



LEADER'S GUIDE

NO GOD

A FORMER MUSLIM INVESTIGATES THE

BUT ONE

EVIDENCE FOR ISLAM & CHRISTIANITY

ALLAH OR JESUS?

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THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER SEEKING ALLAH, FINDING JESUS

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INTRODUCTION

This workbook is designed to help individuals and groups facilitate thinking and discussions on one the most strategic conversations in the today's world. People hear and read many things about Islam in the popular media. Yet Christians in general know very little about the faith and practices of Islam. Nabeel A. Qureshi, a former Muslim and dedicated advocate for the Christian faith, presents excellent answers to the questions about the differences between these two world faiths. Nabeel writes, "It is my prayer that this book will reach many who are in the throes of their search [for God], and I pray it will lead them to the altar of the one true God. If that is you, know that I have prayed and shed tears for you, and that this book is written for you."

This workbook is organized into twelve sessions. Each of these sessions—except sessions 9 and 12—covers the material from three or four chapters. The questions in the guide are designed to focus on *the main objective* in each chapter.

A WORD TO GROUP LEADERS

SEVEN VITAL FEATURES FOR STIMULATING DISCUSSIONS

The Necessary Conversation

Congratulations, leader! You will be have a strategic voice in facilitating discussions on one of the most needed conversations in the Christian world. People hear and read many things about Islam in the popular media. Yet, Christians in general know very little about the faith and practices of Islam. Nabeel Qureshi will open your group's eyes to the history and ways of Islam. With this knowledge, Christians will engage Islamic friends, neighbors and co-workers with both godly compassion and insightful knowledge.

The General Format

The format of this *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* Leader's Guide reflects the twelve parts of the book. You, the group leader, will be prepared to facilitate twelve stimulating conversations based on the questions that provoke answers drawn from the group. Each of the sessions, except two—sessions 9 and 12—is informed by three or four chapters. Allow at least one hour for the discussion of answers to the questions and personal reflections on what was learned.

The Main Focus

Nabeel Qureshi presents a lot of intriguing information about Islam and Christianity. To keep your group from getting information overload, the questions in the guide are designed to focus on the main objective in each chapter. To be a well-equipped leader, you are urged to read the assigned pages or chapters for each session and answer the questions in order to keep the main focus in mind. You will find THE LEADER'S MAIN FOCUS SUMMARY at the end of the PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE.

The Key Assumption

As a leader, you understand that the core assumption is that the participants in your group have read the assigned chapters and answered the questions. The group's work before the meetings is crucial to transformative discussions *during* the meeting. Remind your group of their vital role in these life-changing conversations.

The Group's Participation

In group interaction, some members will be ready and eager to contribute. Others will be more reluctant. As leader, invite participation from each member of your group. Oftentimes, the quiet member will offer insights that stimulate more eager and expansive conversation. Be sensitive to your group and ask the Holy Spirit to help you draw everyone into the discussions. Lead by example by communicating how what you have learned has influenced you.

The Life and Death Reality

Fellow Christians are dying over the truths presented in *No God by One: Allah or Jesus?*, and Sara Fatima's story is only one example. Encourage your group to pray for the Muslim world and for new Christians converted from Islam. Where prayer focuses, God's power falls.

A WORD TO GROUP PARTICIPANTS

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A Safe Place

You are engaged in a strategic conversation about Islam and Christianity. In the context of extreme Islamic terrorism, keep your heart and mind focused on what will help Christians reach Muslims for Christ. Nabeel wants us to learn, not debate, tragic world events. Imagine a seeking Muslim in your group. How would you behave? Keep all discussions and reflections confidential.

Respect is Vital

Others in the group may not see things like you do. Give each person space to process what they are learning. With only an hour (or so) for your meeting, share your thoughts kindly and briefly, giving space for others to share as well.

Just Do It

Your leader will expect you to read the assigned chapters and answer the discussion questions *before* your meetings. For maximum benefit from the book and this group, do the assignments. The group discussions center on the valuable information that Nabeel presents. The questions are designed to get you into the book and prepared to discuss what you are learning.

The Power of Reflection

Take time to ponder what you read and learn. How does it change your perceptions of the Christian faith and the Muslim faith? How does what you learn help you pray for the conversion of Muslims to Jesus Christ? How might God want to use you in that endeavor? Reflect, also, on what others contribute to the group's growth.

The Power of Community

While you might be informed by reading *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* alone, you will experience stimulating personal transformation in group discussions. Jesus meets us through his Body, our fellow believers. God seeks to use you to help others grow in the faith and God wants to use others to help you as well. Be willing to contribute to your group and be eager to listen and learn from your group.

NO GOD BUT ONE: ALLAH OR JESUS?

THE LEADER'S MAIN FOCUS SUMMARY

Each of the twelve discussion sessions in the Participant's Workbook is based upon three to four chapters in *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* This means that each group member will come to each session with a lot of information. You, as leader, must keep in mind *the main objective* of each part of the Nabeel's book. Without ignoring what each participant may contribute to the discussions, you will want to keep the main focus the main thing.

The following "main focus summary" is provided to help you keep Nabeel's core ideas at the center of your group's discussions. It provides key paragraphs that keep the main objective in mind. A participant may offer some comments about a secondary focus from the chapters read. You will want to help the participant connect that information to the main idea. For example, in discussing the Crusades, a participant may get bogged down trying to recite the history of the Crusades from both an Islamic and Christian point of view. The main point of Nabeel's whole discussion of the Crusades is that for Christians the Crusades were *a defensive move*, not a violently aggressive move against Muslims (contrary to popular opinion).

SESSION 1

QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY?

Part 1: Sharia or the Gospel? Two Different Solutions

(read Preface and Chapters 1 - 4)

Preface

In his Preface Nabeel writes, “Both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic, believing there is ‘no God but one,’ but they differ fundamentally on who that God is: Allah or Jesus.” What are the four ways that the words “Allah” and “God” are used by Muslims and Christians that may cause some confusion?”

PART 1: SHARIA OR THE GOSPEL? TWO DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

Chapter 1 “The Way to Life”

1. What are some surprising similarities between Islam and Christianity?

2. How would you describe “the way to life” in both Islam and Christianity? What was your initial reaction to these two different ways?

Chapter 2 “Comparing Sharia and the Gospel”

3. What is the concept of “prophet” in Islam and how is it different from that in Christianity?

4. What is the Islamic solution for the problem of the human condition and how does it compare to the Christian worldview and solution?

5. What are the *Five Pillars of Islam* that are the basic requirements of Sharia?

6. “So important are the hadith that, after the Quran, they form the second rung of sharia.” What are the hadith and how do they inform Islam?

SESSION 1

Chapter 3 “Questioning Grace”

1. Nabeel is often asked an expected question, “If God just forgives all Christians and none of them go to hell, why would any Christian do good when they can sin all they want?” How would you answer this question?
2. How would you answer a Muslim who asks, “How can God be just if he is willing to forgive serial killers and genocidal dictators? You’re telling me Hitler could have gone to heaven if he had become a Christian?”
3. How does Nabeel answer the common Muslim question, “How can Jesus die for the sins of mankind?”
4. What reasons do Christians have to do good?

Chapter 4 “Diagnosis and Deliverance”

1. In spring of 2009, Nabeel volunteered with a humanitarian organization called Physicians for Peace helping with educating young mothers in the barrios of Santo Domingo. What was Nabeel’s point in telling that story?
2. According to Nabeel how do Islam and Christianity “diagnose” the spiritual condition of humanity?
3. Nabeel makes three observations to support his view that “the gospel resonates with reality.” What observation was most compelling for you?

SESSION 2

PART 2: *TAWHID* OR THE TRINITY? TWO DIFFERENT GODS

Chapter 5 “The Islamic Inquisition”

1. “*Tawhid* teaches that Allah is absolutely one; and the conclusion naturally arose among some thinkers that since Allah is *absolutely* one, he cannot have attributes. Attributes would curb his absolute unity, being things he has as opposed to things he is.”

2. What theological problem did *Tawhid* create for early Muslim scholars regarding the Quran?

3. What was the *Mihna*? What happened to Muslim thinkers who believed in the eternity of the Quran?

3. What does *bila kayf* mean and how does it relate to the eternity of the Quran?

4. What is the Sufi Muslim view, *wahdat al-wujud* that creates divisions among Muslims?

Chapter 6 “Comparing Tawhid and the Trinity”

1. What is the difference between “the eternal Word of God” in Islam and in Christianity and how does each faith have “a physical expression of God” in the world?

2. Why is the idea—“*person* is not the same as *being*”—crucial to the discussion about Islamic Tawhid and the Christian Trinity?

3. What are the five elements found repeatedly throughout the Bible that are best interpreted through the lens of the Trinity?

SESSION 2

4. What intrinsic reason separates Allah from Yahweh regarding relationships with people?

Chapter 7 “Questioning Complexity”

1. What does quantum physics have to do with the differences between Islam’s view of one God and the Christian view of one God?

2. What is the very significant theological problem with Allah being “relational,” that is, how can Allah be called Allah the Merciful or Allah the Gracious? Why is this not a problem for the Trinity?

3. What is the *shema*? How can Christians account for the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 and still believe in the Trinity?

4. What do some notable Jewish scholars teach about Jewish views of God in Jesus’ day?

Chapter 8 “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?”

1. How are the views of God in Islam and Christianity “diametrically opposed”? What texts in the Quran support your answer?

2. How does the Islamic model of theism promote service to others, yet the Christian model of theism “goes further still” to *intrinsically* require service to others?

3. Nabeel writes, “People ought to be selflessly loving because it is who we are.” How does he support that truth?

4. Why is belief in the Trinity not just a “theological curiosity”?

SESSION 3

PART 3: MUHAMMAD OR JESUS? TWO DIFFERENT FOUNDERS

Chapter 9 “The Council of Nicaea”

1. What did Christianity experience before and after the Edict of Milan in AD 313?
2. At the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 what was the controversial view of Arius?
3. What is the popular Muslim misconception about the Council of Nicaea and Jesus?
4. What is the “fundamental fact” that separates Muhammad from Jesus in the understanding of the Islam and Christianity?

Chapter 10 “Comparing the Messenger and the Messiah”

1. When Nabeel hears Muslims say, “We respect Jesus, but you Christians do not respect Muhammad,” what are those Muslims really saying?
2. What did you learn about God coming to be among us from Nabeel’s teachings from the first chapter of the Gospel of John?
3. What is the “hypostatic union” and how does it support the Christian view of Jesus the Messiah?
4. What is the role of the Prophet Muhammad and the hadith in the life of the Muslim believer?

SESSION 3

Chapter 11 “Questioning the God-Man”

1. How would you answer this question from Sahar, a Muslim woman, “How can you believe Jesus is God if he was born through the birth canal of a woman and that he had to use the bathroom? Aren’t these things below God?”
2. How do you answer a Muslim who asks, “If Jesus is God, and God died, who was ruling the universe?”
3. Why is God not unjust in punishing Jesus for others’ sins?
4. Why does Nabeel ask, “Sahar, let’s imagine that you are on your way to a very important ceremony and are dressed in your finest clothes. You are about to arrive just on time, but then you see your daughter drowning in a pool of mud. What would you do? Let her drown and arrive looking dignified, or rescue her but arrive at the ceremony covered in mud?”

Chapter 12 “Libya’s Best Friend”

1. What is Ronnie Smith’s story and how does it relate to a discussion of Islam and Christianity?
2. What motivated Ronnie Smith and his family to move to Libya?
3. How was Jesus’ teaching and life an Example for Ronnie Smith?
4. What do you feel reading Ronnie’s wife ending sentence in a letter to her husband’s killers, “Ronnie loved you because God loves you. Ronnie loved you because God loved *him*—not because Ronnie was so great, but because God is so great”?

SESSION 4

PART 4: THE QURAN OR THE BIBLE? TWO DIFFERENT SCRIPTURES

Chapter 13 “The Burning of Scripture”

1. In 2011 what senseless violence happened in Mazar-e-Sharif, considered a safe city in Afghanistan, and what caused the deaths of 12 innocent people?
2. In 2009 what happened at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan when “the US government officially announced that the Bibles were trash, and accordingly they were burned”?
3. Rather than caricatures of Muslims and Christians regarding their holy books, what compelling reality does Nabeel offer regarding the two faiths and their holy books?

Chapter 14 “Comparing the Quran and the Bible”

(Because this is a lengthy, significant chapter, more questions will be asked.)

1. What must Westerners know about Islam that makes the thought of burning a copy of the Quran a highly inflammatory insult to Muslims?
2. While Christians do not suggest or like the idea of burning Bibles, what is one reason why Christians do not riot and murder when the Bible is treated as trash by US military officials?
3. How would your view of the Quran be changed if you believed it to be “the closest thing on earth to the incarnation of Allah”?
4. How would you describe the differences in the composition of the Quran and the Bible?

SESSION 4

5. How would you summarize the Christian view of the Bible?

6. Is the Islamic practice of “abrogation”?

7. When Nabeel discusses “the sufficiency of Scripture,” how does this apply to the Quran? What guides most Islamic practices?

8. How would you contrast the Muslim and Christian views regarding “why” they believe and “what” they believe.

Chapter 15 “Questioning Texts”

1. What are the stories of Ahmed Deedat and Zakir Naik and what is their main argument for the superiority of the Quran over the Bible?

2. Why is this observation important in the Muslim/Christian debate: “The Quran is written in one uniform style, whereas the Bible is written in many genres”?

List at least four contradictions within the Quran (see page 120).

3. How does Nabeel, using 1 Peter as an example, answer the Muslim charge about “wholesale omissions or insertions of New Testament teachings, [and] intentional alterations by ruling powers”?

Chapter 16 “The First Burning of the Quran”

1. What did Caliph Uthman do and why did he do it? What does this reveal about human control over the Quran in human history?

2. What is Nabeel’s personal story about the impact of the Quran and the impact of the Bible on him at a significant moment in his life?

SESSION 5

PART 5: JIHAD OR THE CRUSADES? TWO DIFFERENT HOLY WARS

Chapter 17 “The First Crusade”

1. How did President Bill Clinton advance the growing popular understanding of the (first) Christian Crusades to take back the holy land?
2. Why was the 9/11 attack in 2001 a very difficult experience for patriotic American Muslims?
3. Contrary to the popular view, how could Crusade scholar Thomas Madden write, “The crusades were in every way a *defensive war*”?
4. Why does Nabeel confess, “Considering the historical realities, the common Muslim perspective of the Crusades—the perspective I inherited—is a modern invention”?

Chapter 18 “Comparing the Traditions of the Founders”

1. What did you think when Nabeel asked a Muslim friend at a conference in Washington, D. C. on July 4, 2009, “So if we were in a Muslim country right now, would you kill me?” and the friend responded, “Yes, I would kill you right now. It is the command of the Prophet (SAW)”?
2. Why does Nabeel write, “But in order to follow a peaceful Islam, one has to ignore or reject vast swaths of traditions from Muhammad’s life as well as virtually the entire history of Islamic jurisprudence”?
3. What was one of Augustine’s contributions to the Christian understanding of war?

SESSION 5

4. What do you learn when you contrast Muhammad and Jesus regarding the use of violence?

Chapter 19 “Questioning Christian Peacefulness”

1. What did Nabeel do in Hyde Park in 2009 when a Muslim man pushed a Mennonite woman’s hand down as she was holding out the Bible?

2. How did Nabeel’s actions show him that “in a very microcosmic sense, defending victims with violence is a natural reflex. But throughout the Gospels, Jesus teaches us to forsake our natural inclinations for his otherworldly teachings”?

3. Why does Nabeel write, “There is absolutely no room for exulting in violence for the follower of Jesus”?

SESSION 6

QUESTION 2: CAN WE KNOW WHETHER ISLAM OR CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE?

(pages 154-161 and chapters 21-24)

1. Many religious pluralists believe all religions are the same leading us to the true God who is known by different names such as Yahweh, Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Krishna, or Supreme Ground of Being. If this is true, why do Muslims literally risk their lives converting to Christianity by faith in Jesus Christ?

2. How are Islam and Christianity fundamentally different religions when it comes to considering Jesus Christ? What three central claims of Christianity are denied by Islam?

3. What three points constitute the Case for Christianity? How do these points argue for the truth of the Gospel?

4. What two points constitute the Case for Islam? How do these points argue for the truth of Islam?

PART 6: DID JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS?

Chapter 21 “The Positive Case: Unanimous Records”

1. How (and where) does the Quran explicitly deny the crucifixion of Jesus?

2. What surprised Nabeel the most as he considered the conclusions of both Christian and non-Christian scholars (and one Muslim scholar) about the crucifixion of Jesus? Provide some examples.

3. Beyond the Scriptures what are some primary sources about the crucifixion of Jesus?

SESSION 6

4. If the death of a “Savior” by crucifixion was considered ridiculous, shameful, even abhorrent in the first century, why did the Christians make it the centerpiece of their faith?

Chapter 22 “The Islamic Response: It was Made to Appear So”

1. Describe the Muslim “Theistic Swoon Theory” of Jesus’ experience on the cross (based on the Quran) and how does it differ from the atheistic swoon theory?

2. What is the more common Muslim “Substitution View” of Jesus’ experience on the cross and how is it supported?

Chapter 23 “Assessing the Islamic Response: The Quran and the Historical Jesus”

1. According to Nabeel, why would an objective observer have a problem with the Theistic Swoon Theory’s main point: “Although Jesus might have died on the cross under natural circumstances, he did not die because God miraculously preserved him”?

2. What is the problem with the Theistic Swoon Theory regarding the inception of the church?

3. The Quran speaks of the early life of Jesus. Where did the creator(s) of the Quran most likely get some of their material for writing about Jesus’ early life (for example, Jesus creating living birds out of clay)?

4. Where does the Quran get its information about Jesus? Are those sources historically reliable? Why or why not?

Chapter 24 “Conclusion: Jesus Died on the Cross”

1. Nabeel offers two reasons why the Theistic Swoon Theory and the Substitution View were not plausible to him. What are those reasons?

SESSION 7

PART 7: DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

Chapter 25 “The Positive Case: The Best Explanation of the Facts”

1. What do the three New Testament texts cited by Nabeel tell us about the early Christians’ view of what happened to Jesus after his death?
2. When Mike Licona debated Muslim scholar Shabir Ally regarding the resurrection of Jesus, what were the 3 facts Mike used in his “minimal facts approach”?
3. Regarding “Fact 2,” what are the three reasons that the earliest Christians believed they saw the resurrected Christ?
4. Name two unbelievers who were converted to Christianity. How is the argument that “even unbelievers verified the resurrection” a powerful fact?
5. How can a Christian respond to the charge that the resurrection appearances of Jesus were hallucinations?

Chapter 26 “The Islamic Response: All Paul’s Fault”

1. What is the Muslim understanding of Jesus’ resurrection and Jesus’ ascension?
2. Muslims believe that the true message of Jesus was corrupted very early in Christian history. Who corrupted Christianity’s teachings, according to Muslims, and how was the corruption done?
3. What three reasons did Shabir Ally, the Muslim debater, offer to support his view that Paul corrupted early Christianity?

SESSION 7

Chapter 27 “Assessing the Islamic Response: Paul and the Disciples in Proper Perspective”

1. What did the two authors quoted by Nabeel say in their claims about Paul that fueled the debate about Paul and Christianity?
2. What are two reasons that the consensus of scholars give to defeat the argument that Paul was a power-hungry deceiver in the early church?
3. How does the New Testament present Paul’s relationship to the early church leaders Peter, James, and John?
4. What is the importance in knowing that Jesus came to “fulfill” the Law, not “follow” the Law?
5. What did you learn about Paul and the historical Jesus?
6. How does the Quran complicate the Muslim of view of Paul as a deceiver?
7. How does Nabeel support his claim, “The truth is, even if we disregard Paul entirely, we still have good reason to think Jesus rose from the dead”?

Chapter 28 “Conclusion: Jesus Rose from the Dead”

1. How did Nabeel reach this conclusion: “The common Islamic characterization of Paul as the one who hijacked Christianity not only ignores Allah’s promises in the Quran but also fails to provide a motive or a means for Paul’s corruption of the church, and it requires a wholesale disregard for the records of the early church’s history”?

SESSION 8

PART 8: DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?

Chapter 29 “The Positive Case: Jesus was Always God”

1. What significant fact do we learn when we compare Quran (5:72) and Romans 10:9?
2. Present and explain three texts from the Gospel of John that support the truth that Jesus is divine.
3. How does Nabeel expand on this observation: “When I read Mark through that lens, the lens of Hebrew Scripture, I realized that [Bart] Ehrman was terribly mistaken. Not only does Mark present Jesus as divine, but *the very point of Mark’s gospel is that Jesus is Yahweh*” (emphasis added)?
4. What is the surprising climax in Mark’s Gospel about the identity of Jesus?
5. How does Nabeel provide an answer to the question “Was Jesus God before the Gospels”?

Chapter 30 “The Islamic Response: Did Jesus Really Say ‘I am God’?”

1. Before his conversion, why did Nabeel understand John 17:3 as a verse denying that Jesus is divine?
2. Besides John 17:3, what other New Testament verses are used by Muslims to show that Jesus did not think he was God?
3. How do Muslims understand what Jesus was saying about himself in John 10:33-36?

SESSION 8

Chapter 31 “Assessing the Islamic Response: Letting the Context Speak”

1. What realization about the Islamic use of Gospel texts caused Nabeel to write: “[It] led me to change the way I approached the Bible”?
2. What does the Trinitarian model teach about the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son, and how does this truth help us understand key verses in John’s Gospel?
3. What important truth does Philippians 2:6-7 teach us about Jesus the God-Man?
4. How do you understand “the Messianic Secret” in Mark’s Gospel?
5. What do we learn from Jesus’ use of the title “Son of Man” and how does it relate to Daniel 7 and Psalm 110?

Chapter 32 “Conclusion: Jesus Claimed to be God”

1. How would you answer this summary question: “The very first Christians believed that Jesus is God, including the disciples themselves. How could the disciples have concluded this, especially considering the Jewish emphasis on monotheism and on worshiping God alone”?

SESSION 9

MIDWAY SUMMARY TO QUESTION 2: ASSESSING THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM'S EFFORTS TO ACCOUNT FOR CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

1. At this point in learning about the differences between Islam and Christianity, what are three significant truths that you never knew before? Think, for example, about the Quran, Muhammad, and Jesus. What three things stand out to you?

2. From a cursory glance at the Gospels, how is the Islamic view of Jesus “utterly incompatible” with the view of the earliest Christian proclamation?

3. What about Islamic teaching requires us to conclude that their view of Jesus means that he was an “entirely incompetent Messiah, even worse an abject failure”?
How could an alert Muslim conclude that “Allah started Christianity, a false religion that has kept billions away from Allah,” and “If Allah saved Jesus from the cross and did not inform the disciples, he is a deceptive God who is responsible for the damnation of billions”?

4. What was the “paradigm shift” in Nabeel’s mind about the historical evidence for Christianity?

5. What investigation into Islam was Nabeel forced to take on account of the historical case for Christianity?

6. Discuss the group members’ personal relationships with Muslims, if any. Pray for the work of Nabeel Qureshi and for many Muslims to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

SESSION 10

PART 9: IS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET OF GOD?

Chapter 33 “A Positive Case: The Foretold Paragon”

1. What three arguments did Nabeel offer to support “Muhammad’s status as a messenger of God, his prophethood, as a central pillar of Islamic faith”?
2. How would you summarize Nabeel’s presentation of “Muhammad’s life and character”?
3. How do Muslims understand prophecies about Muhammad in the Bible, specifically by appeals to Deuteronomy 18 and John 16?
4. What are some examples from the Quran of Muhammad’s “miraculous scientific knowledge”?

Chapter 34 “The Response: Don’t Forget the Counterevidence”

1. When learning about “the sources most Muslims consider most trustworthy: the Quran and the hadith of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim,” what calls into serious question “Muhammad’s excellent character”?
2. What are the glaring weaknesses in the Islamic understanding of Deuteronomy 18 and John 16 as prophecies about Muhammad?
3. Give some examples that demonstrate that the counterevidence thoroughly undermines “Muhammad’s miraculous scientific knowledge.”

SESSION 10

Chapter 35 “Assessing the Response: Hadith versus History”

1. “The fact is most Muslims simply have not read the primary sources on Muhammad’s life, instead only hearing overviews that have filtered out the more problematic accounts. When they first hear these stories, they do not know how to react.” How did Nabeel react?

2. What is the process involved when Muslim scholars “grade individual accounts” of Muhammad’s life to determine which ones are trustworthy?

3. According to Nabeel, what is “the dangerous game” Muslim scholars often play regarding Muslim accounts of Muhammad’s life and teachings?

4. How did you react to Nabeel, citing scholars, including Muslim ones, when he wrote, “There is almost nothing we can know with certainty about the historical Muhammad”?

Chapter 36 “Conclusion: The Dilemma of the Historical Muhammad”

1. What is the Muslim dilemma that Nabeel had to confront about Muhammad’s life?

2. What was the final hope Nabeel had for maintaining his Muslim faith in the face of the questionable reliability of the documents about Muhammad’s life?

SESSION 11

Part 10: IS THE QURAN THE WORD OF GOD?

Chapter 37 “The Positive Case: There is No Other Book Like It”

1. Nabeel repeats the fact that the Quran’s place in Islamic theology is comparable to the place Jesus Christ is in Christian theology. How did Nabeel and other Muslims demonstrate their reverence for the Quran?

2. What is the basis for the “literary excellence of the Quran”?

3. What are some of the “fulfilled prophecies” mentioned in the Quran?

4. Give some examples of the “miraculous scientific knowledge” in the Quran?

5. What are some of the “mathematic marvels” revealed in the Quran?

6. Describe the importance and basis of the “perfect preservation of the Quran” to Muslim believers.

Chapter 38 “The Response: In What Way is that Miraculous?”

1. How did Nabeel’s friend, Mike, jolt Nabeel regarding the Quran’s literary excellence?

2. What is *Furqan al-Haqq* and how did Arabic-speaking Muslims respond?

SESSION 11

3. What did Gerd Puin, an expert in Arabic orthography, say about the literary nature of the Quran?
4. What point does Nabeel make by appealing to Stradivarius, the violin-maker, and the inspiration of the Quran?
5. How does Nabeel demonstrate that the prophecies in the Quran are not really prophecies, especially “the clearest prophecy” in the Quran about Roman victory (Quran 30:2-4)?
6. How does Nabeel debunk the alleged “miraculous scientific knowledge” and “mathematical marvels” of the Quran?
7. How do you think Nabeel felt when he discovered that “the arguments for the divine inspiration of the Quran all prove unconvincing when we begin to dig beneath the surface. ...there is no reason to accept the Quran as the Word of God”?

Chapter 39 “Assessing the Response: What Kind of Book is the Quran?”

1. What shocked Nabeel as he researched “the foundational narrative of the Muslim faith”?
2. Why was the final written version of the Quran problematic to Muslim teacher Ubay ibn Kab and how did Abdullah ibn Masud disagree with Ubay?
3. “[F]ew Muslims realize that only one hundred years before, there were about eighty different readings of the Quran in the Muslim world, and that there are significant differences in Qurans even today.” In light of this, what does Nabeel conclude?

Chapter 40 Conclusion

1. What does Nabeel mean by this, “The five most common arguments [for the Quran as the Word of God],...far from being so strong that they can vindicate the faith, they actually need to be vindicated by faith”?

SESSION 12

CONCLUSION TO QUESTION 2: ISLAM OR CHRISTIANITY? THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR— ASSESSING THE CASE FOR ISLAM AND ITS EFFORTS TO ACCOUNT FOR ISLAMIC ORIGINS.

1. What startling discovery did Nabeel make about the historical underpinnings of Muhammad and the Quran as a divine book?
2. “But if there was one thing Islam had taught me, it was that I must submit to God and not to man. That meant following the truth, no matter where it led.” Where did the truth lead Nabeel regarding Muhammad and the Quran?
3. How does Nabeel contrast the truth claims of Islam and Christianity?

CONCLUSION: Is the Truth Worth Dying For?

1. When considering the gospel, what are some of the deep secrets of the world that unfold for Nabeel and for Christian believers?
2. Re-read the Prologue pages 19-22 regarding Sara Fatima al-Mutairi, a 26 year old Muslim convert to Christ. In view of her decision and its result, how would you describe Fatima’s value of truth?
3. How would you describe the influence of Sara Fatima’s poem on you?
4. Pray for seeking Muslims worldwide who daily face the same dilemma as Fatima’s.

SESSION 1 | Main Focus Summary

QUESTION 1: What are the Differences between Islam and Christianity?

PART 1: SHARIA OR THE GOSPEL? TWO DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

Preface and Chapters 1 - 4

In Part 1 Nabeel writes, “Finally, we are at a place to understand the message of Islam. Sharia is more than just Islamic law. It is the answer to mankind’s ignorance and, if followed, will result in a life of peace with Allah and an abundance of his blessings. Sharia is derived from the Quran, exemplified in Muhammad’s life, and explained by imams. On the last day, if we have obeyed and done well, Allah *may* grant us mercy and allow us into heaven where we will have an eternal reward” (35, emphasis added).

This is the Islamic worldview.

Nabeel contrasts Islam with Christianity. He writes, “[In Christianity] the fundamental problem of mankind is sin, and we are powerless to save ourselves. The good news is that God loves us and makes a way for us by paying our penalty himself upon the cross. Jesus proved that he is the Author of Life by rising from death. We who repent and follow Jesus demonstrate our faith in him and his salvation, and God begins a transforming work in us. As we follow Jesus the Holy Spirit makes us more like him and sends us into the world to love mankind with the selfless love of God. We can even lay down our lives for others, as Jesus modeled for us. Our ultimate restoration will come to miraculous fruition when we are remade, unbroken, to live with him and love him for eternity” (37).

God’s Grace versus Islamic Law. Person (Jesus) versus Book (Quran).

SESSION 2 | Main Focus Summary

PART 2: *TAWHID* OR THE TRINITY? TWO DIFFERENT GODS

Chapters 5-8

“Allah is *absolutely* one, he cannot have attributes. Attributes would curb his absolute unity, being things he has as opposed to things he is. This conclusion of Islamic philosophy can use a little exploration. If God has attributes, he must always have had them, because he is unchanging. That would make those attributes eternal. If those eternal attributes are not a part of his essence, part of who he is, then something other than God existed alongside God from the beginning of time” (50).

Allah is one God and has no parts or attributes.

“The Trinity is just like every other monotheistic doctrine in teaching that there is only one God. If we miss this, we miss everything! Christianity has always taught that there is only one God. Where Christian theology differs from other forms of monotheism is not on the number of gods, but on the concept of God’s personhood. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the one God exists as three persons” (596).

The Christian God is One God existing in three eternal Persons. Christians serve and worship a relational God. Allah is remote and non-relational.

SESSION 3 | Main Focus Summary

PART 3: MUHAMMAD OR JESUS? TWO DIFFERENT FOUNDERS

Chapters 9-12

“This is the Christian view of Jesus: The God who created the universe, who walked with Adam, who talked with Abraham, who wrestled with Jacob, who stood with Moses, who dined with Aaron, and who led the Hebrews—that mighty God fulfilled his prophecy that he would be born as a human child to us. Jesus is “God with us,” the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Word through whom the universe was created” (83-84).

God is with us and loves us.

“Muhammad’s status as *the perfect exemplar* is one reason Muslims have undertaken immense efforts to record his life. Within a few centuries of his death, over five hundred thousand accounts from the life of Muhammad were in broad circulation. As we learned in the first chapter, these accounts are called the hadith, and they record details of Muhammad’s life ranging from anecdotes of his childhood to decisions he made as a general and statesman.

As my Sunday school teacher taught, Muhammad had a series of roles and performed them perfectly. So when Muslims want an example of the perfect husband, or the perfect statesman, or the perfect general, or the perfect merchant, they turn to Muhammad’s life for exemplary guidance. The hadith record what Muhammad said and did in thousands of situations, and what he told the Muslim people to do in turn” (86).

Jesus is a Savior; Muhammad is an example.

SESSION 4 | Main Focus Summary

PART 4: THE QURAN OR THE BIBLE? TWO DIFFERENT SCRIPTURES

Chapters 13-16

*** Note to leaders: this is a significant difference between Muslims and Christians. Try to keep the reverence of Muslims for the Quran in view. What corresponds to this reverence in Christianity?

“The place the Quran holds in the heart of Muslims is beyond the estimation of most Westerners, and so is the offense of burning it. There is nothing flammable on earth that Christians revere as much as Muslims revere the Quran. That is not to say that Christians do not highly revere the Bible, because they certainly do. But the traditional Muslim reverence for the Quran is almost inestimable. To understand this, we have to remember a point from the previous two chapters: The Quran is, to Muslims, the eternal Word of Allah himself. It is the closest thing to God incarnate. To Christians, the eternal Word of Yahweh is Jesus. The Quran holds in Islam the place that Jesus holds in the Christian faith. So let’s put it together: To comprehend the insult of burning a Quran, a Christian would have to imagine someone burning Jesus” (105).

“Muslims believe that the Quran primarily serves as a guidance for mankind, of course, but since they do not usually exegete it themselves it is fair to classify this as an indirect purpose for the average Muslim. Rather, it is the mystical value of the Quran that serves as its primary purpose. This is illustrated by devote Muslims’ average encounter with the Quran: its recitation in Arabic, even if the Muslim does not speak Arabic. In this case, it is not guidance but blessings that Muslims seek” (111).

SESSION 5 | Main Focus Summary

PART 5: JIHAD OR THE CRUSADES? TWO DIFFERENT HOLY WARS

Chapters 17-19

“Along with [President] Clinton’s admission, it seemed that others were coming to agree with this perspective. Most Americans I knew looked at the Crusades with shame. A scholar at Georgetown University, John Esposito, described the Crusades as the beginning of hostilities between Muslims and Christians: “Five centuries of peaceful coexistence elapsed before political events and an imperial-papal power play led to a centuries-long series of so-called holy wars that pitted Christendom against Islam and left an enduring legacy of misunderstanding and distrust.” Sharing a similar understanding, Ridley Scott released a movie in 2005 called *The Kingdom of Heaven*, which depicted Christians as the aggressors against civil Muslims who simply desired peaceful coexistence. At that time, it seemed to me that jihad had been vindicated even in the eyes of the West and that no one could point a finger at Islam, given the atrocities of the Crusades” (127-128).

The Crusades were aggressive, unprovoked violence against Muslims.

“Considering the historical realities, the common Muslim perspective of the Crusades—the perspective I inherited—is a modern invention. The narrative of an offensive Crusade against peaceful Muslims, along with the overtones of Ridley Scott’s *The Kingdom of Heaven* and John Esposito’s “five centuries of peaceful coexistence,” turn out to be fanciful slants based on motivations other than history. The reality is that the Crusades were launched in defense of the Byzantine Empire after two-thirds of the Christian world had been conquered by centuries of Muslim attacks. Muslims understood this and held no grudge against crusaders until modern times, when postcolonial narratives came into vogue” (133).

The Crusades were a defensive measure by Christians that barely attracted Muslim attention at the time.

SESSION 6 | Main Focus Summary

QUESTION 2: Can We Know whether Islam or Christianity is True?

Part 6: DID JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS?

Pages 154-161 and chapters 21-24

“For example, a foundational Christian teaching is that Jesus died by crucifixion in the first century (Mark 15:37; Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 19:33; Acts 10:39; 1 Cor. 15:3). By contrast, the Quran teaches the exact opposite: Jesus was not killed, nor was he crucified (4.157). Neither religion treats these accounts of Jesus as a myth, so we cannot resolve these contrary positions in some metaphorical sense. He either died by crucifixion or he did not. Either Islam or Christianity has to be wrong” (151). Both Islam and Christianity are open to historical scrutiny.

“If we can determine that the Quran is the Word of God, or if we can determine that Muhammad is a messenger of God, then we have good reason to accept Islam. Unlike the Christian case, where all components need to be true to build the case, defending the prophethood of Muhammad vindicates the inspiration of the Quran and vice versa. The case for Islam should therefore, in concept, be easier to establish, as only one point needs to be well defended: either the prophethood of Muhammad or the inspiration of the Quran” (154).

Historical records overwhelmingly support the facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection over against the Quran’s view of these realities.

SESSION 7 | Main Focus Summary

PART 7: DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

Chapters 25-28

“As a Muslim observing Mike’s debate, I had to agree that if Jesus really did die on the cross, there was excellent reason to believe he rose from the dead. Historically speaking, the three facts are indisputable: Jesus died by crucifixion, his disciples truly believed they had seen him risen, and even men who were not his disciples truly believed they had seen him risen. Nothing accounts for these facts without strain apart from the resurrection hypothesis, and even as objective observers, the spiritually charged context allows us to conclude that a miracle has happened. Along with the early church, history testifies that Jesus rose from the dead” (195).

Both biblical and secular sources testify that Jesus did live and die on a Roman cross.

“This has been but a quick foray into the reasons why Muslims distrust Paul and consider him to be the corrupter of true Christianity and the founder of the blasphemous religion that worships a man and ignores God’s law—that is, today’s mainstream Christianity. This view is espoused by Muslim apologists and imams worldwide, and it filters down unabated to the average Muslim, as it did to me. In truth, almost every single Muslim-Christian conversation about early Christianity I have heard comes to a gridlock on the person of Paul. It is hard to exaggerate how much Muslims distrust Paul and how much they hold him accountable for the shape of Christianity today” (198).

How do Christians answer this resistance to the Apostle Paul?

SESSION 8 | Main Focus Summary

PART 8: DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?

Chapters 29-32

“When I finished investigating the deity of Jesus, I realized that every layer of Christian teaching depicts Jesus as divine. It is impossible to argue that Jesus’ deity was a late invention, an evolution of Christology. Not only does John’s gospel present Jesus as divine, but even Mark’s gospel and Paul’s writings present Jesus as Yahweh. The very earliest evidence there is, possibly from the very decade of Jesus’ crucifixion, equates Jesus to Yahweh.

For the earliest Christians, Jesus is more than a prophet, more than the Messiah, and more than divine. He is Yahweh himself” (222).

The Gospels are clear that Jesus considered himself divine.

“When I was studying the Gospels as a Muslim, I was shocked to discover these facts. Having always believed that the doctrine of Jesus’ deity was invented decades if not centuries after Jesus’ death, I realized that the Islamic explanation for Christian beliefs does not work. The very first Christians believed that Jesus is God, including the disciples themselves. How could the disciples have concluded this, especially considering the Jewish emphasis on monotheism and on worshiping God alone? ... The best conclusion is that Jesus himself claimed to be God. The Gospels are telling the truth. As a Muslim my mind rebelled against this, but considering the perspective of an objective investigator I had to admit that it was the best explanation of the evidence. Nothing else accounted for the origins of the church without strain” (237-238).

The Muslim claim that “Jesus never said he was God” is baseless.

SESSION 9 | Main Focus Summary

MIDWAY SUMMARY TO QUESTION 2: ASSESSING THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM'S EFFORTS TO ACCOUNT FOR CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

"All evidence indicates that Jesus' followers uniformly believed him to be divine, unquestionably more than a mere human.

How can the Islamic model account for this? Why is it that the followers of Jesus preached a superhuman Jesus, in fact God himself? Without dismissing the history, there is no alternative explanation. Islam requires us to believe that Jesus was so incompetent as a teacher and prophet that he was not able to instill this most simple fact in his followers' minds: that he was merely a human. Given that Islam's central proclamation is *tawhid*, this means Jesus was an abject failure. In fact, he was worse than a total failure, since he left his disciples believing the exact opposite of *tawhid*. ... Could I really conclude that the Messiah was so woefully incompetent? Of course not, but that is what Islam requires us to believe if we are to take the historical evidence seriously" (236-237).

Did Jesus fail in making himself truly known?

"But the history is incontrovertible: The foundation of the disciples' preaching was the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. Therefore, if it is true that Allah saved Jesus from the cross, the deception of Allah is responsible for the establishment of the Christian church and billions of people committing *shirk*, the unforgivable sin. ... Could I really conclude that Allah committed such a massive blunder? Of course not, but that is what Islam requires us to believe if we are to take the historical evidence seriously" (237-238).

What is the Muslim dilemma regarding Allah saving Jesus from death on the cross?

SESSION 10 | Main Focus Summary

PART 9: IS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET OF GOD?

Chapters 33-36

“Providing a portrait of Muhammad’s life that had passed down to me through generations, I started by telling everyone that Muhammad lived a very meek and humble childhood. His father died before he was born, his mother died shortly thereafter, and he lived most of his childhood as an orphan. He grew to become a trusted and respected young merchant, ultimately marrying a widow fifteen years his elder instead of a youthful maiden. Muhammad was thus a very noble young man uninterested in worldly attractions even before receiving his prophetic call” (243-244).

“For these reasons, not just one Muslim scholar but many scholars doubt the traditional origins of Islam and even the existence of Muhammad, at least as the early Islamic records describe him. According to them, the truth about the origins of Islam is unfortunately veiled. There is almost nothing we can know with certainty about the historical Muhammad” (263).

What severe conflict did this pose for Nabeel as he was assessing Islam and Christianity?

SESSION 11 | Main Focus Summary

Part 10: IS THE QURAN THE WORD OF GOD?

Chapters 37-40

“In our [Muslim] circles, the Quran really was above dispute. For multiple reasons, the Muslim community is convinced beyond any doubt that it is the Word of God: Its text is inimitably excellent, it foretells prophecies that have been fulfilled, it holds hidden scientific truths waiting to be discovered, its marvelously calculated text could only be the product of a divine mind, and the text has been preserved perfectly, down to the very stroke of the scribes’ pens” (272).

“The arguments for the divine inspiration of the Quran all prove unconvincing when we begin to dig beneath the surface. The literary excellence of the Quran proves to be untestable, subjective, and non-sequitur; the prophecies of the Quran are not compelling; the science of the Quran is actually problematic; the numerical patterns are often distorted data combined with exaggerated interpretations; and the Quran has not been preserved in any miraculous sense.

Because there is no compelling argument, *there is no reason to accept the Quran as the Word of God*” (283 emphasis added).

SESSION 12 | Main Focus Summary

CONCLUSION TO QUESTION 2: ISLAM OR CHRISTIANITY? THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR— ASSESSING THE CASE FOR ISLAM AND ITS EFFORTS TO ACCOUNT FOR ISLAMIC ORIGINS.

*** Reread the Preface and the dilemma of Sara Fatima and now its conclusion in Part 12. Discuss how crucial it is to reach Muslims for Christ and the cost they might pay to convert to Jesus.

“Once again, it was not just that history did not support the traditional narratives of Islam, but rather that *history proved to be entirely incompatible with Islamic origins*. When using the same standards to assess the origins of Islam as are used to assess the origins of Christianity, we find a gaping hole in the historical record” (289).

“The three core claims of Christianity, that Jesus died by crucifixion and rose from the dead proving he was God, are very firmly grounded in history. Even though Islam denies these points, I concluded that the historical evidence for Jesus’ death on the cross was as strong as any- thing historical could be, that his resurrection from the dead was by far the best explanation of the facts surrounding his crucifixion, and that his claiming to be God was the best way to account for the proclamation of the early church” (290).

May you, as a leader, significantly influence your group. God bless you!