

ENGAGING
with...

Muslims

understanding their world
sharing good news

John Klaassen

The logo features a stylized white bird or wing shape above the text.
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COMPANY

Engaging with Muslims

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Tel (US): 866 244 2165

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com

Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:

North America: www.thegoodbook.com

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



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Also in this series:

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Engaging with...

Preface

Christians have a wonderful message to tell the world. As the angel said at the birth of Jesus, it is “good news of great joy, *for all people*” (Luke 2 v 10). But sometimes we have been slow to take that message of forgiveness and new life to others.

Sometimes it’s because we have become *distracted*. There are so many things that can push the need to tell others from its central place in our calling as individuals and churches. We get wrapped up in our own church issues, problems and politics. Or we get sidetracked by the very real needs of our broken and hurting world, and expend our energies dealing with the symptoms rather than the cause.

Sometimes it’s because we have lacked *conviction*. We look at people who seem relatively happy or settled in their own beliefs, and just don’t think Jesus is for them.

Or perhaps we have forgotten just how good the good news is, and how serious the consequences for those who enter eternity unforgiven.

But often it has been *fear* that has held us back from sharing the good news about Jesus. When we meet people whose culture, background or beliefs are so different from ours, we can draw back from speaking about our own faith because we are afraid of saying the wrong thing, unintentionally offending them, or getting into an unhelpful argument that leads nowhere.

This little series of books is designed to help with this last issue. We want to encourage Christian believers and whole churches to focus on our primary task of sharing the good news with the whole world. Each title aims to equip you with the understanding you need, so that you can build meaningful friendships with others from different backgrounds, and share the good news in a relevant and clear way.

It is our prayer that this book will help you do that with a neighbour, friend or work colleague who is an actively engaged Muslim, or who is from a Muslim background and culture. We pray that the result would be “great joy” as they understand that Jesus is good news for them.

Tim Thornborough
Series Editor

Introduction

I met him in a coffee shop near my house. He was from the Middle East, friendly as I expected, but nothing else went as planned. As we met together, I was astonished at how God had been working in his life.

Rachid's¹ father was a wealthy businessman who had studied outside his country and returned home a practical atheist. He raised his family to be wealthy but without religion, even though they lived in a predominately Muslim country.

Rachid grew up not knowing much about the *Qur'an* or prayer times, other than what he was taught in school. So when he went to college he was filled with questions. That was the time of the 9/11 attack in the US, and college campuses around the Middle East were alive with Islamic radicalization. But when Rachid asked what he thought were very reasonable questions, he was threatened for doubting Islam. He was called a *kafer* (infidel).

Because his father was wealthy, Rachid was able to travel. He visited the East to explore Hinduism and Buddhism, but he instinctively knew that there was only one God. As he continued his thinking, Rachid struggled to understand why Muslims kill one another and why they commit other immoral acts. As a result he began to study Christianity.

In his country they have a saying: "*Eat with the Jews,*

¹ Not his real name—throughout this book names have been changed to protect the identity of people who may be in personal danger because they have professed faith in Christ.

sleep with the Christians." You can eat with Jews as their food is *kosher* (equivalent to *halal*), but you can trust Christians. When you are asleep, they won't kill or hurt you. A Christian's moral compass is different. Rachid wanted to understand why.

Rachid was attacked and shot not long after returning from his travels because he questioned Islam and was intrigued by Christianity. The Muslims around him wanted him dead, so he fled to Jordan and managed to get refugee status to come to the West. While in Jordan, at an orientation briefing with other Muslims, he was told that when he got to America Christians would come to his house and give him things. He was advised to take what they gave him, but not listen to what they had to say. Secretly Rachid couldn't wait. He longed to hear the truth of the gospel. They also told him that if he ever went to a church he would be prohibited from entering—"*Americans just don't like Muslims,*" he was told.

When he arrived in the US he was placed in an apartment with other Muslims and he waited for the Christians to visit. They didn't come. He moved to a new place, unable to live with the other Muslim refugees, and waited longer. He walked past a local church but was afraid to go in because of what he had been told. It would be shameful to be asked to leave. Nine months passed without one Christian coming to his house as he had been promised.

He began to think God was angry with him so he prayed: "*God, just let someone come to my house; please don't be mad at me.*" One day, not long after, he found a pamphlet on the ground near his door. It was for a free Bible. He immediately wrote and asked for a Bible and

more information about Christianity. They sent him the Bible but it was in English and his language wasn't very good. He was frustrated once again. This time he wrote and begged:

Just send me someone to tell me about Christianity. I will pay for them to come to me. I don't need anything; just send me someone.

The woman who received this message, by God's grace, happened to be the cousin of a pastor at my church. She called her cousin, her cousin called me, and I set up a time to meet with Rachid.

After meeting with me for six months and being at church with other believers, Rachid was baptized. What a glorious time of celebration we had that day, rejoicing with our church, who had grown to love him! Rachid continues to come, learn, serve and grow—a wonderful brother in Jesus.

In Matthew 9 v 37 Jesus tells us that:

the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

The harvest is plentiful? I worked in the Islamic world for over 18 years and it never felt plentiful, and yet there was a steady trickle of people coming to Christ. There were men and women who were ready to be harvested.

Over the course of the last few years the agency I was with discovered an amazing truth—**we don't see decisions for Jesus where we are not sharing the gospel!**

Ok, that's not so amazing; perhaps it's even a bit simplistic, but it's powerful none the less. If we are sharing the gospel, even in the hardest parts of the world, we see people come to Christ. We see men and women make Jesus Lord and Savior of their lives. However, if we aren't faithful in sharing the gospel, we don't see anyone come to faith. That must be what Jesus meant when he went on to say:

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out
workers into his harvest field. v 38

Sometimes we think this person or that people group or that religion is too hard to reach. When I share the gospel with Muslims, I understand God's promise to Hagar:

And the angel of the LORD said to her,
"Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the LORD has listened to your affliction.
He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

Genesis 16 v 11-12, ESV

Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael, can be hard and argumentative, but sometimes they listen because God is working in them! God was working in Rachid, and he not only listened but also drank deeply from the well of

living water that only Jesus could provide. The promise of Jesus wasn't that it would always be easy but that the harvest is plentiful! There are men and women waiting in their apartments and houses for you to come by and share Jesus with them! Pray the prayer to the Lord of the harvest—and then be willing to be the answer. If faith comes by hearing (and I believe that it does), someone must be telling! Might as well be you and me. The purpose of this book is to help you do just that—share your faith with a Muslim.

I need to make a truth very clear, from the beginning: **all Muslims are lost without Jesus.** I make no apologies for, and take no joy in, that statement. I have many Muslim friends who are lost, facing an eternity separated from God. The fact is Jesus said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14 v 6). As a result, I am convinced there is no other way to heaven but through Jesus Christ. Jesus cannot just be a prophet; he cannot just be a man: he must be God incarnate!

Only God himself could take our shame upon himself and pay the just penalty for our sin. Jesus was the propitiation for our sins; he satisfied the wrath of the holy God by dying on the cross for our sins. This truth bothers me! Jesus took on himself what was reserved for me. What I deserved Jesus suffered!

So I thank him deeply for what he has done and I serve him fervently because he calls me “son.” Salvation was undeserved so I will not be ungrateful!

It is my prayer that as you read this book, you will lose some of the very natural fears you might have

about sharing the gospel with a Muslim friend, neighbor or work colleague. And that as you share that life-saving message, you will rejoice with heaven as the lost are found by Jesus.