

LESSON 7

BARRIERS WE MUST CROSS

PONDER THIS

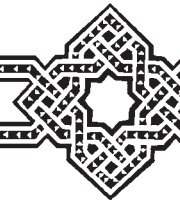
- What are some misconceptions Muslims and Christians have about each other?
- What role did your family play in your coming to Christ?
- How might a Muslim's family influence his or her decision to follow Christ?
- What values held by Muslims are attractive to you?
- How does your culture create barriers to communicating the gospel?

LESSON OUTCOMES

1. *New:* You will be able to acknowledge, identify, explain, and begin to overcome cultural barriers between Christians and Muslims.
2. *Builds on previous lessons:* You will further be able to interpret and respect a Muslim worldview.
3. *Builds on previous lessons:* You will be able to interpret current events through Muslim cultural perspectives.
4. *Builds on previous lessons:* You will be able to influence judgments others have about Muslims based on their cultural stereotypes.
5. *Builds on previous lessons:* You will be able to pray that cultural barriers would not impede the way of Muslims responding to Christ.

KEY POINTS

1. Like Christ, it is our responsibility to incarnate the message in another culture.
2. Humility is the foundation for our conduct towards Muslims.
3. The nature of sin goes beyond forms to their meaning or essence.
4. Conversion is a process that goes beyond initial intellectual response.
5. Barriers are historical, political, economic, social, and supernatural.
6. We adapt to culture: language, food, music, names, and pets.
7. Contextualization must demonstrate transformation in Christ within the culture, yet not compromise the gospel to avoid difficulty.
8. As his witnesses, Christ calls us to cross historical, political, and cultural barriers to demonstrate the gospel within the Muslim context.



ASSIGNMENT


Any learning experience about Muslims would be incomplete without visiting their place of worship and observing the ritual prayers of the community gathered together. Your visit to the mosque, like your meeting with a Muslim, is for the purpose of listening and learning. Familiarize yourself (and your group, if going with others) with the customs and rules for the mosque, and make sure that your speech and behavior communicate reverence and respect. Without participating, observe and be teachable as to proper conduct.


In the discussion forum of your online classroom, be sure to write about your mosque visit experiences.

You will find more helpful guidelines and information in the Course Introduction (p. xxxi).

Also remember to continue with Online Readings at encounteringislam.org/readings.

LESSON READINGS

	Textbook: Introduction to Lesson 7	244
	The Valley of Decision	249
	Ten Stumbling Blocks to Reaching Muslims	253
	God's Messenger	256
	Contextualization and Community	262
	The Reconciliation Walk	272
	Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East.	274
	A Brief History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.	282
	Appeal for Peace	286

	Online: A Lifestyle That Leads to Life, by Fouad Accad	
	<i>Beyond our words, the way we live communicates the truth of the gospel to our Muslim friends.</i>	
	Selections on Conversion, by David W. Shenk, Phil Parshall, Harvie Conn, and Dean Gilliland	
	<i>Four missiologists discuss the complexity of Muslims' turning to faith in Christ.</i>	
	Living as the Family of God, by Christine Mallouhi	
	<i>The church provides family and community for Muslims who come to Christ.</i>	

Access Online Readings at encounteringislam.org/readings.

INTRODUCTION



“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.



Making friends in India

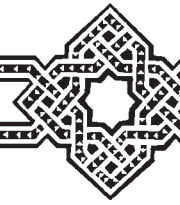
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“Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:1–6).

Like the Corinthians to whom Paul was writing, Muslims are more likely to recognize the truth in our witness when our communication issues from within our deep and lasting friendship with them.

A person’s reluctance to put his trust in Jesus usually does not rest entirely on theological doubt. A Muslim considering following Christ will wonder, “How will my family react? What will be the consequences of my decision culturally, politically, economically, or socially within the community? How will this affect my allegiance to my family and community? Who will be my friends? Whom will I marry?” These questions affect the decision to follow Jesus even in societies that are not community-oriented.

Similarly, a person’s hesitations about the message of the gospel cannot usually be overcome by a one-time decision to follow Christ. Attitudes toward new messages change incrementally, and a premature focus on contrasting Islamic beliefs over against new, unfamiliar theology can quickly entrench those we witness to in their presuppositions about Christianity. Lifelong adherence to Christ may start with a personal decision, but life choices are rarely made in response to rational arguments for or against beliefs, values, and behaviors. Our model of direct com-



munication and emphasis on undeniable proof may show thoughtless lack of respect for cultures in which indirect forms of communication are more persuasive in changing attitudes and building consensus decisions. The online reading, *Selections on Conversion*, illustrates these important points.

Dimensions of Response to Christ

Cognitive:	Knowledge of the gospel
Affective:	Attitude toward the gospel
Presumptive:	Evaluation of the gospel
Volitional:	Decision about the gospel

THE BARRIERS

Understanding cultural, sociological, historical, political, and economic concerns are important in our approach to Muslims. What are their deepest issues and felt needs? Once we understand Muslims' cultural contexts and the historical obstacles between us, we can address these barriers. Then we may find significant opportunities to share our faith with Muslims. But if we fail to address sociological issues in our relationships with Muslims, they may reject our words and actions before ever really hearing or seeing the beauty of the gospel. Providentially, as yet, humankind has not developed an effective defense against love, humility, vulnerability, and authenticity lived out in relationships. This was both Christ's and Paul's method.

Many times Muslims react against our culture and are unable to focus on the gospel message we intend to proclaim. This lesson asks: How can we communicate the gospel message more clearly with

less cultural baggage? How can we affirm the positive aspects of Muslim society, use these as bridges to build a biblical understanding and worldview, and call on the Holy Spirit to redeem and improve our methods of sharing our faith?

Muslims react strongly against many so-called Christian behaviors: immodest dress, offensive diets, drunkenness, drug use, dysfunctional families, abortion, homosexuality, and other immorality demonstrated in television, movies, and pornography exported to Muslim communities. We cannot just write these off as negative byproducts of our culture, and not reflective of true Christianity. Many Muslims have yet to meet Christians who abhor these practices and effectively articulate that opinion, Christians who honestly critique our own culture.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul declares that he will endure all things so to cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. The only acceptable stumbling block can be Christ, not our cultural behavior. Therefore, Paul became like a Jew culturally to win the Jews and like a Greek culturally to win the Greeks. Surely, we can do similarly for Muslims. In Galatians and elsewhere, Paul strongly argues that the Greeks did not need to adopt Jewish practices in order to become Christians. Surely, we can allow Muslims to stay in their cultural context while they are being transformed by Christ.

Imagine yourself a Muslim visiting a church service: the sexes mix freely; worshipers wear shoes and sit on pews in the presence of God; people talk even as the service starts, to rock music, with worship dance performed by immodestly dressed women; and wine is served at communion! Might not that Muslim exclaim, "God,

please rescue me from this discothèque!”? How we dress, what we eat, what our attitudes are toward their culture, how we use our money, how we raise our children, even what kind of house we live in, and how long we stay among Muslims all affect Muslims’ impression of Christ.

Historical barriers also influence how Muslims feel about Christianity. For us, the Crusades and colonialism may be distant history, but these memories are echoed in Muslims’ present-day thinking as they interpret current events. What does the Bible say about justice for the poor and the politically oppressed? Do we react only when Christians are persecuted, while ten times as many Muslims are abused by dictators? Many Christian humanitarian organizations have excellent records of offering assistance to all those in need, regardless of religious background. Could Christians go further by seeking reconciliation, and encouraging governments to address long-standing conflicts affecting Muslims?

All of humanity is under the curse and we struggle to implement justice. Often we can view questions of economics and politics as non-religious topics. Muslims may feel mistreated economically and politically, unfairly judged for their human rights record, and inundated by pop culture and products: our response to these sensitivities may not have registered with us as factors in how we represent

Christ to Muslims. We may try to quickly distance ourselves from “Christian” government policies, and we may disagree with “Christian” figures in the news, but should we speak out more adamantly against injustice? “What would Jesus do?” does not merely apply to children obeying their parents. Christian values have economic and political consequences, whether the issue is exploitation of Jews, or of Palestinian Christians and Muslims, or of ourselves.

GREATEST FELT NEED, GREATEST POWER

In addition, the cultural value of individualism often causes friction in societies where conformity and the group are valued more highly than the individual. Muslims often perceive Christians as relationally insincere and aloof. Often we tend to make friends and encourage a response to the gospel among already independent, non-conformist, or culturally rebellious individuals, thus cutting off the potential strength of community in the life of the Muslim-background-believing church. Moreover, when Muslims become Christians, we often delay baptizing them until they have a proven track record. One consequence of this is that baptism becomes a rite of passage rather than a celebration of welcome into community. Yet Muslim-background believers suffer an unusual sense of isolation Christians



BARBED WIRE

A great barbed-wire barrier of peripheral offense has often been erected by well-intentioned missionaries. The biblical message has become interwoven with Western economics, politics, and a very Western approach to religion.

Source: Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 85.

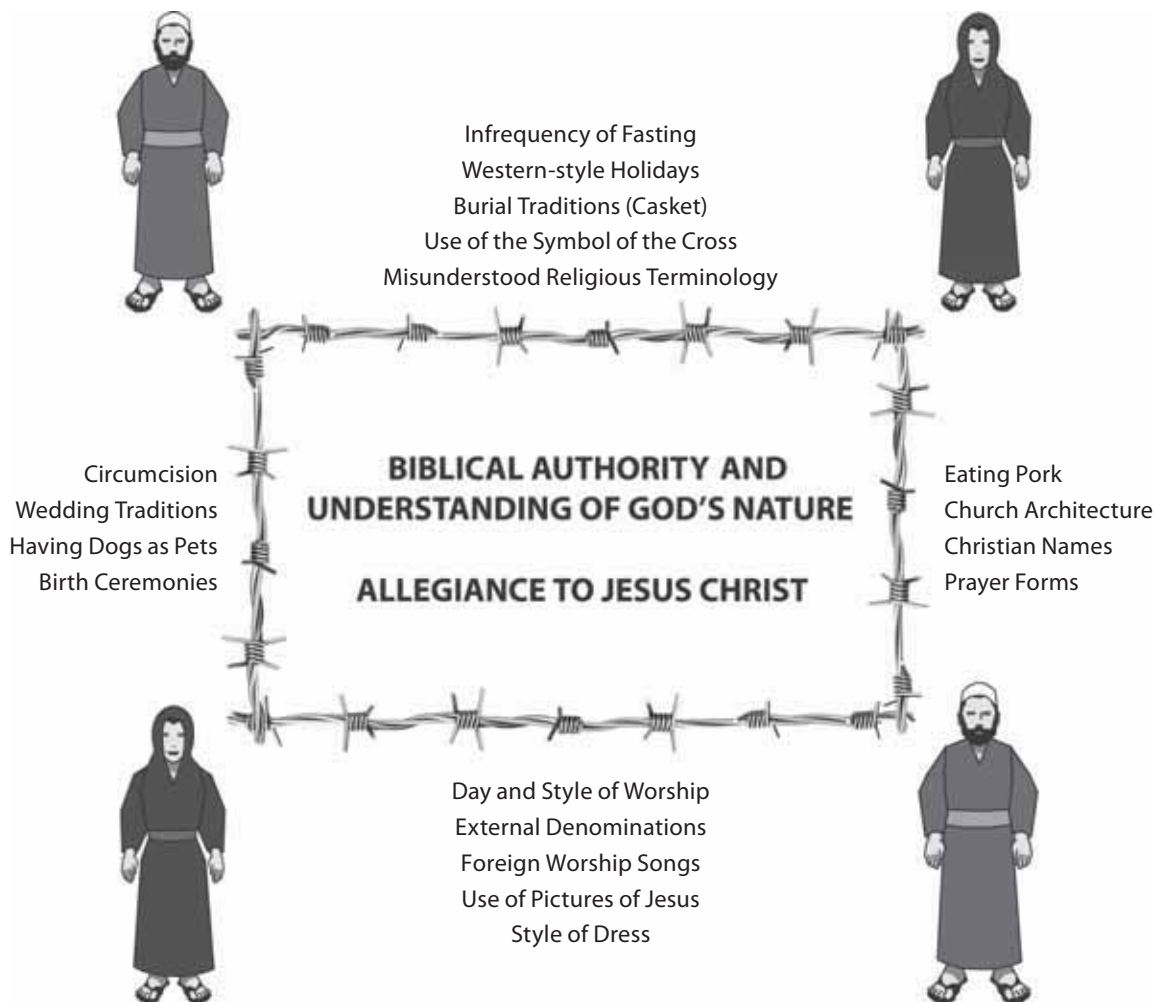
do not comprehend. They hunger for community to fill the void left by what they have given up, especially if their families have rejected them because of their newfound faith.

In order to be good friends to Muslims, we need to understand their political and economic realities. We should encourage them to mentor us in learning about their cultures, languages, and values. Building trust takes time. The early church struggled with community issues of unity, morality, rights, acceptable food, freedoms, standards, propriety in worship,

body life, and love. First and Second Corinthians are devoted to helping new believers wrestle with these dilemmas. One of the central solutions proffered for all of these complications is the energetic personal activity of the Spirit of Christ in the community of believers and evidence of his work in us. We desire to express our love of Christ and the biblical truths of salvation to our Muslim friends. However, we cannot do this solely through persuasive words.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with

Cultural and Social Barriers That Turn Away Inquirers



wisdom and eloquence, lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power (1 Cor. 1:17).

And so it was with me...when I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power (1 Cor. 2:1–5). ◆

– K.S., *Editor*.

EXPLORE

Caleb Crider and others, *Tradecraft for the Church on Mission* (Portland, OR: Upstream Collective, 2013).

Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991).



EVANGELISM AS A PROCESS

Isn't "So how many were saved on your last mission trip?" the usual question? Or, "How many were baptized?" "How many attend your church?" Why this focus on numbers? Too often our goal-oriented culture binds us, fooling us into thinking figures and events tell the story and measure the task. Are we satisfied if someone keeps us accountable to such goals?

Evangelism is a process—of befriending, supporting, loving, proclaiming and persuading while continually pointing Muslims toward Christ. I am encouraged by God from his Word, specifically, his servant Paul's testimony: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6). We all have our "assigned tasks" in God's field, but God is the one who grows the seed and gives salvation in his time. Ministry among Muslims can take a long time, sometimes years, before the first fruits are seen. As God is the one responsible for the outcome, we should enjoy the friendships and the process!

On my overseas assignment, my coworker Peter befriended a Muslim named Mahmud. After seven years, Peter expressed frustration, questioning whether he was wasting his time in this relationship. Even though Peter had helped Mahmud many times (he had found him a job), Mahmud seldom expressed any spiritual interest. Our team prayed for them both, encouraging Peter to press on. At the next meeting, Peter had exciting news. Mahmud had told him, "I've known you for seven years, and often wondered if you were really my friend, or if I was just another potential convert to Christianity. I've decided that you really have been a caring friend, and now I want to be baptized."

Source: Annee W. Rose, *frontiers.org*.