

Leading Muslims to Jesus: Questions to Consider

By L.D. Waterman

Consider these three different approaches to reaching Muslims:

Some time ago **Bill**ⁱ baptized Ibrahim—a 23-year-old single Muslim who has since been disowned by his family, threatened, and fired from his job. Besides being discipled by Bill, Ibrahim attends a local church—whose members are from a different ethnic group. This church has hired Ibrahim as a part-time janitor, which provides for his basic needs, as well as giving him a place to sleep. Ibrahim loves sharing his testimony with Muslims and surprising people that someone of his ethnic group is a Christian. **Bill** emphasizes [Romans 10:9](#): “Confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord.’”

Jerry has taken a different approach with Ahmed—a 27-year-old single Muslim who began following Jesus two years ago. Jerry studies the Bible with Ahmed and encourages him to prayerfully maintain his identity as a member of his Muslim people and do all he can to remain connected with his family and community. Ahmed continues many of his former religious practices, such as attending the mosque, saying ritual prayers, and fasting during Ramadan. He and a group of friends study God’s teaching from the “before books” (the Bible). They still respect Muhammad and sometimes use the Qur’an, but they no longer consider it God’s word. With Jerry’s encouragement, Ahmed and his friends avoid saying or doing anything that would imply they have joined a “foreign” religion: Christianity. However they actively share their faith, and others in their people group view them as a “different kind of Muslim.” **Jerry** emphasizes [1 Corinthians 7:17](#): “Each one should remain in the place in life that the Lord assigned to him.”

Dan takes yet a third approach in coaching Uma, a national believer, to actively look for “Persons of Peace.” One day Uma asked Khalil, a fruit seller at a local market, “Have you ever had a dream you felt was from God?” Khalil told Uma he had recently dreamed of a man in white who said, “You are on the path to destruction. I am the path to life. Ask my servant how to find the right path.” Uma identified himself as a servant of the man in white. Uma told Khalil that if he would gather his family and friends, Uma would begin showing them the path to life. Seven of Khalil’s friends gathered for the first study of the “Holy Book,” at which Uma distributed a photocopied page containing [Genesis 1:1-2:4](#). The group discussed how God had created all things, and what God would want them to do with this understanding.

Uma also met privately with Khalil, equipping him to assume leadership of this group. After the third study, Uma phased out of the group, continuing to meet only with Khalil. After 30 studies (covering essential truths of salvation up through the New Testament), six of the eight group members chose to be baptized and continue meeting (as the beginning of a house church). This group does not call themselves “Christian” (which could imply to others they had joined a political and ethnic group despised by their people). They call themselves “Followers of the Way of God” (see [Acts 18:26; 24:14](#)), and others in their people group realize they have chosen a new identity—a new way of life and faith. **Dan** emphasizes [2 Timothy 2:2](#): “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Questions to Consider

All three of these approaches are currently being applied by missionaries in various contexts:

1. Some encourage converts to make an individual decision to be baptized and join an existing church as soon as possible, regardless of the effect on their family, friends, and others in their culture.

2. Others encourage individuals to follow Jesus while remaining members of their religious community (as a witness in that context).
3. Still others focus on bringing *groups* to Christ—extended families, interest groups, or groups of friends.

Some issues and questions to consider:

- The vast majority of church growth described in Acts involved group responses rather than isolated individuals. How may Western individualism have shaped our reading and application of the Bible?
- If a “fringe person” is the first to follow Jesus, and forsakes his or her own culture to join the “church culture” of a different people, what effect does that have on the rest of their people?ⁱⁱ
- How much should cultural outsiders teach right doctrine to seekers and new believers, and how much can we expect the Holy Spirit to guide them through group interaction with the Scriptures?
- Who should make decisions about what parts of a person’s beliefs and practices must change—when they begin to follow Jesus and as they mature in him?
- What practices will help catalyze a church planting movement rather than simply drawing scattered individuals into a church?
- How can we plant truly indigenous churches—led, supported, growing, and multiplying with local resources—rather than churches dependent on outsiders?
- To what extent are these issues similar or the same in a Western context, but less obvious because of a lingering veneer of Christianity?

Our answers to such questions influence our effectiveness in launching church planting movements.

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ⁱ All case studies are a fictitious composite of actual individuals and strategies existing on the field.

ⁱⁱ Sometimes the person most open to accept outsiders and follow their teaching and lifestyle is already on the fringe of their own culture—perhaps a rebel or an outcast, unable to fit any “proper” role within their own society. When such a person comes to Christ, two stereotypes are often reinforced: 1) that Christianity is for other ethnic groups but not for this group, and 2) that Christianity is an aggressive threat, set on destroying their culture. The frequent result is that the group as a whole tends to become more resistant to the message of the gospel.