

FROM NEIGHBOR TO FRIEND



An Introduction to Islam for Christians

Connie Fourré

From Neighbor to Friend will soon be available as a free iBook.



© 2017, 2018 Constance Fourré

Creative Commons License

This material is licensed under Creative Commons. You are free to take ideas from these materials and use them as you wish. You have permission to download and distribute the book or portions thereof as is, giving credit to the author and the photographers. You do not have permission to alter the text or to charge compensation for its use, other than for the cost of materials in producing copies of the book.



Cover image: iStock Photo, FatCamera

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

From Neighbor to Friend - 8.4.18

Available as a free download at www.alliesandfriendsmn.org

He said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, "Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back."

"Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25-37

This book is dedicated to all
who strive to find the good Samaritan within
and to follow Jesus with generosity, courage
and open hearts and minds.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
I. LAYING THE FOUNDATION	11
Lenses on Religion	
Taking Inventory	
The Life of Muhammad	
II. CORE PRACTICES OF ISLAM	19
The Declaration of Faith	
Prayer	
Fasting	
Almsgiving	
Pilgrimage	
III. THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH	28
The Primacy of God	
Scripture	
Prophets	
Angels	
Judgment	
The Will of God	
IV. WOMEN, ISLAM AND SHARI'A	36
Religion vs. culture	
The Bible and the Qur'an on Women	
The History of Women in the U.S.	
Law, Christians and Shari'a	

V.	PEACE AND WAR	46
	Christian and Islamic Just War Theory	
	Scripture and Tradition on War	
	“Religious” Terrorism	
	Heroes of Peace	
VI.	WHAT NEXT?	54
	A Spiritual Response	
	Building Relationships	
	Advocating for Better	
	<i>About the Author</i>	61

INTRODUCTION

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as your self. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Mt. 22:36-40

Thirty years ago very few non-Muslims gave much thought to Islam. Today Muslims and Islam appear in the news on an almost daily basis. The stories and debate are confusing and frightening, and many of us wonder what to believe and whom to trust. Our attempts to understand are limited by the fact that most of us don't know any Muslims personally.

We wonder: What is Islam, really? Who are Muslims, and how do they live? And how are we called to respond to our Muslim neighbors here at home and abroad? *From Neighbor to Friend* provides information and reflection to help sort out answers to some of these perplexing questions. You will probably be surprised and relieved to learn that Islam is much closer to Christianity than most of us have been led to believe. For example, I have been touched time and again by the tender regard for Jesus expressed by my Muslim friends. In fact, Muslims and Christians alike are followers of Jesus, although we understand him differently.

This work invites us not only to learn about Islam but also to reflect on our own faith and how we live it out. Years ago in the United States there was outright violence among Christians of different denominations, but more recently Christians of many denominations mingle freely. It has sometimes been easy just to go along without thinking too deeply about our faith. We need to remember that Jesus called us to peace, not complacency. America is considered to be among the most religious countries in the Western world, yet most Americans are uninformed not only about other religions but also about our own. You may well find this study deepens your knowledge of Christianity along with expanding your awareness of Islam and Muslim life. Many find that understanding other faiths more deeply actually strengthens their commitment to their own Christian faith.

We are not in this alone. Jesus also lived in turbulent times. He was desperately poor; his country was under foreign occupation; he and his closest friends were almost all killed for their beliefs. He and his followers held fast in the midst of suffering and confusion, and the light of their example shines clearly for us across the centuries. Jesus calls us to faith, hope and love: to trust in God, to live in hope rather than fear, to act in love to bring about the reign of God on this earth. We gain strength for the effort when we reach out and link arms with *all* who seek to walk in the light of God.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

From Neighbor to Friend can be used for individual or group study.

If you are studying on your own, I encourage you to take some time with the questions for discussion as well as the text itself. Most of us have an emotional as well as an intellectual response to Islam. Our emotional response can lag behind a new intellectual understanding, and most of us need to spend some time with a new awareness before we experience a lasting shift in our thinking and attitudes. Taking time to reflect on the discussion questions can help you settle in and remember what you've learned.

For group study, in addition to the guidance above we recommend using clips from the video series *Discover Islam* to facilitate discussion. These videos are beautifully produced and intended to introduce non-Muslims to Islam. While *From Neighbor to Friend* contains more detailed information than you'll find in the DVD's, the videos are invaluable for putting a face on the conversation. The DVD's are available to churches and schools for the price of postage from Congregations Together for Peace, www.ctfpmn.org; they are also available to individuals for purchase at www.discoverislam.com.

If there are Muslims in your community who are willing to join you as participants or co-leaders, we highly recommend extending an invitation. In Minnesota the Islamic Resource Group (www.irgmn.org) has a deep roster of excellent speakers who are trained, certified and will speak without charge.

Format for Group Study

1. Begin with prayer, asking God for openness and wisdom in approaching this study.
2. Review the discussion guidelines on page 10.
3. Review the chapter's opening quote and its message for today.
4. Watch a recommended video clip, if available
5. Review the main points of the reading for clarity. If participants have questions not answered in the text, John Esposito's *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* is a great resource to have on hand. Its question-and-answer format helps track down answers quickly. Or you can email us at ctfpmn@gmail.com and we'll get an answer back to you before your next study session. Unfortunately, this is a topic where the internet isn't automatically a great resource. Check out the reliability of any site you decide to consult.
6. Use the discussion questions at the end of the chapter. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions, but rather pick and choose according to group interest.
7. Close with prayer, encouragement to read before the next session, and an invitation to pray during the week for wisdom and interfaith cooperation.

Discussion Guidelines

We encourage group leaders to set guidelines for discussion at the beginning of the series and review them at each following session. We are in tender territory, and we all need to be reminded to be our best selves in these conversations. It may help to go around the circle, asking each person to read one guideline aloud.

- Remember the goal of this study is to understand Islam and our Muslim neighbors rather than to debate which religion is superior.
- What you share within the context of the conversation is confidential, honored and

respected

- Use “I” statements. No one speaks for another or for an entire group of people.
- Focus on your own experiences.
- Be honest and willing to share.
- Listen with curiosity and the willingness to learn and change.
- Resist the urge to interrupt.
- Be brief and share the time equitably.
- Be open to the kernel of wisdom in each person’s story.
- Accept the fact that the group is likely to disagree on some things. We are dealing with complex issues, most of which are probably new. Remember to pray for guidance as you ponder your own response to the material.
- Be curious. You may read or hear things in this study that contradict what you have believed to be true. Investigate the source of your own and the study’s information and evaluate carefully.

Adapted from YWCA It’s Time to Talk

CHAPTER ONE

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

In this chapter we will:

Check in on some preconceptions

Talk about perspectives on religion

Learn about the life and times of Muhammad

TAKING OUR OWN INVENTORY

___ Most of us walk around bursting with firm convictions that are not based on facts.

This is nothing to be embarrassed about. Even though we can't possibly know everything, we still need to make sense of our world and take action. So we trust other people to know how billions of bits of information translate into the images on a computer screen or how the alternator in our car works. In the absence of concrete information and the time to investigate, we form working opinions, often without even being aware we have them. This capacity helps us get through the day, but it also sometimes gets us in trouble.

It's probably safe to say that most non-Muslim Americans have more mistaken than accurate notions about Islam. This is causing a great deal of trouble at the moment. To check out this assumption, we're going to start our study with a pretest. This exercise is not to make anyone feel foolish. Instead we want to flush out mistaken notions we may hold

without even realizing they're there. Until we recognize our assumptions we have a really hard time letting them go.

Very few non-Muslims are likely to answer all the following questions correctly. In fact, you're doing very well if you get better than 75% right. But going through the pretest is a learning experience in itself. When you've gone over the answers on page 18, you'll probably already know more about Islam than all your neighbors put together.

Except, of course, if your neighbor is Muslim.

Pretest

Circle the correct answer:

1. The % of Muslims that are Arab: 20 40 65 80
2. Muslims worship Muhammad T / F
3. A substantial percentage of Africans who were brought to the U.S. as enslaved persons were Muslim. T/F
4. Muslims believe Jesus is the Messiah and will come again on the Last Day T / F
5. Mary is mentioned more often in the Qur'an than in the Gospels. T / F
6. Divide the following religions into two groups according to similarity to one another:
Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam

Name that Scripture passage!

Mark each passage with one or more of the following to indicate its source:

OT - Old Testament

Q - Qur'an

NT - New Testament

7. _____ "Love God with your whole heart and strength and your neighbor as yourself."
8. _____ "Women should remain silent at worship. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak at worship."
9. _____ "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which has come down to you: our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow."
10. _____ "Righteous is he who believes in God and the Last Day and the angels and Scripture and the prophets; and gives wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and who sets slaves free."



Answers can be found at the end of this chapter.

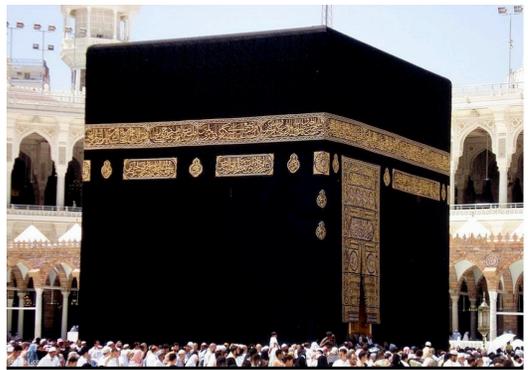


Mount Hira today

PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION

Before we begin, let's take a moment to consider *how* we're approaching this study.

When we examine a religion we can look through more than one lens or perspective. When we use a *historical* lens we consider information like geography, statistics, cultural differences, etc. - we're simply describing what has happened or what is happening. When we use a *theological* lens we consider ways in which beliefs align or differ. In this small book we will use both lenses, sometimes alone and sometimes together. Early questions in the pretest dealt with history: the ethnic background of Muslims; the arrival of the first Muslims in North America. Other questions were theological: Muslim beliefs about Jesus and Mary; a tiny taste of the Qur'an. This chapter primarily uses a historical lens: we are telling the story of Muhammad and his report of his experience of God without debating the validity of his story. In later chapters we'll focus more on similarities and differences in Christian and Muslim beliefs and practices.



THE STORY OF MUHAMMAD

___ Muhammad was born in 570 AD in a town called Mecca on the Arabian peninsula. At this time traditional Arab culture, which had a strong sense of community and care for all members of the tribe, had broken down. There was a new and widening gap between the haves and have-nots; feuds were frequent and bloody.

Muhammad was orphaned by the age of six. First he was taken in by his grandfather, who died just a few years later. He was then adopted by an uncle who was a member of the powerful Quraysh tribe. Muhammad's early vulnerability and dependence on extended family for protection may have shaped his strong sense of social justice and lifelong concern for the poor and vulnerable.

Mecca was a well-known pilgrimage site, visited by devotees of many different religions. Much of Mecca's wealth depended on the trade generated by these pilgrims. Muhammed was disheartened by the greed and violence surrounding him, but this did not stop him from

being industrious in his work with caravans. When he was twenty-five Khadijah, a well-to-do widow and trader fifteen years his senior, asked him to marry her. Their marriage was happy, although marred by the sorrow of having only one surviving child. In spite of the lack of a living son and the polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife) common at the time, Muhammad did not take another wife until Khadijah's death twenty-five years later.

Mecca was home to Jews and Christians as well as polytheists (people who believe in many gods.) Muhammad was influenced by the Jews and Christians he met but did not convert to either religion. Spiritually restless, he began taking time to himself in a cave in the nearby mountains, reflecting and seeking guidance on his role in life and the tragedy and upheaval surrounding him.

According to Islamic belief, in his 40th year Muhammad had a profound and frightening experience. While on retreat in a cave in the Mount of Hira he experienced an encounter with a being he would later name the angel Gabriel. The being challenged him to "Read!" but Muhammad protested he was illiterate. On the third command from the angel Muhammad received a revelation, the first of many to be delivered over the next 23 years. Muhammad was terrified he was losing his mind and fled home to his wife. After hearing his story Khadijah encouraged him to talk to her cousin, a faithful Christian who encouraged Muhammad to trust the experience as coming from God.

While continuing to receive further revelations, Muhammad began to share the message cautiously with family, friends and acquaintances. He met with skepticism, except from Khadijah and a few others close to the family. Over the next ten years Muhammad grew bolder in inviting the Meccans to join him, meeting ever-growing resistance. Muhammad's insistence that there was only one God threatened the lucrative business of hosting pilgrims from many religions. In response the Meccans grew increasingly more aggressive and violent toward Muhammad and his followers. Some members of the group took refuge in Abyssinia under the protection of the king, who was a Christian.

At the same time, Muhammad's reputation as an upright and fair man grew beyond the Meccan borders. The people of Medina, a city 270 miles north of Mecca, invited Muhammad to live with them and arbitrate the many disputes occurring there. Muhammad accepted. To avoid drawing attention to their departure, Muhammad directed his followers to leave the city a few at a time. He was among the last to go, narrowly escaping a plot to kill him. Muhammad and his followers spent ten successful years in Medina, where their numbers grew slowly but steadily.

While Muhammad and his followers lived in Medina the Meccans continued their hostility and sent out raiding parties periodically to attack the city. Muhammad and the Medinans fought back in defense of their home.

Eventually Muhammad decided to return to Mecca. He conquered the city quickly and, remarkably, without bloodshed. He then consolidated his influence over the city and implemented a major change in the pilgrimage trade. Pilgrims had traditionally worshipped at a large black building called the Kaaba, which at the time housed hundreds of idols. Muhammad removed all the idols to make the shrine suitable for worship of the one true God.

Under Muhammad's leadership Mecca became a community in which Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together in peace. This is not surprising in light of the fact that Islam draws its origins from the Abraham of the Bible. According to both the Qur'an and the book of Genesis, Abraham's wife Sarah was infertile. In desperation she offered her servant Hagar to Abraham in hopes that a son would be produced. While pregnant Hagar began to feel superior to Sarah, who grew jealous and drove Hagar out into the desert. An angel appeared to Hagar and told her to return home. After Hagar's son Ishmael was born Sarah also became pregnant and bore Isaac. (Gen. 16:1-16)

Muslims emphasize that Ishmael was Abraham's older son and claim him as their ancestor. They believe the Kaaba rests on the site where Abraham intended to sacrifice Ishmael. Jews and Christians, on the other hand, trace our spiritual ancestry to Isaac, the beloved son whom Abraham was prepared to sacrifice in Genesis.

We will talk more about peace and war in interfaith relations in Chapter Five.

Discussion and Reflection

Chapter One

For Group Leaders

1. Offer welcome and open with prayer. If the group is small enough, have people introduce themselves.
2. Review the discussion guidelines on p. 10.
3. Check in on any questions or reflections in response to reading the first chapter.

4. Watch from 13:30 to 20:08 of *Faith and History*, from the *Discover Islam* series, if available.
5. Ask participants to note any questions they want answered before the end of the study. Encourage them to add to the list as the sessions continue.

Questions for Discussion

6. Which answers to the pretest did you get right? Where did you learn this information?
7. Which answers surprised you? Why?
8. What did you learn about Islam in taking the pretest? What did you learn about your own preconceptions?
9. Were you surprised to learn that Muslims revere Jesus? Many Muslims would even say it's impossible to be a good Muslim without reverence for Jesus. Does it make a difference to you to learn that Muslims hold Jesus in high regard, even if they don't consider him to be divine? (We will talk about the very significant differences between the Muslim and the Christian view of Jesus in Chapter Three.)
10. Review the map on p. 14. The distance between Mecca and Jerusalem is roughly the same as the distance between New York and Chicago. Both Mecca and Jerusalem were on trade routes, with many people traveling between cities. Hinduism and Buddhism both began in northern India, many miles to the east of Mecca. Does this knowledge shift your impression of Islam's relationship to Judaism and Christianity?
11. Recall the story of Moses' first encounter with God in the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-15). Can you see similarities between the story of Moses' experience and that of Muhammad? (Reminder: Muslims see Muhammad in the same light that Jews and Christians see Moses or Abraham.)

Answers to Pretest

1. 20% of Muslims worldwide. are Arab. In the US, according to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 18% of American Muslims are of European descent; 24% are African immigrants or of African descent; 25% Asian, 18% Arab, 6% Hispanic, 1% Native and the remaining 7% are listed as of mixed race or “other.”
2. Muslims view Muhammad as a prophet, similar to the ways Jews and Christians (and Muslims) view Moses. They consider Muhammad the last prophet sent by God, but not a greater prophet than Jesus, Moses, Noah, etc.
3. A large percentage of Africans brought to the U.S. against their will came from countries in Africa with a high Muslim population. There is historical evidence of African Muslim presence in the US in the early 1700’s.
4. Muslims have great veneration for Jesus. They believe in the virgin birth, Jesus’ miracles, his teachings, that he is the Messiah and will come again on the last day. They also believe God protected Jesus from the terrible fate of crucifixion; they do not believe in the resurrection or the divinity of Jesus. They believe Jesus’ message has been corrupted over the years and Muhammad intended to bring both Jews and Christians back to the true message received by Abraham from God.
5. Mary is mentioned more often in the Qur’an (34 times) than in the Gospels (22 times). An entire chapter of the Qur’an is named for Mary (*Miriam* in Arabic.)
6. Judaism, Christianity and Islam belong together; Buddhism and Hinduism both have origins in northern India. Jews, Christians and Muslims all trace their spiritual heritage back to Abraham, and are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.”
7. Mark 12:30; Mt. 22:37, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Note: Today some prefer to use the terms Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures.
8. St. Paul, 1 Cor. 14:34
9. Qur’an 29:46, speaking of Jews and Christians
10. Qur’an 2:177

CHAPTER TWO

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE AND CORE PRACTICES OF ISLAM

There are three things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy.

Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives.

Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, almsgiving is the lifeblood of fasting.

Peter Chrysologus, 5th century Bishop

In this chapter we will:

Explore the core message of Islam

Continue the history of Muhammad and his followers

Reflect on the essential practices shaping the life of Muslims

THE CORE MESSAGE OF ISLAM

Muhammad never intended to start a new religion. From the beginning he believed Abraham had received the essential truths about God, but that Jews and Christians had lost their way over the years and forgotten their true roots. He hoped and expected that Jews and Christians would join his cause, and some did. Mecca welcomed a wide range of people through its gates, and Muhammad saw his mission as spreading the message of Abraham to all the peoples of the world.

The core belief of Islam, Christianity and Judaism is surrender to God. Jesus affirmed this same concept when he quoted Dt 6:5 in response to a question about the greatest commandment:

*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul,
and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.*

The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

Mt 22:37-40

The Muslim call to prayer begins, “God is the greatest,” affirming that God is supreme over all creation. Virtually every chapter of the Qur’an begins, “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful...” Judaism, Christianity and Islam all agree: there is only one God, a God of mercy and compassion for all.

A WORD ABOUT LANGUAGE

Muslims often refer to God as *Allah*, the Arabic word for God. Since few non-Muslim Westerners speak Arabic, the word can feel unfamiliar and unsettling to us. Arabic plays the same role in Islam that Latin did for Catholics for centuries. The language was a means of unifying believers and reinforcing a worldwide sense of identity. The use of Latin by Catholics has frightened some non-Catholics, who saw it as a means of hiding the Church’s true intentions from the outside world. We see similar reactions today to Muslims’ use of Arabic in prayer and conversation.

Allah is simply the word God in Arabic. Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages, linked together much as Spanish and Italian share common roots in Latin. The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, comes from the same root as the word *Allah*. Just as *Dios*, *Gott* and *Dieu* all are European language names for God, *Allah* and *Elohim* are Semitic language names for God. The word *Allah* indicates a different language, not a different God.

The words **Islam**, **Muslim** and **salaam** (peace) all come from the same root word and share the base consonents **slm**. The Arabic word *salaam* is almost the same as the Hebrew word *shalom*; they both mean “peace.” The traditional Muslim greeting is *Asalaamu aleikum*, or “Peace be with you.”

The word *Islam* in Arabic means *to surrender*, in this case describing our ideal relationship with God. When we truly realize who God is, we recognize that the very best path for our lives can emerge only in response to God’s guidance. Christians might be more familiar with

the term *obedience* or *doing the will of God*, but the essence is the same. The word *islam* can also indicate the peace that comes from living a life surrendered to God. The word *Muslim* indicates a person who has surrendered to God.

ISLAM IN MECCA AND BEYOND

After over a decade of suffering and derision, Muhammad and his followers finally began to have success in spreading their message. As their influence expanded, Muhammad was challenged to spell out in more detail not only his understanding about God but also the standards for living according to God's guidance. Later chapters of the Qur'an reflect the need to shape a common life for this new community. The Qur'an has a strong emphasis on sharing wealth and decisionmaking. We will speak more about Islamic teaching on women in Chapter Four.

Islamic history differs from Judaism and Christianity in that Islam had political success at an early stage and maintained that success for many centuries. While Moses stopped at the edge of the Promised Land and Christians were persecuted for their first three centuries, Islam enjoyed initial and longlasting political success. Within a century of Muhammad's death the Islamic Empire covered vast portions of northern Africa, the Middle East, and even Spain.

Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi

Many people know that Muslims are divided into two major groups. These roughly correspond to the division between Catholics and Protestants in that each group shares a common Scripture and beliefs; considers themselves the true followers of their religion; and have a history of conflict among themselves and with the other dominant group.

Muhammad died without designating a clear successor. Muslims believe Muhammad was the last prophet sent by God. They did not seek to replace him as a religious leader after his death, but still needed a political leader who would rule according to Islamic teaching. Some of Muhammad's followers, who later became known as Sunni's, felt



the most reasonable choice was any mature follower who had earned Muhammad's trust. This group won out in the beginning and the first three caliphs were close followers but not blood relatives of Muhammad. Another group, which became known as Shi'a Muslims, were convinced the caliph needed to be a blood relative of Muhammad. The fourth caliph (political leader), Ali, was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. His murder set off a conflict between these groups which persists to this day. About 80-85% of the world's Muslims are Sunni, and their numbers reflect their relative dominance in the Muslim world.

Sufism is a movement within Islam; both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims can be inspired by



Sufism. Sufis seek a strong direct experience of God. The poet Rumi is probably the most familiar example of Sufism in the West.

An *imam* is a spiritual teacher and prayer leader. There is no central authority or hierarchy in Islam, especially in Sunni Islam. An imam can gather followers and build a mosque much as non-denominational and interdenominational Christian congregations today often grow up around a dedicated leader with a more-or-less distinctive interpretation of Christianity. Like their Christian counterparts, many imams are formally trained, but some are not. One cause of disturbing trends within the Islamic world today is the emergence of charismatic leaders who do not truly know Islam and may even be illiterate and unable to read the Qur'an. Some advance their own prejudices and beliefs with little reference to what Islam and the Qur'an actually teach. In the same way, some Christian groups such as the Branch Davidians have been known to blindly follow a leader and end up with a theology that has wandered far from the Bible, sometimes with tragic results.

ISLAM IN DAILY LIFE

Religions are made up of beliefs and practices. In Islam the core *beliefs* are called the "Articles of Faith;" we will learn about them in the next chapter. The core *practices* are referred to as the five "Pillars of Islam." They are:

- The Declaration of Faith
- Prayer
- Fasting

- Almsgiving
- Pilgrimage

Each of these elements has a parallel in our own Christian tradition.

The Declaration of Faith

The first pillar is *shahada* in Arabic. It calls Muslims to frequently repeat their essential creed, which is, “There is no god but Allah (God), and Muhammad is his Prophet.” While this statement is clear about the existence of just one God, it does not mean to imply that Muhammad is God’s only prophet, as we shall see in the next chapter. If we misunderstand the word Allah to mean a God other than the God of Abraham, or to think that Muhammad is the only prophet who matters to Muslims, the Muslim declaration of faith can seem divisive. If we understand the phrase properly we are reminded that in fact we stand together on holy ground.



Breaking fast at an iftar meal

The Muslim statement of faith is similar to the first commandment received by Moses, “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me,” and the Jewish *shema*, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one.” Recitation of the *shahada* functions like the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed; when we recite the creed aloud together, we are reminded of our beliefs and recommit ourselves to them.

Prayer

Like Christians, Muslims practice both formal and informal prayer. Informal prayer is called *dua* and can happen any time. Muslims are also required to engage in formal prayer, or *salat*, five times a day. The five sessions share common elements but each has its own format.

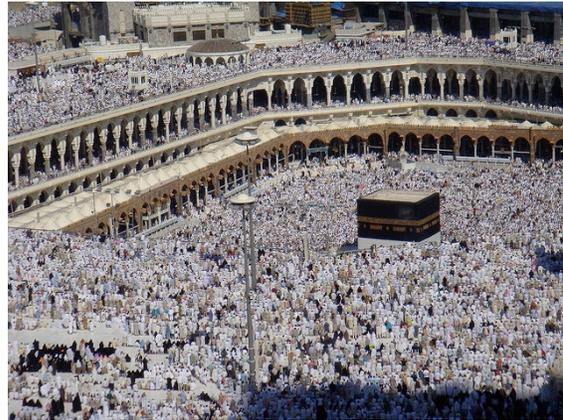
Salat begins,

*O God, You are above all imperfection and
deserving of all praise. Blessed be Your name.
Your majesty is exalted, and there is no god
worthy of worship except You.*

Salat can be recited in a mosque or anywhere. When possible, Muslims are required to wash their hands, faces and feet before prayer and to face toward Mecca. In the beginning they faced toward Jerusalem, but this guideline was eventually changed.

While Christians observe the Sabbath on Sundays and Jews on Saturdays, Muslims hold a special extended service on Fridays. This service includes *salat*, a reading from the Qur'an and a sermon.

The term mosque, or *masjid* in Arabic, means a space for prayer. The distinctive patterning on the carpeting in the prayer space marks the spots for participants to pray. Muslims stand shoulder to shoulder as they pray to express their solidarity with one another.



Just as we may use the term “church” for a building with both a sanctuary for worship and additional activity rooms, an “Islamic center” commonly has multi-purpose spaces and a prayer space. Sometimes the words “mosque” and “Islamic center” are used interchangeably.

There is a prescribed series of movements during formal prayer, each with a specific symbolic meaning. Bowing and prostration are signs of submission to God. Muslims believe everyone has at least two guardian angels, the angel on the right shoulder recording good deeds while the angel on the left records the bad. Muslims turn their heads to the right and the left during *salat*, saluting those angels.

Muslims do not have hymns or group singing. Instead, individuals do what is called a “lyrical recitation” of the Qur'an. This consists of a distinctive, musical proclamation, something like when the Psalms or other passages of the Bible are set to Gregorian chant. Some Muslims use prayer beads with 99 beads, reminding them of the 99 names for God. These “names of God” would be comparable to our calling Jesus “Prince of Peace,” “Lamb of God,” “Son of God” or “King of Kings.” Muslim names for God include, “The Most Merciful,” “The King,” “The Most Holy,” etc.

The dedication to prayer and surrender to God practiced by Muslims can be a bit humbling for us Christians, and a reminder of the importance of prayer in our own lives.

Fasting

The season of Ramadan bears some resemblance to the traditional Christian observance of Lent, although the mood is more joyful. Where Lent commemorates the suffering of Jesus, for Muslims Ramadan honors the beginning of Muhammad's revelations from God. During the month of Ramadan Muslims abstain from food and drink from sunup to

sundown. When the sun sets they break their fast with a meal called an *iftar*, often shared at the mosque. The *Eid* celebration marking the end of Ramadan is especially festive. Some Islamic centers open their *iftar* meals to non-Muslims as a way of offering hospitality and sharing a first-hand experience of their faith. Attending an *iftar* can be an inspiring first step toward building relationship and understanding with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

The purposes of fasting in Islam resemble our own understanding. Repeatedly saying “no” to ourselves as we choose to abstain strengthens our will and our capacity to say “no” to temptation in other areas of our lives. As we undergo the discomfort of fasting we are putting ourselves in solidarity with those who suffer, particularly those who suffer hunger because they have inadequate food. The discipline of fasting helps us focus our attention on God and the spiritual dimension of our lives. Muslims are encouraged to donate the money they would have spent on food to those who are in need.

The rules of Ramadan apply to all Muslim adults with the exception of those who are elderly, pregnant, ill or traveling. Similar to Christian practice during Lent, Muslims are especially mindful of their behavior and of being kind, prayerful and generous during this time. Ramadan is a season of spiritual renewal. Many Muslims speak enthusiastically of the inspiration and transformation they experience during this time.

Muslims observe dietary restrictions throughout their lives, abstaining from pork and pork products (including gelatin) and from alcohol. Like Jews, who require their *kosher* meat to be slaughtered and prepared according to certain procedures, Muslims are expected to eat only meat that has been blessed and prepared according to *halal*. Fish and seafood do not require special preparation.

Almsgiving

Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam has a strong emphasis on caring for the poor and vulnerable. The Jewish prophets repeatedly admonished the people to care for “widows, orphans and aliens,” and the Year of Jubilee originally called for forgiving all debts and freeing all slaves every forty-nine years. (Lev. 25:8-13) The intention was to regularly redistribute wealth so that all God’s people could live freely.

Some Christians practice *tithing*, or giving 10% of their annual income. The guideline for Muslims is 2.5% of net worth annually. For more affluent Muslims this can come to a very substantial amount. Some Muslim-majority countries have collected this amount as a *zakat* tax which is then spent to provide for those in need.

All three faiths clearly expect followers to share generously. One scholar said, “It is not so much what we give away as how much we have left that matters in the eyes of God.”

Pilgrimage

Making pilgrimage is an ancient tradition; Scripture tells us Jesus himself traveled to

Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

Many Christians have traveled to the Holy Land to visit the places where Jesus and his apostles walked. The purpose of pilgrimage is to take a time apart from our regular lives, to be in the presence of other pilgrims, to immerse ourselves in the spirit of the events that happened in these holy places and to commemorate those who have inhabited them.

Many believers tell of profound transformation happening during pilgrimage.

The Arabic term for pilgrimage is *hajj*. Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they have the means to do so. While Muslims are formally obliged to travel to Mecca, many also visit other holy sites such as the cities of Medina and Jerusalem or the cave of Hira, where Muhammad prayed. Pilgrims to Mecca change to very simple white clothing, a sign of the equality of all believers before God.

Discussion and Reflection

Chapter Two

For Leaders

1. Open with prayer.
2. Welcome the group and introduce any newcomers.
3. Review the guidelines for discussion.
4. Watch *Breaking the Taboos of Interfaith Dialogue*, a TED talk by the “Interfaith Amigos.” A Muslim imam, a Jewish rabbi and a Christian pastor talk about learning to be in true interfaith relationship.
5. Check for understanding of the chapter. Ask for any questions.
6. Invite questions or comments to begin discussion or select from the questions below.

Discussion Questions

7. How do you understand the idea of submission or obedience to God? Can you name some examples in your own life or in history of people you would see as having truly lived in obedience to God? What qualities do they have? What makes surrendering to God so difficult? And what helps?
8. What do you see as the benefits of regular prayer or meditation? Are you more comfortable using memorized or spontaneous prayer? What would you see as a real-life, practical “prayer plan?”
9. Have you experienced fasting and/or “giving things up” during Lent? If so, how has that experience helped you? Have you lost touch with it? Is there something you would like to try anew?
10. Have you ever attended an *iftar* meal during Ramadan? What was it like?
11. We often talk in terms of sharing “time, talent and treasure.” It would probably be more accurate to say we hear about them from the pulpit but don’t talk about them much among ourselves. What is your inspiration in deciding about time, talent and treasure? What do you think about the Muslim call to almsgiving? How do you think we can inspire one another to be generous?
12. Have you ever participated in a pilgrimage - or wanted to? Have you ever been in a place that felt somehow holy - and where do you think that sense came from? Share any stories you might have from your own pilgrimages or others you may know.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CENTRAL BELIEFS OF ISLAM

We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent inspiration to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.

Qur'an 4:163

In Chapter Two we examined the core *practices* that shape Muslim life across the globe. In contrast to the five Pillars of Islam, the six Articles of Faith express the core *beliefs* that constitute the religion of Islam. The list looks fairly familiar, at least at first glance. They are:

- Prophets
- Judgment
- Scripture
- Angels
- The Oneness of God
- The Will of God

In this chapter we'll examine both similarities and differences between Muslim and Christian beliefs. You may well be surprised by the level of similarity, but important differences about the divinity of Jesus remain a challenge.

Prophets

Muhammad did not consider himself to be a founder of a new religion but rather a reformer calling people back to the original message God revealed to Abraham. He believed Christians and Jews were generally well-intentioned but had distorted God's message over the centuries. Muslims revere many of the Old Testament prophets and consider Jesus also to be a great prophet (note the quote at the beginning of this chapter.) When observant Muslims mention the name of Jesus, Mary, Moses, Muhammad, or any other prophet, they will say, "Peace be upon her/him/them." The phrase is often said in Arabic and sometimes others in the room will join in the refrain.

Muslims have a deep and tender reverence for Jesus but they do not believe he is divine. They believe in the virgin birth and would say that God created Jesus without the benefit of a human father just as God created Adam and Eve without human parents. They believe in Jesus' healing miracles and that he is the Messiah who will come again on the Last Day. The Qur'an says "They neither killed nor crucified him - it was only made to appear so...Rather, God raised him up to Himself." (Q4:157-8) There is debate within the Muslim community on how to understand this passage; some Muslims interpret it to mean a taking up into heaven similar to Jesus' ascension. Muslims do not believe in Jesus' resurrection as Christians understand it.

Some Muslims distinguish between *messengers* - those who gave a Scripture to their followers - and *prophets*. Moses, Jesus, David and Muhammad are messengers. Most Muslims don't "rank order" their prophets, considering them all of equal stature. They do believe, however, that Muhammad is the last prophet and that his message, unlike earlier prophetic calls, was clearly intended for everyone and not just for a Chosen People. From the beginning Islam was remarkable for its diversity.



Judgment

Like Christians, Muslims believe we will be held accountable for the decisions we make in this life and that the quality of our afterlife depends on those decisions. The standards of judgment come from the Qur'an, the *hadith* - stories of Muhammad's actions and example - and *shari'a* law, which developed over the course of centuries and will be discussed in the next chapter. The Qur'an says, "Be they Muslims, Jews, Christians or Sabians, those who

believe in God and the Last Day and who do good have their reward with their Lord. They have nothing to fear, and they will not sorrow.” (Q2:62)

The Muslim understanding of the Last Days differs from ours in details but the substance is the same. There will be a time of great suffering as people of the world stray ever farther from God’s ways. A cataclysmic war will be fought between the forces of good and evil. Muslims believe Jesus will lead the armies of God in the last battle, and there will then be peace upon the land.

Muslims believe in a state called *barzakh* which is quite similar to the Catholic understanding of Purgatory (Protestants do not accept the concept of Purgatory.) Muslims believe that at our death judgment will be made as to our ultimate destination: heaven (for Muslims usually translated as “paradise”) or hell. No one will enter paradise or hell until the Last Day, but in the meantime for some there will be a time of suffering because of actions committed during physical life on earth. Muslims pray and perform good deeds on behalf of loved ones in *barzakh*.

As in Christian history, some teachers and some periods in Muslim history have emphasized a harsher standard of judgment and others have emphasized God’s compassion and mercy. Isolated verses can be pulled out of both the Bible and the Qur’an to justify either interpretation. Wisdom comes from studying the whole of our Scripture as we try to hear God’s guidance.

The Oneness of God

The oneness and sovereignty of God are at the essence of Islamic belief, as they are of Christianity and Judaism. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims worship the God revealed to Abraham. Muslims, like Jews, take exception to the Christian claim of Christ’s divinity. As we noted in the first chapter, Muhammad lived amidst remarkable religious diversity. He knew Christians and Jews; Zoroastrians and Sabians, who were among the very earliest monotheists (believers in one God); and many types of polytheists. Particularly because of the religious diversity in Mecca, Muhammad needed to be very clear about his definitions. While the Qur’an explicitly states respect for Jews and Christians, it is equally clear in distinguishing Muslim from Christian belief. Muslim declarations about God often specify: God is one, is not begotten and does not beget, and has no partners. This clearly differentiates Islam from Christian creeds which declare Jesus as the only-begotten Son of the Father. The divinity of Jesus is the core difference between Muslims and Christians, as it is between Christians and Jews.

Islam, like Judaism, forbids creating any images of God in order to prevent followers from falling back into idolatry or limiting God to any particular human imagination. Some Muslims believe creating any images of Muhammad or any other prophets violates this principle, but there is debate on this issue.

Scripture

Muslims, like Christians, disagree in their interpretation of Scripture, but most believe the Qur'an was dictated word-for-word in Arabic by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad. Beginning when Muhammad was 40, the revelations continued until his death 23 years later. The earlier revelations, which occurred in the city of Mecca, were more exclusively spiritual in tone; later chapters, occurring primarily in Medina, dealt with more practical matters. These later chapters play a role similar to that of the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an is not divided into books. References to the Qur'an simply give chapter and verse, appearing as "Qur'an 4:163" or "Q4:163," meaning chapter 4 verse 163. Each chapter also has a name, and some references will give the name instead of a chapter number. Muslims consider texts in Arabic to be the only truly authentic source; translations are referred to as "interpretations." Muslims believe the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospels were inspired by God but were corrupted over the centuries through various translations into other languages. This may influence their insistence on study from the original Arabic.

It is believed the Qur'an was written down within 20 years of the death of Muhammad; the gap between Jesus' life and the writing down of the Gospels is just a little longer. Like Jesus, Muhammad lived in a time when most people were illiterate and therefore trained their memories to an astonishing degree. To this day it is common for young Muslims to memorize the entire Qur'an. Thus oral memory is a more reliable resource than most modern people would think.

The Qur'an can be confusing for non-Muslims for several reasons. Where the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles provide a chronological history of Jesus and the early days of the church, the Qur'an does not offer a biography of Muhammad or his followers and is not arranged chronologically. Rather, it is a work of poetry.

Poetry was of great importance in Arab culture, and those who are fluent in Arabic say the poetic language of the Qur'an is remarkably beautiful. Reading the Qur'an in Arabic might be compared to reading Shakespeare, both because of its poetic character and because

these older, classical versions of our languages can be difficult for us to understand today. (Modern poetry is confusing enough for many of us.)

As with our own Scripture, some verses are apparently contradictory and present endless opportunity for reflection and debate. In addition, Islam has been around for centuries and spans the globe, so naturally it has different expressions and emphases in various parts of the world and in different times in history. Similarly, a portrait of Christianity in France during the Middle Ages, for example, would look very different from a view of Christians in China under Communist rule or Christianity in the U.S. Each picture is a snapshot of the Church as lived out in real time, resting on the same foundation of Scripture and doctrine but with differing expressions. Islam also has a varied and complex history, and applying the Qur'an to today's world is as challenging as staying true to Jesus' message for the twenty-first century.

Because Muhammad lived more than five centuries after Jesus, there are more extensive historical records about his life and times. In addition to the Qur'an, Muslims give great authority to the *hadith*, stories passed down about Muhammad and his followers. These accounts were written down over the course of a century and a half, and there is internal debate about which versions are truly authoritative.

Angels

Muslims believe in angels but understand their nature differently than do Christians. Christian tradition holds angels have free will but long ago declared their allegiance either for or against God. Some refused to submit out of pride; Lucifer, which means Light-Bearer, was one of the most beautiful angels but tragically rebelled. In contrast, Muslims believe humans are superior to angels, and Satan rebelled when God commanded the angels to bow down to humans. Both traditions speak to pride and a refusal to submit.

The Old and the New Testament are filled with angels. They are called messengers of God and frequently help humans in other ways. In Gen. 16:7 an angel helps Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, and promises her son will be the father of a great nation. Angels ministered to Jesus after his forty days in the desert, and spoke to the women at the empty tomb.

Some angel names appear in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Michael appears in the books of Daniel, Jude and Revelations, and is referred to as *Mika'il* by Muslims. Both the Gospel of Luke and the Qur'an tell the story of Gabriel (*Jibra'il*) appearing to Zechariah and Mary to announce Jesus' birth. Islam and Christianity hold that the angel Raphael (*Rafa'il*)

will announce the end of time. While Catholic tradition assigns each person one guardian angel, Muslims believe we each have at least two angels as guides and recordkeepers.

Muslims believe in the existence of *jinn*s, sometimes translated *genies* in the West. Contrary to popular belief, *jinn*s do not live in bottles. Rather, they are spirits of a lesser rank than angels that roam the world and sometimes interact with humans. They can be good or bad, and might be compared to legendary Irish faeries.

The Will of God

All religions struggle with the tension between a good, loving God and the tragic evil and suffering in the world. Why do some people make such terrible choices? Why do a few people appear to be so thoroughly bad, and how did they get that way? Why does God allow accidents and natural disasters? Is everything that happens the will of God, or is the definition of evil precisely that which is *against* the will of God?

Christians as well as Muslims have difficulty handling the subject. You will find a range of answers in both faiths. One way to tackle the question is to break it down into three components:

- God's knowledge:

If God *knows* something bad is going to happen before it comes to pass, does that mean God therefor makes it happen and in a sense wants it to happen? Or does God function like a person watching a movie for the second time, who knows how things will turn out but did not control the process.

- God's power:

If God *has the power* to intervene and stop bad things from happening but doesn't, does that mean God doesn't care or that God wants it to happen or even makes it happen?

- Human nature and free will

If God is in control, how can humans have free will?

There is great debate in the Christian world as we try to come to terms with these questions. Followers of the Protestant reformer John Calvin believe in predestination: that God ordained from the beginning those who will be saved and those who will be lost. Other denominations teach that human beings are basically good but flawed, and that much of the evil in the world comes from God allowing free will and the suffering that comes when freedom is exercised badly. We would say that God *allows* bad things to happen rather than *making* bad things happen, at least most of the time. The doctrine of original sin names the tendency to sin that we inherit or absorb from others, which makes good decisions more difficult while not completely getting in the way of our free will.

Muslims, like Christians, debate the exact level of God's control in the world. Mainstream Islam would say that God has a great deal of control, but that humans still exercise free will and with God's help can live moral lives. Christians, Muslims and Jews are together in our

belief that

God loves us and leads us even in the midst of our own limited understanding of God's ways.



Discussion and Reflection

Chapter Three

For Leaders

1. Begin the session with prayer.
2. Review the guidelines for discussion.
3. If available, watch from 8:50 to 19:15 of *Christianity and Islam, Discover Islam* series.
4. Ask for any questions from the reading. Check for understanding. These topics are not easy; affirm the group for being willing to tackle them.

For Discussion

5. Did this chapter surprise you? Is there anything you'd like to hear more about?
6. What is your own understanding of God? Do you see God as a personal God who watches over you? Intervenes in your life? Answers your prayers? Do you feel comfort from God in times of distress?
7. What is your understanding of inspiration when it comes to Scripture? Do you believe the Bible was dictated word-for-word by God? Inspired but not always correct in the details? Do you think something has been lost or put at risk as Scripture is translated from the original languages into English or other modern languages? Do you think God inspired Muhammad?
8. The Old Testament prophets generally had the tough job of reminding people, including kings, that they were getting away from God's call to them. Are there people you would consider to be "small-p" prophets today? Do you have any favorite prophets in the Old Testament?
9. If a non-Christian asked you to explain Jesus, what would you say? Throughout history Christians have wrestled both with his message and with understanding who he really was and is. How do you understand Jesus' divinity?
10. How do these differences in beliefs between Christians and Muslims matter? Do we live differently, relate to God differently because we believe that Jesus is God and a mediator between God and humans?
11. What is your understanding of judgment and afterlife?
12. How do you explain why bad things happen to good people? How does your faith help you cope?

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN IN ISLAM

In this chapter we will talk about:

- The difference between religion and culture
- What the Qur'an and the Bible say about women
- The history of women in the U.S.
- The experience of women in Muslim-majority countries
- Shari'a law and Catholic canon law

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE

When you think of Muslim women, what comes to mind? To many, images appear of women completely covered from public view, unable to access education and health care let alone dignity and power. While this holds true for women in some Muslim-majority countries, the issue is much more complex than most of us think. Likewise, the history of women in the West is more troubled than many, especially younger, people realize.

Any religious community is shaped by its culture. Culture does not just impact the language we speak, the music we sing or the clothes we wear. It also affects our openness to truly hearing and understanding the word of God and our willingness to respond.

Too often we are blind to the limitations of our own culture-shaped perspective. There's a story of a couple of young fish encountering an older fish as they head home from an afternoon in the middle of the lake. The mature fish wishes them well and then asks, "How's the water today?" The youngsters swim a hundred yards away before one turns to his companion and asks, "What's water?" The point of the story is that, simply because we've never been



outside our “water,” we’re usually unaware of how conditions around us shape our view of the world. If you’ve ever travelled someplace and suddenly realized for the first time that, for example, some people eat cheese for dessert (France) and other people put gravy on French fries (Canada), you’ve had the opportunity to realize that some things you assumed were always done a certain way - aren’t.

Without our even being aware of it, our perception of women’s lives is colored both by media images of oppressed Muslim women in other countries and a surprising amnesia about the recent condition of women in the US.

In this chapter and the next you’ll be invited to take a look at the water you swim in. We’ll encourage you to notice some facts about our own history that can be painful to face. This chapter and the next take hard work and a willingness to take discomfort, but without looking squarely at both Christian and Muslim histories we can’t possibly come to an accurate understanding of the Muslim world or our own. This particular part of our study requires humility, courage and generosity - one of the reasons we always open our discussions with prayer.

ASSEMBLING THE PUZZLE

Examining the subject of women and Islam is a bit like putting together a puzzle. We can’t simply work in a straight line from point A to point B. There are several intersecting pieces that need to be acknowledged individually and then wrestled into place. In the next few pages we’ll lay out the pieces and then encourage and guide you as you assemble the puzzle for yourself.

Puzzle Piece #1: Oppression of women has been the norm throughout human history. This is not the result of some dark male conspiracy. Whenever resources were scarce and physical survival depended on strength and physical aggression - which was most of the time - women were at a disadvantage because of childbearing and women’s smaller size and lesser physical strength. Historically when a group has a distinct power advantage over another group and the difference lasts for a significant period of time, the dominant group as a whole tends to abuse their power. Of course, there are countless



examples of kind and loving relationships between men and women over the centuries, but overall the imbalance of power has been damaging.

Piece #2: From the beginning Scripture and religion have been used to justify this imbalance. For example, in Genesis God says,

“I will put enmity between you (Adam) and the woman.”
He addressed Eve saying, “Your urge shall be for your husband
and he shall rule over you.” Gen. 3:15-16

It’s interesting to note that these verses are a punishment God administers because of Adam and Eve’s rebellion, not a part of God’s original creation. Apparently this is not God’s fundamental plan for relations between the sexes.

(Side note: In the Bible Adam blames his sin on Eve, while in the Qur’an’s telling of the same story Adam and Eve share the blame equally.)

St. Paul says,

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;
nor was man created for woman, but woman for man;
for this reason a woman should have a sign of authority
(a headcovering) on her head. 1 Cor. 11:9-11

This is a hard passage that we’d like to gloss over. Today most of us attribute it to the culture of the time and don’t consider it binding in today’s world. Yet many people have used Bible passages such as this to justify sending women back into abusive marriages, preventing them from teaching men in church settings, preventing them from becoming educated, requiring them to promise to obey their husbands in marriage when husbands were under no such requirement, etc. Some Christian churches today still promote highly restrictive practices for women.



Piece #3: Women were elected to head Muslim-majority countries long before such a thing was considered remotely possible within the United States. The picture at right is of Benazir Bhutto, educated at Harvard and Oxford and first elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988 at the age of 35. Although her political career was tumultuous, she was democratically re-elected several times to a position of great power.

Piece #4: The Qur'an is absolutely stunning for its time - or any time up to the late twentieth century - in its protection of women. The Qur'an outlawed infanticide, which was commonly practiced against female infants (selective abortion favoring boys still occurs in some parts of the non-Muslim world today.) It provided for women to be able to control property, to witness in court (although two women were needed to counter one man's testimony), to have a say in choosing a mate, and to have their dowry returned to them in the case of divorce. Divorced women were entitled to maintenance.

Piece #5: Women in Europe and the United States in recent years have made great gains, and many of us have come to take these advances for granted. But note the word *recent*. Here are a few facts about life for women in the U.S.:

- Married women gained the right to legally control property in state-by-state battles during the 1860's and 1870's. Until that time women had no right to control the property they brought to a marriage unless the husband died. In the case of divorce the property stayed with the man.
- American women were not allowed to show their ankles and were expected to hide any outline of their legs until after World War I. Just imagine the challenge - and physical danger - of trying to ride a horse sidesaddle because riding astride was considered indecent.
- In the 1950's women were expected to quit their jobs when they became visibly pregnant.
- The first battered women's shelter in the U.S. was opened in 1973. Before that time women had few options to escape abusive marriages. Abuse short of murder was rarely prosecuted in court. Even when convicted, men's sentences were (and sometimes still are) light.
- As late as the 1970's women, if they attended college at all, were expected to study to be teachers, nurses or social workers. A standing joke was that women only went to college to get their MRS (Mrs.) degree. Women who attempted to go to engineering, law or medical school faced serious discrimination.
- On average US women today make \$.79 for each \$1.00 earned by men.

Piece #6: After the death of his wife Khadijah, Muhammad took several wives. Polygamy was standard for the time and also practiced by Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon. Some of these marriages were for the sake of political alliances with other groups,

while others offered protection to widows. Marriages were also arranged for political reasons by European royalty into the 20th century; both boys and girls in arranged marriages were often betrothed at very young ages. Until recently very early marriage was common everywhere.

Piece #7: Customs vary from mosque to mosque and country to country regarding women's participation in worship. Muslim women are often positioned behind men during prayer. There is a very practical reason for this. Given the sequence of movements that Muslims perform during prayer and the close proximity in which they pray, it is a matter of simple modesty and comfort for women to be positioned behind men.

However, some mosques require women to enter by a separate door, to worship and even eat separately. Orthodox Jewish synagogues also practice segregation of the sexes during worship. Interestingly, the 1917 *Catholic Code of Canon Law* states:

1. It is desirable that, consistent with ancient discipline, women be separated from men in church.

2. Men, in a church or outside a church, while they are assisting at sacred rites, shall be bare-headed, unless the approved mores of the people or peculiar circumstances of things determine otherwise; women, however, shall have a covered head and be modestly dressed, especially when they approach the table of the Lord.

Canon 1262

Severe restrictions on women, wherever they are found, often are accompanied by lost dignity, freedom and decisionmaking.

Piece #8: The headcovering, or *hijab*, is often considered an identifying mark for Muslim women, although many Muslim women do not cover their heads and many non-Muslim women do. Women throughout history and across the globe have worn headcoverings. Sometimes this garb was simply a matter of style or practicality, while in other times and places the headcovering was symbolic. In Muhammad's time veils were a sign of wealth.

Until the mid-1960's, no self-respecting Catholic woman or girl would enter a church without a headcovering, even if she had to resort to plopping a Kleenex on her head. While Sisters' religious dress may have looked odd to non-Catholic Christians, in the past these veiled women were often among the best-educated and most independent women in society.

Piece #9: Without a doubt, women suffer terribly in some Muslim-majority countries. While religion is called on to justify these horrific practices, they actually existed long before

Islam and are a product of culture rather than religion. For example, there is no justification for female circumcision in the Qur'an, any more than the Bible requires women to submit to being beaten by their husbands. In countries where female circumcision is commonly practiced, Christian as well as Muslim women are often victims.

Freeing any group from oppression is a long and arduous process, and improving the plight of women in many parts of the world will require generosity and steadfast dedication. Those who battle these injustices find courage and hope in our common faith in a God who created and loves all of us.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century he made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire. For the next fourteen centuries the Church and the state in Europe were closely linked, often with unfortunate results. The "divine right of kings" claimed that disobeying a king was equivalent to rebellion against God. Kings, popes and bishops clashed in power struggles that had nothing to do with Jesus' teaching or bringing about the reign of God. The Middle Ages and Renaissance were times of great saints - and great darkness.

The European Enlightenment in the seventeenth century created a desire for democracy, and some thinkers began to ask for a separation of church and state. This vision emerged in Europe in a struggle lasting several centuries; many lives were lost in the process.

The United States was founded by people seeking freedom from religious and political oppression in Europe. Over time we developed a legal system providing that all religions could be practiced freely and no one religion was ever to become the official state religion. Over the last few centuries we have wrestled with how to legally protect individuals' rights to religious freedom while making sure the government neither favors nor oppresses any one religion. Shifting demographics in the U.S. today create new challenges in understanding and applying this delicate balance.

RELIGIOUS POLICIES AND LAW

Over the centuries both Islam and Christian denominations have developed systems of governance.

Christian Governance

Many Christian denominations create policies and laws to guide selection of leaders, requirements for membership, dispute resolution and dealing with members who have strayed. These guidelines operate very much like secular (nonreligious) law but address internal denominational issues. The distinction between these laws or policies and U.S. laws is very clear to us.

This was not always the case. Many American colonists attempted to make their own denomination the law of the land. While many came to America fleeing bloody religious wars in Europe, some saw the new country as an opportunity to make their own group come out on top. While physical and legal competition among Protestant denominations eventually faded, Protestant/Catholic hostility persisted for centuries. Most older Americans remember tension and hostility among denominations. Our current legal protections around religion are hard-won.

During John F. Kennedy's campaign for president in 1960, prominent pastor Harold Ockenga of Park Street Church in Boston said the following:

Are we moving into an era of Roman Catholic domination of America? This is the avowed aim of the hierarchy. If and when this becomes a fact, will the principles of Roman Catholic political theory be applied? Will there be a denial of rights, freedom and privileges for non-Roman Catholics? If so, should we aid and abet this situation by electing a President who has more power to advance such a goal than any other person?

...The opinion expressed in this message is not isolated but represents a wide segment of American thought on a subject which is dividing the American people in a time when we ought to be reunited.

These fears had some basis in history. Until the 1870's 75% of Catholic bishops and most priests were foreign-born. Catholics debated intensely among themselves about the wisdom of European-language parishes and assimilating into American culture. Some did in fact hope to make America Catholic. Official Vatican documents continued to resist the separation of church and state until well into the 20th century. Yet neither the Pope nor the local Catholic church is running the United States.

Shar'ia Law

Shar'i'a law is similar to church law in that it is a code of law developed over centuries to govern the life of the Muslim faith community. Shari'a law is made by human beings, and varies in its faithfulness to the message of the Qur'an and the hadith. Similarly, Christian countries have passed laws in the past that go directly against Jesus' message.

The primary difference is that unlike most Western countries many Muslim-majority countries have not separated religion and government. Some have tried and failed. It took centuries for Europe to develop a workable model of church-state separation; the Islamic world's efforts began much more recently. Muslim-majority countries may or may not decide to move toward a separation of church and state similar to that of Western countries.

Religion/State Relations in the US

While the state protects the churches' right to govern their own internal affairs, church law does not take precedence over secular (government) law. At the same time, individuals are free to act politically out of convictions based in their faith tradition. The American civil rights movement, for example, was strongly influenced by the religious faith of its leaders, most of whom were Christian or Jewish and many of whom were clergy. In the struggle around abortion, individual Christians can be politically active in trying to pass laws in accordance with their beliefs, but no denomination can as an institution outlaw abortion for all Americans.

When considering shari'a law two things should be remembered:

- 1) What is shown in the news as shari'a law is often a harsh pick-and-choose interpretation of Islamic tradition. True Islamic teaching does not mandate atrocities any more than the Bible condones the witch-burnings that happened in Salem, MA.
- 2) There is no more danger of shari'a becoming the law of the land in the United States than there is of Catholic canon law controlling U.S. legal processes. Some reasons:
 - The Constitution is clear about the separation of church and state and any attempt to impose shari'a law would be declared unconstitutional by the courts.
 - Muslims constitute 1% of the population. Even if they collectively attempted to institute shari'a law (which they would not) they could not win a majority.
 - Allowing schoolchildren to pray during the school day is protecting religious freedom, not imposing shari'a law. Requiring all children to join in Muslim prayer would be imposing shari'a law, and will never happen for the two reasons listed above.

Most Muslims come to the U.S. precisely because of our legal system, its regard for civil law and its protection from violence. Europeans and Americans needed centuries to find a system that worked to protect religious freedom for all. New Muslim immigrants may need some time to understand and adjust to the American way of governance. But the vast majority of American Muslims welcome the separation of church and state and the freedom it allows them to practice their own religion in harmony with their neighbors of other faiths.



Discussion and Reflection

Chapter Four

For Leaders

1. Open the session with prayer.
2. Review discussion guidelines.
3. Watch from 4:42 to 17:02 from *Women in Islam* from the *Discover Islam* series

Questions for Discussion

4. Much of what we find troubling about Islamic experience, such as the treatment of women in some settings, is actually a result of culture and not religion. Reflect for a moment on how culture and religion have shaped your outlook and experience - and how they've overlapped. For example, which of the following have had the greatest impact on you?

Being American

Your religious affiliation (if you have one)

Your gender

Your ethnicity

The region of the US you live in: Midwest/East/South/West, etc.

Your age

Whether you live in a city, small town, rural area

5. How do these perspectives affect how you view the world? Do you ever experience tension among them? For example, do you ever find that your ethnic heritage is different from the prevailing American way of doing things? Or that your Christian faith puts you out of sync with non-Christian friends or neighbors? How do you resolve the tension?
6. Have you seen the role of women change in your lifetime? In what ways? Do you see the changes as being positive? negative? mixed? In what way?
7. How do you come to terms with messages in Scripture or your denomination that give different privileges and status to men and women?
8. Do any of the facts about the history of women in the U.S. come as a surprise to you? If so, which ones? Does that change your perspective on the experience of Muslim women today?
9. Clearly there is a disconnect between what the Qur'an says and what some women experience in the name of Islam. The reality is tragic and needs to be changed. Do you see this disconnect differently after reflecting on our own complicated history?

CHAPTER FIVE

PEACE AND WAR

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Luke 23:34

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to them the other as well.

Matthew 5:39

*Overcome evil with what is good,
and your enemy will become your best friend.*

Qur'an 41:34

In this chapter we will:

Examine Christian just war theory and corresponding Islamic guidelines

See what the Bible and the Qur'an say about violence and peace

Look at "religious" terrorism

Remember and honor heroes of peace

People of faith have struggled with the tragedy of violence since Cain murdered his brother Abel in the fourth chapter of Genesis. We are torn between God's call to love our neighbor on the one hand and fear for our safety and that of those we love on the other. Christianity and Islam share noble ideals of compassion, forgiveness and generosity - and a history filled with instances of the exact opposite. At times we have been at war with one another, and at other times lives have been lost to internal religious wars on either side. There are also shining examples of peaceful cooperation and mutual support between Muslim and Christian communities. These episodes, and the heroes of faith who made them possible, give us hope.

JUST WAR PRINCIPLES

While some groups of Christians and Muslims have taken a pacifist position saying killing is never justified, most agree war is necessary under some circumstances. Each faith has come up with important principles to guide the conduct of war, struggling to reconcile its ugly reality with Scripture and tradition.

Christian Just War Theory

During the first few centuries after Jesus' death early Christians endured horrific persecution without fighting back. But the question of war was never far from people's minds and experience, and the Church never officially required all members to refrain from war. Over the years guidelines emerged which came to be known as "just war theory." (Theory in this sense means a working framework of thought, comparable to scientific molecular theory - not an educated guess as in "My theory about why my neighbor's children are so annoying.") Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century played major roles in articulating a Christian position. While there is much debate on the topic of war, this "just war" theory addresses:

- 1) the reasons for engaging in warfare and
- 2) the manner in which war should be conducted.

The requirements for a declaration of war *to be considered just* include:

- the war must be in self-defense
- the war must be for a just cause
- the war must be a last resort - all other forms of resolving the conflict must have been exhausted first
- there must be a reasonable chance of winning to justify the suffering and loss of life
- the loss and suffering inflicted in the cause of war must be in proportion to the benefit to be gained

The requirements for *waging war justly* include:

- acts of war must be directed only at combatants, not civilians
- the means of war must meet certain standards: no terrorism, no rape as a weapon of war, no chemical warfare, etc.
- war is to be declared formally by a competent authority and fair notice given of resumption of battle after a truce or treaty

The Muslim Perspective

There is remarkable similarity between Christian and Islamic “theology of war.” *Islamic Rulings on War*, a publication of the United States Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute, notes:

Understanding the importance of the classic Islamic texts and the ultimate goals of Islam itself—peace and social equity—will enable us to fight terrorism through information operations combined with other means. It will also permit us to better comprehend the views and options of our Muslim allies.

Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups seek to employ Islam and secure Islamic conquest for their own purposes and ignore the emphases that the sacred texts place on restraint and justice. Osama Bin Laden and other extremists want Muslims to believe that Muhammad took up the sword to kill disbelievers, while Islamic texts show that Muhammad resorted to fighting only in defense of his new society in Medina. Religious scholars must work more assiduously to discredit this version of Islamic history. ...The emphasis on justice, moderation, and restraint long predates our era. Hopefully, it will bring Muslims closer to other faiths and heal the fissures created by the extremists’ brand of Islamic warfare.

Islamic Rulings on War, Strategic Studies Institute p. 29-30

The report quotes Abu Bakr, the first Caliph to lead the Islamic community after Muhammad’s death:

Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy’s flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.

Islamic Rulings on War, p. 22

Other classical Islamic sources list similar moral guidelines. Some people would argue that very few modern wars meet either the Christian or the Muslim criteria for justice, and if we in fact actively applied these guidelines the world would largely be at peace. The tension between what our faith teaches and how we conduct ourselves is nowhere more evident than in the area of war.

Conflicting Messages in Scripture

Both Christian and Muslim Scripture have conflicting messages about war and peace, forgiveness and retaliation. We all know Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, to walk the extra mile, to forgive those who hurt us. We know he told Peter to put up his sword in the garden of Gethsemane and healed the servant's ear that Peter had cut off. And yet our beloved Psalms contain passages like this one, directed at the people of Babylon who held the Jews captive:

Blessed the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock.

Psalm 137:9

This passage is remarkably brutal, and there are other similarly bloodthirsty passages in our Scripture - not many, but enough to require us to pay attention. This sentiment is clearly out of step with Jesus' life and message. It's tempting just to skim over these passages and pretend they aren't there. At the very least we need to acknowledge their existence when someone waves before us a hostile, aggressive text from the Qur'an.

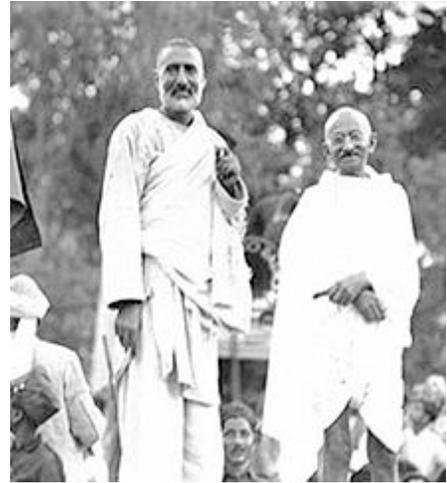
Just as Christians draw guidance from Jesus' example, Muslims are inspired by the actions of Muhammad. While it is true that Muhammad waged war, his conduct was remarkably restrained, particularly in light of the culture of the time. The Arab world in the seventh century, like the world in which our own Scripture was written, was violent. Battles were fought hand-to-hand, the defeated routinely massacred; women and children were killed, taken into slavery, or sold.

For more than a decade in Mecca Muhammad and his followers endured persecution without striking back. After moving to Medina he set up a political community where everyone pledged to protect one another regardless of race or religion. This may have been the first such legal community in human history. Muhammad and the people of Medina fought only defensively to protect themselves from outside attack.

When Muhammad finally returned to Mecca he took the city without bloodshed and, contrary to custom, did not exact vengeance on his former enemies. He set up protections for Jews and Christians to practice their religion freely as long as they did not ridicule him or his teaching. Non-Muslims were assessed a tax to be used for the common good, just as Muslims were expected to annually contribute 2.5% of their estate to be used to care for the poor and vulnerable and to free slaves.

One tragic incident occurred while the community was living in Medina and the Meccans were periodically attacking the city. One group of Jews that had committed themselves to the Covenant of Medina committed treason and attacked Muhammad's forces from the rear in the midst of a battle. In this instance Muhammad followed prevailing custom and all the soldiers in that group were killed.

Muslims consider Muhammad's example binding in the same way Christians see Jesus' example as binding. As Christians we clearly cannot see Muhammad and Jesus as equivalent figures. On the other hand, if we compare Muhammad to one of our prophets, the dust begins to settle. We don't expect apostles or prophets to be perfect. Many characters in the Old Testament took multiple wives. David even arranged to have Uriah killed so he could marry Uriah's wife. While traveling to Egypt, Abraham told his wife Sarah to say she was his sister because he was afraid someone would kill him in order to marry her. He allowed Sarah to be taken into the Pharaoh's house, and she was not freed until God stepped in. (Gen. 12:10-20.) Peter denied Jesus three times. Virtually every major character in the Old and New Testament, including some of the greatest leaders and prophets, made some extremely questionable decisions.



We are not being asked to convert to Islam, but rather to see God at work in Muslims in the present and in the past. God has spoken to and worked with many people in history who have been less than perfect - including us. We can recognize God at work without necessarily agreeing with or admiring every choice Muhammad or other Muslim leaders have made.

THE QUESTION OF TERRORISM

The vivid images of the events of September 11, 2001, and ongoing headlines about groups committing atrocities in the name of Islam, make understanding the role of violence in Islam especially challenging for us. These ongoing attacks are facts, horrible facts that show no signs of diminishing in the near future. The question is: are the people committing these acts representative of Islam?

We have already established that terrorism and other brutal methods of war are forbidden by the Qur'an. Many so-called Muslim terrorists today know very little about Islam, even though they may use Islamic slogans to justify their actions. For example, the brothers who took part in the horrific Paris bombing in 2015 owned a bar where alcohol was served and drugs were dealt, even though Islam clearly prohibits consuming alcohol or other intoxicants. A number of others arrested in terrorism investigations show little knowledge of Islam and flagrantly violate its principles on drugs, alcohol and sex as well as violence.

Many poor people in Muslim-majority countries are illiterate and can't read the Qur'an in their own language, let alone in Arabic. They are particularly vulnerable to being recruited by a leader who promises a better life while using the Qur'an for his own ends. Groups like ISIS bear roughly the same relationship to Islam as the KKK or the Branch Davidians bear to Christianity.

The term *jihad* has taken on a highly charged, negative meaning. The actual translation of *jihad* is *struggle*; it is more broadly considered to refer to the internal struggle for each of us to surrender and live life as God would have us live. An ancient story says that Muhammad turned to his soldiers as they were returning home victorious from war and said, "We have just won the little *jihad*. The big *jihad* begins now."

Like the word *crusade*, *jihad* can refer either to a moral, spiritual effort or to a physical war against an enemy. There is much debate within the Muslim community about when physical war should be waged and who is obligated to fight, just as there is within our own Christian community. But we can be very sure that *jihad* does NOT condone terrorism or the kind of hate-filled violence we see perpetrated by some.

HEROES OF PEACE

When we think of outstanding examples of peace a few names typically come to mind: Martin Luther King, Jr. here in the U.S.; Gandhi in India; Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa.

Few of us know about Abdul Ghaffar Khan, nicknamed “the frontier Gandhi,” a Muslim who led 100,000 “Soldiers of God” in a nonviolent struggle against Britain. Recruiting from the rugged frontier area that is now home to the Taliban, Badshah Khan gathered an army that wore uniforms, performed drills - but carried no weapons. He and his followers maintained nonviolence for more than twenty years in the face of incredible brutality on the part of the British. Khan spent a third of his 92 years in prison. His selflessness and his commitment to nonviolence rested in his Muslim faith.

Badshah Khan’s incredible commitment is mirrored across the Muslim world today. Thousands of people are today sacrificing their lives for the cause of peace. Without media coverage, in the face of unimaginable odds, they continue bravely and generously to lay down their lives for the common good.

We need to pay attention to these heroes of nonviolence - to study them, celebrate them, and follow their example. Groups like ISIS and Boko Haram engage in unimaginably cruel and violent actions on a massive scale. The threat they pose must not be underestimated. Our challenge is to discover responses that are effective, undertaken in the light of God’s grace, and courageously carried on. Our best hope for success lies in aligning ourselves with other people of faith and good will as we collectively work toward creating a more peaceful world.

Our joint salvation and the survival of humanity depend on it.

Discussion and Reflection

Chapter Five

1. Open the session with prayer. Place special emphasis on asking God's guidance in handling this evening's topic.
2. Read through the discussion guidelines. Emphasize any that may need particular attention.
3. Watch TED talk *Pay Attention to Nonviolence* (search for the title on youtube) or from 4:45-9:00 and 18:50 to the end of *Islam: A Faith Hijacked* from the *Discover Islam* series.
4. Check for questions in understanding. Try to keep this part of the session focused on simple clarification. Focus on each of the following questions individually. Discussion is more likely to be fruitful if participants confine themselves to one topic at a time. Most will be grateful if you make this guideline clear from the beginning and gently redirect when the conversation drifts into another aspect of this complicated and important topic.
5. First review just war theory. To familiarize the group with the principles, do a rapid check-in applying the theory to World War II. The goal is not to debate the points but rather to see how they might be applied, and WWII is one of the least controversial wars in our history.
6. Review the remarkable document from the U.S. Army's War College site. Are you surprised to hear this statement from a U. S. military source? Does it change your perception of Muslims and war?
7. Review the section on *jihad*. What do you think about this perspective on *jihad*? Where do you personally find your greatest struggle in doing the will of God? What is your understanding of the term "crusade"?
8. Are there any passages on peace or violence in either the Bible or the Qur'an that you find troublesome? Inspiring? How do you reconcile the apparent contradictions in some of the passages?
9. What would you call groups like the KKK that cite Scripture to back their action against blacks, Jews, Catholics and Muslims? Would you call them Christian extremists? Something else? What is a parallel term for terrorists who call themselves Muslim?

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT NEXT?

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Mt 5:7-10

We only know what we do.

Francis of Assisi

In this chapter we will:

Consider God's call to each of us individually

Examine ways we can learn more, build relationships,
and advocate for respect and peace

We've covered a lot of ground since we started this study. As Francis of Assisi reminds us, new knowledge invites us to new action and a transformed way of being in the world. Many of us are learning about Islam because of rising tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims. News programming reports almost daily on incidents threatening the peace of our country. What then are we to do?

A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE

We began this study with the story of the good Samaritan. Who were the Samaritans? The Samaritans were Jews who had not been caught up in the Babylonian exile and as a result did not accept the teachings developed in Babylon during the exile. Jews and Samaritans shared a common Scripture, a common God, a substantially similar set of teachings. Yet they hated one another. Sound familiar? Perhaps there's a special message for us in Jesus' choice of an example for his story. Sometimes the most painful conflicts occur with those closest to us.

In addition to challenging us to expand our circle of compassion, the story of the good Samaritan calls out the difference between talking a good game and actually taking a risk and generously living up to our beliefs. We all have different gifts and opportunities, and different stages of life offer varying levels of space for action. But Jesus' call to lay down our lives for one another is clear, and he never said following him would be easy. Change only comes when a community decides to dig deep and step out. Only we can know what God is asking each one of us to do today, and the only way we can learn that is to look God squarely in the eye, let go, ask for guidance, and then pay attention. Whatever direction we choose, our action needs to be sustained and guided by prayer and strengthened by God's love for us and those around us.

POSSIBILITIES

No one of us can fix all the divisions in our world today, but we can all do something. Never underestimate the ripple effect. We never know when an action we take bears fruit down the road, perhaps touching someone we've never even met. This, too, is an example of grace.

We can take action in three ways:

We can learn more and help others learn

We can build relationships between Muslims and Christians

We can take action to advocate for peace and for

respectful treatment of our Muslim neighbors

Congregations Together for Peace, found at www.ctfpmn.org has a broad range of resources to help you toward next steps. Working toward interfaith understanding and peace rests in education, building relationships and taking action to stand up for peace.

Learn More

After reading this book you have enough basic information to carry you through most situations and conversations. For more information or inspiration, try:

What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam - John Esposito. Thorough and easy to read. Check out lectures, classes and other learning opportunities in your community, if they're available. Go - and bring a friend.

Invite a speaker to your congregation, or organize a group to study this book. In Minnesota, the Islamic Resource Group has excellent speakers who will come at no charge. They can be found at www.irgmn.org

There are some good youtube videos out there - and a lot of terrible ones.

An excellent resource is *Out of Context*, a series of short videos capturing an interview with Imam Omar Suleimon, one of today's peace heroes. It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=026pU2dnlhM&list=PLutdSTmJ7bAJQaNrfGlijtVLSdCERufni> or search Out of Context Omar on youtube.

Build Relationships

If Muslims live in your area, reach out to start new relationships or deepen old ones: Invite a neighbor over for tea or a meal. (Remember Muslim restrictions on drinking alcohol and eating pork or non-*halal* meat.)

Some mosques invite non-Muslims to join them during Ramadan to share a meal or to other events. Look for an invitation in your community and join your neighbors.

Propose a joint service project with your parish, school or youth group and a Muslim community. Working side-by-side can be a great way to open up informal conversations.

Form an interfaith sharing group. More information is available on the Congregations Together for Peace website.

Sponsor an interfaith prayer service. Be sure to include all invited faith communities in your planning. Resources and a sample prayer service are available at www.ctfpmn.org

Advocate for Peace and Fair Treatment

Contact your school district to learn if teachers have been trained in handling Islamophobia in schools. If not, ask for an inservice session; help find resources if necessary.

Notice if there is discrimination against Muslims in your workplace - and speak up. Contact your legislators about ensuring fair treatment of Muslims and protecting their safety.

Share this book with others. It can be downloaded at www.ctfpmn.org

Have a phrase prepared to use if you encounter anti-Muslim conversation. Don't argue, but speak up for fairness and respect. You can say, "That makes me uncomfortable," or "That's not my experience," or

Read the *Being Safe Harbor* booklet on the Congregations Together for Peace site. Share it with others.

Discussion, Reflection - and Commitment

Chapter Six

For Discussion Leaders

1. Begin the session with prayer.
2. Review the discussion guidelines. Especially encourage participants to speak for themselves alone. This session is not intended to lay burdens on one another but rather to consider *for ourselves* what we might be called to do.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

3. Are you surprised to hear about the tension among Christian denominations? Ask some elders in your community if they have any stories to share.
4. Are you interested in learning more about Islam? Or about your own faith? What are some questions you'd like to explore? What resources do you need? Where could you find them?
5. Do you know any Muslims? Is there a step you could take to build or deepen a relationship? (Yes, this can be awkward, but it's important.)
6. Do you encounter negative talk about Muslims or action toward them? Where is it likely to occur? Is there a specific action you could take? Check out the *Being Safe Harbor* handout found at Congregations Together for Peace for some guidance. Remember the goal is to win allies, not arguments.
7. What is a prayer commitment that would help you stay hopeful and positive as you move forward? What other support could help?

IN CLOSING

We are an Easter people, a people of hope. We live in difficult times - but we have also discovered a new and perhaps unexpected family of sisters and brothers who love God and this world.

God is good.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

John 14:27

Asalaamu alaikum. (Peace be with you)

Walaikum salam. (And also with you.)

Traditional Muslim greeting

Image credits, all Creative Commons license except Cover and p. 16:

Cover image, iStock Photo, fatcamera

p. 14, Kate Coleman

p. 15, Dreamstime; photo available for purchase from Dreamstime only

p. 16, Al Jazeera English, Flickr

p. 23, Fiona, Flickr

p. 26, Steve Evans, Flickr

p. 26, Nate Pesce, Flickr

p. 36, Luis Cereza, Flickr

p. 38, innocent_tauruscian, Flickr

p. 40, wisegie, Flickr

Bibliographic notes:

p. 43 Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Presidential Campaign Files, 1960. Issues. Religious Issue Files of James Wine, 1960. Religious literature: Ockenga, Harold John

p. 48 <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB588.pdf>, retrieved July 2, 2017

About the Author

Connie Fourné is a retired high school Faith Formation Director and religion teacher. She has received national awards both as a writer and as an educator.

She has presented nationally and in Canada, and in retirement is active in promoting positive Christian-Muslim relations

Her website can be found at www.ctfpmn.org

“As a Muslim, I am very appreciative of the wonderful work my friend Connie has done in this beautiful book. She has undertaken to fully understand the beliefs and practices of Muslims and present them to the Christian community in an objective and easy to understand manner. She provides nicely flowing and practical steps on how to connect, communicate and build bridges of understanding and friendship between Muslim and Christian neighbors and colleagues. I highly recommend this book.”

Tamim Saidi, Co-Founder and President
Northwest Islamic Community Center
Masjid Al Kareem, Plymouth, MN

“Connie Fourré’s *From Neighbor To Friend* is just what we need, a friendly, nonanxious guide to our sisters and brothers in Abraham’s extended family. As an educator and priest, I appreciate the lack of jargon, the spirit of curiosity and respect, and her wise selection of topics we’d actually encounter as we become friends across Muslim-Christian relationships.”

The Rev. John Bellaimy,
Chaplain, Breck School
Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota.

“This is a respectful and insightful approach to introducing Christians to Islam. The book provides healthy guidelines for discussion and invites good reflection and conversation. *From Neighbor to Friend* is concise, readable, timely - and very much needed.”

Gene A. Scapanski, S.T.D., *retired*
Former Dean, School of Divinity
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN