

Dr Stuart Robinson

Author and Research Fellow at the Arthur Jeffrey Centre for the Study of Islam, Melbourne School of Theology

This book is of the usual high standard I have come to expect from Samuel Green. Samuel demonstrates a deep grasp of Islamic belief and practice, but he knows how to cut through the details to highlight the aspects relevant to engaging Muslims in Australia. Sam has left me feeling able and keen to begin conversations with Muslims.

Rev Dr Wesley Redgen

Senior Lecturer in New Testament, Queensland Theological College

I have seen Samuel in action and it's obvious that his writing isn't motivated by an academic interest in Islam; it's a love for Jesus and therefore a love for Muslims that drives him. I love this book because it helps me understand Islam and love my Muslim neighbours, giving me the tools I need to bring the gospel to them. I love this book because Samuel makes the gold of the gospel shine so clearly into the dark places of Islam. I love this book because it has helped me to see afresh the wonderful truths of the gospel.

Pete Woodcock

Pastor of Cornerstone Church Kingston, UK

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Where to Start with Islam

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Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

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Introduction

I became a Christian in 1986 when Chris Moore walked into the service station I was working at and asked if I was a Christian. I had been thinking about God and where I stood with him for some time, and Chris brought it all together for me as he explained the gospel. Shortly after this, I started to attend church and heard that what Jesus did was for all people, not just me. After some prodding, I began to share the gospel with others.

Some of my friends ignored me, some were angry at me, and some were open to the gospel and by God's grace became Christians. What I noticed with my Muslim friends, however, was that they *already* believed in Jesus—but they believed totally different things about him, and they were convinced of what they believed. These experiences made me start thinking about how to share the gospel with Muslims. As I worked in this ministry over the following 28 years, I developed the material in this book.

I wrote this book to help Christians know where to start when it comes to understanding Islam and talking with their Muslim friends about the gospel. In my experience, the starting point is key if Christians and Muslims want to understand each other and make progress in their discussions. Of course, sometimes God prepares someone and they are already keen to hear the gospel by the time you meet them: I know a Muslim family who just turned up at a church and became Christians. However, for most Muslims this is not the case; they are generally not seeking to find out about Christianity.

Not knowing where to begin may mean that you never begin! You have a Muslim friend and you want to talk about God, but because you are not sure where to start and are a little afraid of getting things wrong, you never do actually talk about God. This book will give you a simple place to begin.

Alternatively, not knowing where to start may mean you start at the wrong place. You are unaware of important issues and assumptions that hinder your discussions, and you may think you are answering their questions when in fact you are not. When I started in the wrong place I still made progress, but it was slow. It took me a long time and lots of research to work out why; and in several cases I lost contact with Muslim friends and things never went any further. This book will help you understand and address the assumptions Muslims have so you can have more fruitful conversations. You can learn from my mistakes.

Finally, you may find that even if you are not sure where to start, your Muslim friend is! When this happened to me, my Muslim friend set the agenda for our conversation and led me into the discussions he wanted to have. It is certainly good to listen to what Muslims say and to answer their questions, but it is not good to be completely passive and let them do all the leading. This book will enable you to put forward the Christian position as it speaks to Islam, rather than be led by the Islamic agenda.

Most of the chapters have a similar structure: we look at where Christians often start with a particular subject, then propose a different starting point. After the topic and evidence are discussed, an application summary is given and some of the frequently asked questions Muslims have are answered. Usually there's a related evangelistic booklet you can download from engagingwithislam.org. This book gives you the in-depth learning; the extra booklets give you a practical tool to give to your Muslim friend.

The book is both easy and hard. It is easy in that, for the first

five chapters at least, you don't have to remember many details about Islam. But it is hard because, as I will demonstrate, rather than simply memorizing a few verses from the Qur'an or some new illustrations to use, we need to understand our own faith deeply. You are going to have to learn your Christian doctrine.

I wish to thank those who have made this book possible. Firstly, to my supporters: we are partners. I can only do this work because of your support, and I do it on your behalf. Thank you.

Thank you to Jay Smith, Jochen Jatz, and the team at answering-islam.org. We are a motley crew. Thank you for your perseverance in this ministry and what I have learned from you. This worldwide fellowship has been of great benefit to me.

I also wish to thank my Muslim friends and acquaintances: Wesam Charkawi, Abdullah Kunde, Mustafa Arja, Zakir Hussain, Mustafa Al Shakarji, Diaa Mohamed, Shabir Ally, Abdullah al-Andalusi, Faraz Nomami, Uthman Badar, Shahir Naga, Ijaz Ahmad, Keysar Trad, Abdul Jalil Ahmad, Beylal Racheha, Waseem Razvi, Brother Irman, and Adnan Rashid. Thank you for all the debates and discussion. As I look back over the last 15 years I can see that we have made progress.

A special thank you to Phillip Jensen, Graeme Goldsworthy, Stewart Binns, Mark Durie, Andrew Moody, David Höhne and Richard Shumack. You have all helped me in different ways.

Finally, I want to thank my father and mother, and most especially my family for all their support, perseverance, courage and fun.

Conventions used in this book

The Qur'an is the main scripture in Islam and when it is quoted in this book the reference will take the following form: Qur'an 5:18, Jones. This reference indicates the chapter and verse of the Qur'an followed by the translator (in this case, Alan Jones). Several

different English translations have been used in order to provide readings that are accurate, available, and as clear as possible for someone new to the Qur'an.

The next scripture in Islam is called the Hadith. The word *hadith* means 'a short story'. Each hadith is told by someone and thus each hadith begins by stating who has narrated it. The references to the Hadith take the following form: *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6:61:507. This indicates the Hadith collector is al-Bukhari, the volume (if there are multiple volumes) is 6, the book number 61 and the hadith number 507. There are several different Hadith numbering systems; I have used the one found in my references and that is available online (you can see the various referencing systems in use at sunnah.com).

The name of God in Islam is Allah. In the translated quotes from the Qur'an and the Hadith, and in the subsequent discussion, the words God and Allah may be used interchangeably.

In several of the Qur'an quotes the word 'we' may refer to God speaking in the same way Genesis 1:26 says 'us'.

Where do we start?

Islam is active and increasingly present around the world: Islamic countries play a central role in international politics; secular universities have Islamic schools; there is significant Muslim immigration into non-Muslim countries; jihadists continue in their military actions; and an increasing number of Christians have Muslim neighbours, friends, work colleagues and customers.

People have varying responses to this Islamic presence. Some see it as an economic opportunity, some as a new experience of cultural diversity. Some may marry a Muslim; others may be entirely unaware of Islam. Many Western governments are careful to accommodate and make Muslims feel welcome in their societies, while also responding militarily against the actions of local and overseas jihadists. People are variously concerned, fearful, angry, confused... while some wish it would just go away.

In this opening chapter I want to talk about where Christians should start as they respond to Islam. As Christians we want to make sure that we are not simply following the world around us. We need to understand how God wants us to respond and have our heart and motives right before him. So what is the Christian response to Islam? Where do we begin?

We need to start where God starts, and that is to love everyone.

After all, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God sent his Son to die “for all” (2 Cor 5:14)—that is, all *kinds* of people, including Muslims. Because God loves Muslims we too are to love them and work for their salvation. This love is to shape the way we treat everyone; we are to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:31) and, even more than that, we are to love our enemies (Matt 5:44). We are to do good to all (Luke 10), and this includes Muslims. So let me ask you: do you love Muslims?

Do you love Muslims?

I have asked this question many times as I’ve travelled around the world to talk to Christians about Islam. Many say yes—they love and care for Muslims just like anyone else. I have seen Christians volunteering considerable time to Muslim refugees settling into Australia, helping organize their accommodation, food and government papers, as well as assisting them to learn the local language. I have seen other Christians simply being friends with Muslims. They pray for them, work with them, and are prepared to defend them against unwelcome comments. Christian university groups have organized social events with Muslims in order to build friendships and understanding. On the few occasions I have seen Muslims turn up at church, in every case they were welcomed, even when the Christian welcoming them was not sure what to do. It has been a real encouragement to see this type of love and care happening. This is what we need to do.

Yet I have met other Christians who say they don’t love Muslims. They feel intimidated by Muslims, and Islam makes them worry. They see the regular violence carried out in the name of Islam; they see Western converts to Islam turning against their own countries; they see the rise of home-grown terrorism and the colossal sums of money now spent on security to be safe from this threat. They

are very concerned about the discrimination that occurs in many Islamic countries against women and against other religions. They feel that some Muslims are exploiting the tolerance and goodwill of countries like Australia by establishing themselves and trying to introduce Islamic law while at the same time censoring those who try to question Islam—and this makes them angry. Is that you? Is that how you feel about Muslims?

I do not want to deny your experience or your feelings, but as Christians we are not to be driven by fear and hate. We are to have confidence in God, follow the example of Jesus, and obey God's word.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Phil 4:6)

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy. (1 Pet 3:14-15)

Repay no-one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom 12:17-18)

If you are worried or fearful or angry about Islam then you need to bring this to God in prayer, speak to other Christians about how they have dealt with this issue, and examine what the Bible says—just as you would seek to grow in any other area of your Christian life. This is essential Christian discipleship.

There are several reasons why loving Muslims may be easier than you think. For many Muslims, Islam is just their culture and not a conviction. Not all Muslims *want* to live by Islam. I have met Muslims who say they feel trapped in it and want to get out. Will you love those Muslims? Many Muslims believe in God, think about God and are keen to talk about God, so you'll find that many of them are open to talking with you. Will you talk to them?

Christians also share some common concerns with Muslims. One of the complaints against Muslim people is that they will not completely assimilate into our Western culture. This may be true, but Christians do not sit comfortably with Western culture either. As Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). There certainly are many good things about the West, not least the freedom, openness and equality it currently offers, and the fact that it’s self-critical. But what about the gambling that Western governments support? Or the drinking culture that is so destructive, and the pornography and sexual immorality that is not just permitted but paraded around? There is the abortion of thousands of our children, and the blasphemy and hatred of God that is entrenched in our education system and media. Many Muslims and Christians share these concerns and can talk together about them.

So building relationships with Muslims may be easier than you think. And even with Muslims who are hostile to Christians we need to remember the example of Jesus and the way he loved his enemies.

Here are some practical ways to make Muslim friends:

1. Be friendly and welcoming to the Muslims around you. It is easy when you walk past someone to look away (this may particularly be the case for you if they are Muslim). But I encourage you to give them a smile, especially if they are the same gender as you. If there are Muslims at your children’s school, say hello to their parents when you are waiting for school to end and the children to come out.
2. Talk to them, as you would talk with anyone else, and don’t assume the worst. Take an interest. Ask about their family, work, school, sport, favourite TV programs, or their concerns.

Talk about world events. Do not be argumentative but listen to who they are. You could ask if they are strict Muslims and practise everything the religion teaches. All Muslims are different, so find out who they are. Here are some real-life Muslims I've met:

- a man not really interested in religion who does not want to be known as a Muslim
 - a mother of six children left at home with no help from her husband
 - a woman who knows little about Islam and wears a head covering because it is part of her culture
 - an articulate unmarried woman pursuing an academic career
 - a man who regularly attends church with his Christian wife and believes that all religions are the same
 - a young man who has a Muslim father and Christian mother and who wants to be both Muslim and Christian
 - a keen believer who attends mosque, debates religion online, and is prepared to talk to Christians
 - a Western convert to Islam
 - a woman who sees what Islam does in the world and hates it
 - a soccer fanatic who knows in detail most of the players in the English Football Premier League
 - a man who calls himself a Muslim but does not believe God exists
 - a woman who is impressed by the teaching of Christianity.
3. Pray for your Muslim friends. Ask them what you can pray for and follow up to see how these prayers are answered. Ask that God will open their hearts to the gospel.
 4. Do things together. If you need help with something, ask them to help. If they need help with something, offer assistance. Invite their children to your children's parties. Invite them around for a cup of tea. Be a friend.

I am not suggesting that you have to be best friends with every Muslim you know. There are limits to how we can spend our time. I am simply saying that by default we need to be friendly, welcoming, and eager to serve the Muslims we encounter in our lives. This is where we start as Christians.

For some of us, loving Muslims this way may be easy and natural. For others, it may be hard and something we have to learn to do. If it's hard for you then talk about your fears or anger with your pastor and Christian friends. Pray about it. Seek to grow in this area. If you have suffered significantly at the hands of Muslims, loving them is not a small task—but it is still what God calls us to do.¹ We are to follow the example of Jesus.

So, do you love Muslims?

You might have expected this kind of question in a book about Islam. But God's command to love everyone raises another question: do you love *Christians*?

Do you love Christians?

When the Bible tells us to love everyone it often gives us a particular priority:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

(Gal 6:10)

Christians are to love everyone, *especially* their Christian brothers and sisters. We are family and we are to have a genuine brotherly love and concern for our fellow Christians:

1 If you have suffered like this then I recommend you talk about this with your pastor and Christian friends. You may even need some professional help from a counsellor or psychologist to work through what you have suffered.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. (Rom 12:10)

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another... (1 Thess 4:9)

This love for other Christians should particularly express itself when they are in need; and many of them are in need because of Islam.

Historically, theologically and legally, the religion of Islam has caused Christians significant suffering. It continues to this day, and we need to acknowledge and help our fellow Christians who suffer under it. We must be informed and not naive about Islam.

The Qur'an is clear that Christians are heretics for believing that Jesus is the Son of God:

Christians say, "The Messiah is the Son of God". That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!
(Qur'an 9:30, Arberry)

Christians are therefore to be conquered and subjugated under Islamic rule:

Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle [Muhammad], nor acknowledge the religion of truth [Islam] (even if they are) of the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], until they pay the Jizyah² [tribute] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.
(Qur'an 9:29, Yusuf Ali)

2 The *jizyah* is tribute money the Qur'an commands non-Muslims to pay Muslims to stop the warfare being waged against them (see Qur'an 9:29 above).

Muhammad organized the Islamic jihadist armies in the seventh century AD. These armies quickly conquered most of the Christian world. These Christians, along with other non-Muslims, were subjugated and reduced for the next 1,000 years. This is well-documented and it brought to an end North African, Middle Eastern, and Asian Christian civilizations.

You may have a Muslim friend who is a very nice, peaceful person. This is great, but you cannot conclude from their behaviour that the teaching or history of Islam is therefore also nice and peaceful. It is not as simple as that, because there are different types of Muslims. One Muslim may believe in religious freedom while another may want all those around them to follow Islam strictly. Which Muslim is living in accord with the Qur'an and with how Islam has been practised historically? Looking at your Muslim friend will not provide the answer.

Throughout history, Christians have suffered because of what the religion of Islam teaches. They suffer to this day. Muslim converts to Christianity are especially often imprisoned, killed, or have to flee their country.

One of my Indonesian Christian friends came to study at an Australian university. Before he came, he divided his possessions and stored them in two different villages. This was so that if jihadists came and attacked his village while he was away, he would not lose everything. After he returned home I asked him how things were going. He said jihadists had looted both villages. On my desk I have a photo of this friend standing among the gravestones of the Christians who were killed in these attacks.

Another Christian friend, an Egyptian studying to be a pharmacist, had his church destroyed and house looted after Friday Muslim prayers in his home city. In the local mosque the Muslims were taught that because the Christians were not paying the *jizyah* to the Muslims, they had forfeited their right to protection. He and

his family, like many Egyptian Christians, have had enough of this and now live permanently in Australia.

This is what is happening to Christians in Muslim countries. It's good for us to talk to Christians from these countries and hear their experiences.

Perhaps you dismiss the suffering of these Christians as just part of the general problems that everyone in those areas has to endure, or as simply a political problem and not a result of Islamic teaching. Maybe you think that these Christians should not receive any special help from other Christians. But how does this sit with Galatians 6:10? We are to *especially* help Christians. Even if Christians are suffering in Islamic countries because of conditions common to all, this verse indicates that we should particularly love and care for our fellow Christians. As we do this we can help these Christians to love the Muslims around them, and empower them to be a witness to the love of Christ. There is nothing wrong with looking after our own and helping them to help others.

Just as there are some Christians who need to deal with their fear and hate of Muslims, so too there are some Christians who need to deal with their neglect, embarrassment and denial of the suffering of Christians under Islam. We must not love Muslims in such a way that we neglect our responsibility to our Christian brothers and sisters or deny the suffering that Islam is causing them. We must not be ashamed of them or feel awkward about them in our friendships with Muslims. We must love them and not sacrifice them for our convenience and comfort.

Organizations like the *Barnabas Fund* and *Open Doors* can help you understand the situation of Christians in Muslim countries. Subscribe to one of these organizations and use this information to pray for these Christians at home and at church. These groups can also suggest practical ways in which you can help. Your church could form a partnership with one of these persecuted churches

and work together with them to show the love of Christ to the Muslims around them.

We should be prepared to speak up when people claim that Islam is a religion of peace and has treated Christians with kindness and tolerance throughout history. This is historically false and goes against Islamic teaching. We need to ask Islamic authorities to clearly reject those elements of the Islamic law that discriminate against Christians, and to stop those Muslims who want to apply them. To do these things we need to be well-informed and to speak wisely, gently, truthfully and sensibly. As we think about Islam we need to start where God does and that is with loving everyone.

How do you balance this?

We are to love Muslims but we are also to love Christians who suffer under Islam. Do you love your fellow Christians? Will you help them? How do you balance loving Muslims with loving and supporting Christians who suffer because of Islam? From my experience people tend to do one or the other—but not both. It is not easy to do both.

There is only one way to find this balance, and that is through the power of the gospel. The gospel gives you the power to face the truth and to love those you disagree with. This is what Jesus did. He loved people as he spoke the truth.

Our world does not have this power; it does not know how to love enemies. So some want to insist that Islam is only a religion of peace because then they can accept and love Muslims. But this is not facing the truth about what Islam teaches or its history. Others will say that Islam does teach violence and so we should hate Muslims. But this is not the Christian response either.

The gospel allows us to face the truth about Islam and to love Muslims in the face of that truth. And this leads us to the final question I wish to ask in this chapter: do you believe the gospel?

Do you believe the gospel?

Do you believe that you are a sinner and only saved by the grace and love of God?

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. (Titus 3:3-5)

Jesus Christ died for your sins and you are only forgiven and saved because of him. Do you believe this? We are all sinners deserving God's judgement and needing his love and salvation. Do you believe this? You mustn't think you are better than Muslims—or anyone else. Maybe this is where you need to start: coming to God in repentance and faith, confessing your sin, and submitting to Jesus as Lord. It is only this gospel that will save you and give you the power to love.

Application summary

1. Smile at the Muslims you know; say hello and make some time to talk to them.
2. Be aware of what is happening to Christians in the Islamic world. Pray for them. See if your church can support them in some way.