

# CALLED TO WORK IN THE MUSLIM WORLD



Islam is the second largest religion in the world with up to 1.2 billion Muslims, representing some 22% of the world's population; 1 in 5 people are Muslim. Of the world's 211 largest unreached peoples, 123 are Muslim. A few years ago it was estimated that there are only 2-3 missionaries per million Muslims in the world. As shocking as that is, I believe the missionary tide is turning; many more missionaries are concerned to 'go out into *all* the world' and preach the good news to Muslim people. Islam is most definitely one of the greatest missionary challenges of our day.

Muslims today are often portrayed as 'terrorists' and fundamentalist by the media, although they represent only a fraction of the Muslim world. They receive most of the attention because of the terror some cause. It is important to note that the majority of Muslims are against terrorism and do not want to be associated with extremists or terrorism. If we view all Muslims as terrorists or extremists it will be impossible for us to be motivated to share the gospel with them.

The Biblical view of Muslims is that God loves them. Muslims like us have been created in God's image; like us, all Muslims have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standards and thus face the wrath and judgment of God. They are without hope and lost, even though they are sincere and are, in their own way, seeking God. Like us, God loved them so much that he sent his Son into the world so that 'whoever' believes in Jesus will have eternal life. Yet how can they believe if they have not heard and how can they hear without someone going and telling them (Rom 10:14)? Without us 'going' they will not hear the good news. As evangelicals the challenge is whether

we really care about Muslims. Are we willing to count the cost and even suffer for the sake of the gospel?

This was the challenge God put before me as a student at theological college. Sat in a classroom listening to lectures on Islam, I had no comprehension what God was about to do in my life. I'm not sure if it was the challenge of Islam or the concern for Muslims that led me to study Islam in depth but the following two years led me on a journey full of challenges and surprises. Not only was I overwhelmed by the love of God for Muslims, I was also ashamed at my lack of love and burden for people who had no hope despite their sincere 'religiosity.'

My call to be a witness to Muslims did not happen overnight but began with a burden for Muslim people and grew and grew until God made it clear that *he* wanted me to go and tell them the good news. My fear of Muslims was replaced by a love and a passion that remains to this day.

A couple of years ago I journeyed from Europe to Asia travelling across a bridge in Istanbul that spans the straits. This bridge is so important for the purpose of linking two continents, allowing people to cross to the other side. In a spiritual sense, bridges can make it possible for people of diverse worldviews to make positive contact one with another. Bridges are being built across the world between Christians and Muslims in friendship, in business ventures, through teaching English and through concern for the poor and marginalized.

Although 'building bridges' is important, it is essential the gospel is preached with an understanding of Islam. Muslims have many misunderstandings about Christianity. As Christians we need to correct these misunderstandings so that Muslims are not 'put off' from considering the gospel. Many books have been written recommending various methods and approaches in evangelism; although some of these are helpful, it is God who works in their hearts. It has been my pleasure and delight to see Muslims come to faith in Jesus. Bridge building is a reminder of God's love for Muslim people worked-out through those sent by God and who are willing to go and share the message of his love. ■

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