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Islam: Syllabus

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CLASS #1:

- I. Course Introduction.
- II. Understanding Islam.

CLASS #2:

- III. Evangelizing Muslims.
 - A. Introduction to Evangelizing Muslims.
 - B. Approaches and Attitudes for Building Bridges to Reach Muslims.

CLASS #3:

- III. Evangelizing Muslims.
 - C. Theological and Religious Bridges.

CLASS #4:

- III. Evangelizing Muslims.
 - C. Theological and Religious Bridges. (cont.)
 - D. Other Various Bridges.
 - E. Felt Needs as Bridges.

CLASS #5:

- III. Evangelizing Muslims.
 - E. Felt Needs as Bridges. (cont.)
- Exam.

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Islam: Exam

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Possible 20 Point Questions

- 1) Describe Islam by explaining five basic Muslim beliefs and practices (pp. 264,265).
- 2) Choose three points concerning Jesus and show how they can be used as a bridge to reach Muslims (pp. 270-272).
- 3) Choose three “felt needs” of Muslims and show how they can be used as a bridge to bring Muslims to Christ (pp. 275-277).

Possible 10 Point Questions

- 1) In two or three sentences, describe the beginnings of Islam (p. 264).
- 2) Define the idea of “bridge building” in evangelism (pp. 266,267).
- 3) Give a basic, simple formula that can be used to evangelize Muslims (pp. 267,268).
- 4) What is indigenous training? (p. 274)
- 5) What is the hospitality bridge? (pp. 274,275)
- 6) What is the Christian answer to the “folk” Muslim’s fear of the unknown (p. 276).

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I. Course Introduction.

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Author's Illustration:

A Christian man wanted to witness to his friend. His friend was a Muslim. One day his friend was preparing for prayer. He washed his hands. He washed his arms and his face. He washed many other parts of his body. Then the Christian said, "You forgot to wash the most important part". "What part?" asked the Muslim. "You forgot to wash your heart" replied the Christian. The Muslim said, "Do not be silly. I cannot wash my heart." The Christian agreed, "That is right. That is why you need Christ."

Insert Your Illustration:

Author's Illustration:

A large number of people in the world are Muslims. How can we reach them? We must first understand who they are and what they believe. Then we must evangelize them according to our understanding of them.

II. Understanding Islam.

Author's Comment:

Islam means "to submit to God." Thus, a Muslim is one who submits to God.

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A. Islamic Statistics and Dates.

1. About 20% of the world is Muslim.
 - a. 52% of all Muslims live in Asia.
 - b. 28% live in the Middle East and North Africa.
 - c. 13% live in sub-Saharan Africa.
 - d. About 6% live in Europe and Russia.
2. Islam officially began in 680 A.D.
 - a. The Muslim calendar begins in 622 A.D. (year zero for Muslims).
 - b. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, lived from 570-632.
 - c. Muhammad received his first revelations in 610 and began preaching publicly three years later.
 - d. Muhammad immigrated from Mecca to Medina in 622.

B. Basic Information about Islam.

1. The basic Muslim beliefs include the following.
 - a. Muhammad is the last great prophet, and he is greater than all others.
 - b. The Holy Books of Islam and their prophets include:
 - 1) The Torah - Abraham.
 - 2) Psalms - David.
 - 3) The Gospels - Jesus.
 - 4) Koran - Muhammad.
 - c. Muslims believe in angels (both bad and good).

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- d. Muslims believe in a day of judgment. The criteria for acceptance into paradise is according to good works. If a person has done more good than bad, then he can go to paradise. They believe in the day of resurrection.
 - e. Muslims believe in divine destiny. Whatever Allah decrees must come to pass.
 - f. Allah is an Arabic word which means 'God.' Allah is unique, all-powerful, and merciful to all Muslims.
2. The basic Muslim practices: the Five Pillars of Islamic Faith.
- a. Ritual prayers: Confession of the creed - "I witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."
 - b. Giving alms.
 - c. The fast of Ramadan - Month-long fast during daylight hours.
 - d. The pilgrimage to Mecca - Ideal for each Muslim to attempt this pilgrimage at least once in their life time.
 - e. Jihad (holy war) - Acts of warring zeal in the name of Islam.
3. Muslims believe that their chances of gaining entrance into paradise, although not guaranteed, are increased by scrupulous maintenance of these five pillars.
4. Several Types/Sects of Islam:
- a. Shiite - Fundamentalist of the Arabic sort. Radically orthodox.
 - b. Sunnei - Although this type may emphasize fundamentals, they are often more relaxed or liberal. This type is seen in many places beyond the Middle East.
 - c. Suffi - The mystical group; emphasizes visions, miracles and personal experiences.

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III. Evangelizing Muslims.

A. Introduction to Evangelizing Muslims.

1. Jesus presented the gospel in a particular way to Nicodemus, who was a Jew (Jn 3:1-21).
2. Jesus presented the gospel in another way to the woman at the well, who was a Samaritan (Jn 4:7-26).
3. The presentation varies according to the background of the listeners. The evangelist must know the Bible. He must also know his audience.
 - a. The contents of the gospel do not change.
 - b. The method to present the gospel will change.
4. In the book of Acts, the gospel is presented in different ways.
 - a. The presentation of the gospel must apply biblical truth to the specific needs and situations of those who are listening.
 - b. The method of witness to a Jew was different than the method of witness to a Gentile.
 - c. In today's world, we might say that the method of witness to an atheist will be different than the method of witness to a Muslim.
5. We need to consider different methods of evangelism for different people. We need to form bridges in our evangelism.
 - a. Bridges are instruments that join together things that are separated.
 - 1) Bridge building in evangelism does not create a false unity.
 - a) It does not avoid differences for the sake of good relations.
 - b) It does not offer a partial gospel for the sake of not offending the other person.

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2) Bridge building in evangelism does use what is available. It does focus on what the two people have in common.

a) It blesses whatever can be blessed.

b) It does become all things to all men that by all means it might save some (1 Cor 9:22).

b. Bridges do not promote syncretism (the mixing of different religions). Bridge building in evangelism does promote responsible contextualization (allows the gospel to enter other cultures).

Note: The rest of this course will focus on bridge building in the evangelism of Muslims.

B. Approaches and Attitudes For Building Bridges to Reach Muslims.

1. C.R. Marsh is an expert on Muslim evangelism. He says this: “Start with the glimmer of truth that he has in his religion and lead him on to know the full revelation of God.”¹
2. A simple formula for Muslim Bridge Building.
 - a. Study and use the strong points of Muslim belief to enter into conversation with a Muslim.
 - b. Offer the kingdom of God to fill up the places that are lacking. For example:
 - 1) A Muslim knows that he has not reached God’s standards. He prays repeatedly for forgiveness (strong point).
 - 2) However, in his religion there is no assurance of forgiveness. He can only hope (a place that is lacking).
 - 3) The Christian must offer him the atonement (the Kingdom of God).
3. Muslim belief is monotheistic (they believe in one God). Christianity is monotheistic. We must take advantage of this common belief. Do not treat Muslims like pagans or atheists. A Muslim has a definite fear of God. This can be a bridge.

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4. Muslims are not ashamed of what they believe. They are often eager to share their beliefs with others. Therefore, there are many opportunities to witness to Muslims. They will admire the same eagerness and openness in a Christian.
 - a. Be bold in Muslim evangelism.
 - b. At the same time, show humility (boldness and humility are often thought as being separate--the exact opposite is true--when they are genuine they always are together).
 - c. The message must be bold (without compromise). The messenger must be humble (presented in love).
 - d. The messenger is as important as the message. Thus, it is important to live a life before the Muslim that is consistent with your message to the Muslim (this is especially important in the Muslim culture).
5. Avoid condemning Islam. Avoid speaking in an offensive way about Muhammad. Have an attitude of compassion. See from his point of view. How would you want to be approached?
 - a. Speak the truth and let the truth convict, convince, or condemn.
 - b. Speak positive of Jesus. Do not speak negative of Muhammad.
 - 1) To speak negative of Muhammad only upsets the Muslim and shuts the door of evangelism.
 - 2) To speak positive of Jesus (even to quote Jn 14:6) also may shut the door, but at least it gives an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work.
 - c. C.R. Marsh says, "Present the true vine in such a way that he may desire to gather for himself the fruit of the gospel."²
6. Be sincere. Be genuine. Try to speak to his conscience.
 - a. A religious Muslim will want to have theological discussions. It will be necessary to participate on an intellectual level.
 - b. However, always return to a focus on the need for a Saviour. Point to the need for forgiveness. The gospel satisfies man's longing the way to forgiveness.

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- 1) Appeal to the need. Offer Jesus as Saviour.
 - 2) It is not important how religious they seem to be. They still need the Saviour.
7. More than anything, show love.
- a. Consider the words of one Muslim who was converted: “That man of God felt so sorry for me in my unbelief and pride that he began to weep. His tears did for me what his arguments did not do...they melted my heart.”
 - b. C.R. Marsh says, “In nearly every case of conversion of a Muslim, he has first been influenced by Christian love.”³

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C. Theological and Religious Bridges.

1. Because of ‘atheistic trends’ in the West, it is not perceived as natural to talk about the things of God. In Muslim societies this is different. All of life revolves around religious convictions. One author says, “religious convictions influence practically every act during each moment in life.”
 - a. This creates a very useful bridge called “interest”.
 - b. For Muslims, it is natural to speak of the things of God. Realize this and use it to your advantage.
 - 1) Feel free to discuss religious matters and ideas.
 - 2) Read scripture together.
2. Islam is a religion integrated with all of life. It is not confined to the mosque (a mosque is the Muslim place of worship).
 - a. Here is a bridge. The Muslim can understand the comprehensive nature of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus. They will not say, “We should not include God in every area of life. There is a time and a place for the things of God.” Their religion says that God must be included in every part of life.
 - b. So we have a bridge to use when we are testifying of the Kingdom of God. A Muslim will understand our claim that Christianity must be a whole way of life.

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3. For a Muslim, Jesus is the stumbling block that he cannot accept. However, the wise evangelist can use Jesus as a bridge to reach Muslims.
 - a. The birth of Jesus.
 - 1) The virgin birth is mentioned in the Koran (the most important of Islam's Holy Books).
 - 2) Abdul Haqq, an Arab writer, reports "It is evident from the Koran that the incarnation of the word of God took place through a unique creative miracle rather than by way of natural procreation."⁴
 - 3) The Koran accepts the unique way in which Jesus was born. This can be used as a bridge to lead the Muslim to accept that Jesus is a unique Person. This truth is foundational for them to see Jesus as the Saviour.
 - b. The ministry of Jesus.
 - 1) The Koran does not deny the supernatural teaching of Jesus. It affirms that Jesus cast out demons, healed lepers, gave sight to the blind, made the deaf to hear, and raised people from the dead.
 - 2) Muslims are very curious about the miracles of Jesus. They must be challenged with the historical fact that he healed in his own name and power.
 - 3) The Koran recognizes the power and authority in Jesus' ministry. This can be used as a bridge to lead Muslims to recognize the ultimate authority and power that Jesus has now. This relates to the Lordship of Jesus.
 - c. The sinless life of Jesus.
 - 1) The Koran does not deny the perfection of Jesus. It affirms his sinless life.
 - 2) Who else in history was sinless? Nobody. Not even Muhammad! Muhammad said that he asked for forgiveness 70 times each day.
 - 3) The Koran recognizes the uniqueness and incomparability of Jesus sinless life. This can be used as a bridge to lead the Muslim to recognize the Deity of Jesus.

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d. The death of Jesus.

- 1) The death of Jesus must be used to challenge the Muslim.
- 2) Jesus predicted his own death. He knew when, how, and where he would die. No other human being knows these things. Again, not even Muhammad! He died very unexpected.
- 3) The Koran recognizes the sinless life of Jesus. It recognizes his death. Jesus did not have to die. This can be used as a bridge to lead Muslims to recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God, to recognize the atonement for sins.

e. The return of Jesus.

- 1) The Koran teaches the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- 2) According to the Koran, Jesus (not Muhammad) will return to earth to reign for 40 years. The Muslim must be challenged with the question, “Why?” Why Jesus? Why does he return?
- 3) The Koran accepts the return of Christ. This can be used as a bridge to lead the Muslim to accept Jesus as the Judge.

f. The commands of Jesus.

- 1) The Muslim accepts the Gospels as Holy Books. They must be challenged with the commands of Jesus.
 - a) Jesus claimed that “no one comes to the Father but through Me” (Jn 14:6).
 - b) He spoke frequently as God, saying, “Come to Me” (Mt 11:28), and “take up your cross and follow Me” (Mt 16:24).
- 2) Muslims accept the Gospels. Jesus is called a great Prophet. Yet they do not obey the commands of Jesus.
 - a) Moreover, they do not accept the truth of what Jesus says. This is inconsistent. It defies logic.
 - b) Jesus was either a great Prophet or he was a great liar. He cannot be both.

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- c) Muslims must be challenged with the fact that they must choose. If Jesus is a great prophet, then His words must be accepted as truth.
- 3) The Koran accepts Jesus as a great Prophet. This can be used as a bridge to lead the Muslim to accept the commands of Jesus.
- 4) The Koran accepts the return of Christ.
 - a) We must challenge Muslims by asking: “When Jesus returns, what will you say to him whom you called a Prophet, yet whose words you did not believe?”
 - b) Remind your Muslim friends that Jesus said, “I AM the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). He did not say, “I BRING the way, the truth, and the life.”
- g. The titles of Jesus.
 - 1) The Koran refers to Jesus as the ‘Word of God.’
 - 2) This can be a bridge to consider more closely the identity of Jesus Christ. What is the Word of God? Who is Jesus?

Author’s Illustration:

We want to emphasize that we are not trying to corner our opponent and defeat him. We are trying to challenge a friend and draw him in. Our goal is not to win an argument. Our goal is to win the person! We are not lawyers trying to win a law case. We are evangelists trying to win a soul!

Insert Your Illustration:

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4. The Koran can be used as a bridge to evangelize Muslims. The Koran speaks of Jesus with great respect. The Koran also places a very high value on the Bible. The Bible itself should be used as perhaps the chief bridge for effectiveness..
 - a. Many reports reveal that a large number of Muslim converts come to the Lord by reading the Bible.
 - b. One report describes the case of an Afghan chief who is a very influential Christian leader in his area.
 - 1) The chief testifies how a Christian gave him a Bible and encouraged him to read it. He encouraged him according to his already established respect for the scriptures (Remember, to bless whatever can be blessed!).
 - 2) Here is an important bridge to Islam. A Muslim respects the Holy Books. This can be used to lead him to THE Holy Book.
 - 3) The Christian must remember not to offend the culture of the Muslim.
 - a) The Muslim, for example, would never put the Koran on the floor. He holds it or places it on a wooden stand.
 - b) We can be culturally sensitive by doing the same with our Bibles. This will create an even stronger connection...a sturdier bridge.
5. Prayer can be used as a bridge to reach a Muslim for Christ.
 - a. The Muslim is dedicated to prayer. However, it is a system of ritual prayers. The dedication comes from a sense of duty, obligation, and debt owed to God.
 - b. This dedication can be a bridge. The Muslim's prayer system offers no real relationship with God. The Muslim must be presented with the opportunity to commune with God in prayer through Jesus Christ.

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D. Additional Bridges for Reaching Muslims.

1. Indigenous training (training nationals so that they can evangelize and disciple those of their own culture).
 - a. This is the most effective long term bridge. The national believer becomes the bridge. The national believer already knows the culture.
 - b. The student should remain in his geographical location during his training.
 - c. The training should be done in the Arabic language (if that is the dominant language used).
 - 1) To speak in their language is to demonstrate sensitivity, identification and esteem.
 - 2) Language is especially important in Muslim evangelism. Arabic is revered by the Muslim. Certainly, key religious terms must be learned and used properly.
2. The family unit as a bridge.
 - a. In the Muslim culture the family is very strong and influential. We might even say that religion exercises its authority over the individual through the influence of the family. Family and religion strengthen each other in an Muslim society.
 - b. In the past, many missionaries have not had success because they have only focused on individuals. The positive influence of the family must be used as a bridge.
 - c. Culturally, an individual only participates in larger groups through the social connections of his family. Thus, the evangelism of whole families must be practiced. Many times, Muslims have come to the Lord in family units.
3. The hospitality bridge.
 - a. In Muslim culture hospitality is extremely important. It is a highly respected value.

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- b. Here is a very natural bridge to Christianity.
 - 1) The New Testament emphasizes hospitality as a Christian value (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8; 1 Pt 4:9).
 - 2) Visiting and being visited can lead to a strong friendship and to many opportunities to share the faith.
- 4. The “Witness” as a bridge.
 - a. As we learned, ‘the witness’ is one of the main practices of the Muslim faith. The Muslim will repeat with conviction, “I witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”
 - b. In this practice there is no obligation for a person to change in their moral life.
 - c. Thus, the witness of a Christian must emphasize the change in moral life that is available in Christ. Our testimony is that we are born again. We are new creatures (Jn 3:3; 2 Cor 5:17).
 - d. The bridge is our own personal testimony. The change in our own lives can appeal to the Muslim’s sense of the inability to change. He may soon discover that what he lacks are those values which Christ offers.

E. Felt Needs as Bridges (especially with folk Muslims).

- 1. A felt need - relationship with God.
 - a. Islam proclaims, “The human mind can never adequately conceive of God; it will always think of him too lowly.”
 - b. Nevertheless, every human being has a need to know God.

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Author's Comment:

Some folk Muslims (those who practice a popular form of Islam that is more mystical) have been known to try to come into contact with God through repeating "Oh God" 200,000 times over a period of three days.

We must use this zeal to be in communion with God as a bridge. The felt need is the bridge. Jesus waits on the other side of the bridge to provide for this need.

2. A felt need - fear of the unknown.
 - a Many Muslims (especially folk Muslims) have a fear of the unknown. A Muslim may have a great fear of the future.
 - 1) Their answer to this fear is angel worship, divination, and fatalism.
 - 2) The Muslim can be evangelized through offering the real solution in Christ. It is in Christ that the future already exists (Eph 2:10). Thus, to be in Christ is to have no fear of the future (see Heb 2:15, Phil 1:21; Rom 6:6-11; 1 Jn 5:13).
 - b We must show the Muslim how the genuine, personal, relationally oriented Jesus can be a guide. He can be our protector. He can provide personal security that will replace their fears.
 - 1) To address the felt need in compassion is to build a bridge to the cure.
 - 2) Jesus is the cure for this felt need.
3. A felt need - the need to have community. The bridge to meet this need is the Christian concept of the family of God and the household of God.
4. A felt need - the need for protection from evil spirits. The bridge to meet this need is the power of Jesus over demons.
5. A felt need - the need for freedom from sickness. The bridge to meet this need is the healing power of Jesus.

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6. A felt need - the need for a mediator between God and man. The bridge to meet this need is Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5).

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Author's Comment:

Evangelism through felt needs takes time. Patience is essential. We must be patient to build a bridge, then we can reach Muslims with the gospel. Sometimes we are successful. But many times we fail because of moving too quickly before a bridge has been built. The 'felt-need' approach may take more time, but it has certain advantages:

- 1) The message is introduced gradually.
- 2) Fruitless quarrels are avoided.
- 3) Christianity is shown to be more relevant and practical.

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7. The following chart presents the common felt needs in Popular Islam and their answers, as identified in Animism and Christianity.⁵

Felt needs in popular Islam	Animistic Answers			Christian Answers to felt needs
	Extreme		less Extreme	
Fear of the Unknown	Idolatry Stone Worship	Fetishes Talismans Charms	Superstition	Security in Christ as Protector and Guide
Fear of Evil	Sorcery Witchcraft	Amulets/Knots	Exorcism	Exorcism/Protection in Christ
Fear of the Future	Angel Worship	Divination Spells	Fatalism Fanaticism	Trust in Christ as Lord of the Future
Shamw of not being in the Group	Magic Curse/Bless	Hair/Nail Trimming	-	Acceptance in the Fellowship of Believers
Powerlessness of the Individual against Evil	Saint Worship	-	Saint/Angel Petitioning	Authority and Power of the Holy Spirit
Meaninglessness of Life	-	Familiar Spirit	-	Purpose in Life as God's Child
Sickness	Tree/Saint Worship	Healing Magic	-	Divine Healing

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Conclusion:

The Bridge Is Not the Final Goal. The Bridge is made for crossing.

Felt needs are recognized in order to recognize eternal needs.

Theological and religious bridges are built so that true theological and religious understanding may be presented.

Perhaps the Most Important Bridge that needs to be built concerns our own perception of who Muslims are in reality.

When we stop thinking of them as cruel and ruthless, and begin seeing them as lost souls searching for God; and when we stop thinking of them simply as Muslims, and begin seeing them as human beings who are like us and need a Saviour, then we will see them as Jesus sees them and we will be able to lead them to Him!

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Islam: Endnotes

¹C.R. Marsh, Share Your Faith with a Muslim (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 12.

⁴Abdiah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1980), p. 75.

⁵Phil Parshall, Bridges to Islam (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book Press, 1975), Table 2.